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Perceived Reactions to Interracial Romantic Relationships: When Race is Used as a Cue to Status

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Two studies examined the hypothesis that race, by serving as an indicator of status, more strongly affects prejudice against females' romantic relationships than males'. In Study 1, participants reported on an interracial romantic relationship about which close others disapproved. Consistent with evolutionary and social structural theories of mate selection, non-White males indicated more disapproval from their White female partners' friends and family than all other combinations of race and gender. In Study 2, White females reported more anticipated disapproval for dating members of low status groups than did White males. Moreover, White females anticipated greater disapproval for dating non-Whites, but only if they perceived their parents as prejudiced. Evolutionary and social structural explanations for these findings are discussed.

KEYWORDS mate selection, racial prejudice

INTERRACIAL romantic relationships have been an especially contentious area of intergroup relations in the United States. Many of us might recall, albeit not proudly, of hearing one of our own family members say something like, 'You can be friends with them, but you just can't marry one of them'. The line of contact between groups often seems drawn at the boundary between friends and romantic partners, and those who cross it are likely to experience scorn and disapproval far greater than those who are merely friends with one of 'them'. In the research reported here, we investigate some of the potential causes underlying the uniquely

negative reactions people have to interracial romantic relationships, and test predictions derived from current work in evolutionary and social structural theories of mate selection.

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Prejudice against interracial romantic relationships

Evidence from miscegenation laws, survey data from the social sciences, and in-depth interview studies, all converge to suggest that interracial romantic relationships stand out as uniquely burdened by prejudice. Legal sanctions against interracial marriages were, until very recently, both widespread and harsh. As many as 38 states adopted laws barring Whites from marrying non-Whites in the 19th and 20th centuries, and some states punished miscegenists with up to 10 years imprisonment (Zabel, 1965). In 1967, a noteworthy three years after the passing of the Civil Rights Act, the Supreme Court deemed antimiscegenation laws to be unconstitutional.

While laws against interracial marriages have vanished, survey data suggest that people are still particularly negative toward these relationships. In an era when many Americans denounce racial prejudice, the majority of both Whites and racial minorities are still opposed to interracial marriages (e.g. Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000; Todd, McKinney, Harris, & Chadderton, 1992). Both men and women report that race does make a difference in romantic relationships, and both groups show resistance toward dating someone of another race. Interestingly, women report more negative prejudicial attitudes toward interracial romantic relationships than men (Mills, Daly, Longmore, & Kilbride, 1995). There is also evidence that racial minorities and Whites believe interracial relationships are prone to scorn from both family members and broader communities (Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000; Mills et al., 1995). Moreover, people believe that interracial unions are less stable and that the children of interracial unions will be stigmatized (Frankenberg, 1993; Killian, 1997; Zebroski, 1999).

Interview studies of interracial couples offer potent personalized testimonies of prejudice (e.g. Frankenberg, 1993). These couples report disapproval, conflict, and alienation from friends and family regarding the relationship, as well as blatant discrimination from others. White women romantically involved with non-

White men in particular report that others ostracize them for not being able to find a 'good White man', and for being insensitive to how their children will be affected from being 'mixed' (Frankenberg, 1993; Killian, 1997).

Given that interracial romantic relationships appear to be especially scorned, it is important to understand how romantic relationships differ from other relationships in a way that produces this prejudice. It is certainly the case that romantic relationships are in many senses unique—they typically entail more intimacy and commitment (Hatfield, 1988; Henrick & Henrick, 1986). However, romantic relationships are perhaps most unique in that they involve passionate love, sex, and the potential for offspring (Berscheid, 1988). Current theories of mate selection hold these mate-relationships in special regard, and stand to inform the question of why strong prejudice against interracial romantic relationships continues. The present research is informed by two such theories, parental investment theory and social structural theory, and each will be briefly reviewed.

Evolutionary theories of mate selection

Contemporary evolutionary theories of mate selection are premised on the general assumption that organisms have been selected for behaviors that increase the survival of their genes. Sexual selection theory in particular proposes that, for organisms who propagate themselves through sexual reproduction, the mate preferences of one sex can affect the reproductive outcomes of the opposite sex through intersexual selection. Those who exhibit traits that the opposite sex finds desirable are more likely to find mates, and, hence, pass on their genes to offspring.

Parental investment theory has received the most attention and support of the intersexual selection theories (Buss, 1998; Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Gangestad & Simpson, 2000; Trivers, 1972). The theory postulates that the sex that invests more in offspring tends to be more particular about mate selection than the sex

that invests less, because the costs associated with a poor mate choice are greater for the more heavily investing sex. Conversely, members of the less-investing sex compete with each other for access to mates. In being obliged to several months gestation, breast-feeding, and the majority of child-rearing responsibilities, women are clearly the more heavily investing sex. Women are also limited in the number of offspring that they can produce. Hence, they should be the 'choosier' of the sexes. Men, in having to contribute relatively little to the offspring production process, should be relatively less particular in their mate preferences.

According to parental investment theory and its descendent theories (e.g. Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Gangestad & Simpson, 2000), the sexes' different mate preferences should lead to different mating strategies.¹ Because of the heavy investments they must make in producing offspring, and the limited number of offspring that they can produce in their reproductive lifespan, women are thought to be more interested in long-term mating strategies, and less interested in sexual variety. That is, women tend to seek a limited number of mates who have both the ability and the willingness to invest in offsprings' survival by providing valuable resources. Men, on the other hand, are thought to be more interested in sexual variety, and are often less interested in mate quality (especially when pursuing a short-term mate). Because of the little time and energy required from them to produce offspring, the probability of promulgating their genes increases with the number of successful fertilizations—there is little cost in mating, compared to the potential benefits. Men are therefore less interested in the resources a mate can provide, and more interested in her fertility.

A substantial body of evidence in support of these sex differences in mate preferences has accumulated over the past several years. Buss (1989) found that, across 37 cultures, women were relatively more interested in resource potential in a mate (e.g. financial prosperity, ambition, older age, industriousness; see also Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Men, on the other hand, preferred physically attractive and younger

mates, and were attuned to cues that suggest fertility (Buss, 1989; Singh, 1993). Each culture sampled showed at least some gender difference, suggesting that these differences are biological in origin (for reviews, see Buss, 1998; Gangestad & Simpson, 2000).

Social structural theory

Social structural theory (e.g. Eagly & Wood, 1999) argues that the mate preferences advocated by parental investment theory are largely the result of the social roles that men and women tend to fill, not innate predispositions. The theory advocates, however, that the key determinant of these sex differences is the different biologies of men and women. Because of men's greater size and strength, and women's childbearing and care-giving responsibilities, the sexes have divided their labors throughout history. Men have tended to engage in hunting, herding, and other activities that require physical strength, while women have typically taken on child-rearing roles. Each gender is socialized to fill these roles, and a variety of mechanisms ensure their perpetuation (Eagly, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000). Advocates of a social structural theory point out that men's roles allow for greater accumulation of wealth, power, and resources—resources that women need to adequately provide for offspring. Women have therefore come to rely on men to be resource providers as a result of the gender roles that constrain them, just as men have come to rely on women to be homemakers (Hardy, 1997).

Social structural theory argues that men and women come to occupy different roles not only because they are socially perpetuated, but also because they provide functional benefits to the individual (Eagly & Wood, 1999). Thus, when women are not prevented from acquiring their own resources, they should be less interested in seeking a mate who can provide them. Consistent with this reasoning, Eagly and Wood (1999) re-analyzed Buss's (1989) cross-cultural data and found that women in post-industrial cultures, where they occupy a larger role in the labor-force, place less emphasis on securing a

mate with resource-providing potential (see also Kenrick & Keefe, 1992). Thus, there is evidence to suggest that sex differences in mate preferences are at least partially determined by the roles the sexes are assigned in society.

There are certainly important differences between social structural and evolutionary theories, and the debate over the origins of gender differences in mate preferences continues (Eagly & Wood, 1999; Gangestad & Simpson, 2000; Jackson, 1992). It is most important for the present purposes, however, to note that the two theoretical approaches converge on the prediction that women will generally tend to prefer mates who can provide the resources required to sustain their offspring.

Implications for prejudice toward interracial relationships

The relationship between these theories of mate preference and race is clear when one considers the connection between race and resource possession. In the US, Whites (especially White males) control more resources than Blacks and other racial minorities. For example, the average family income of Blacks is only about 60% of that of non-Hispanic Whites (US Bureau of the Census, 2002). This disparity is not surprising—there is plenty of evidence for it, and the goal of much social psychological research is to explain and redress it. For our purposes, what is important to keep in mind is that people are well aware of the connection between race and resource possession in the US (Fang, Sidanius, & Pratto, 1998). While often underestimated, it is at least the case that people can accurately rank Whites as having the highest status and most resources compared to other racial groups in the US.

The argument we wish to make is that race is used as a heuristic cue to status and resource possession, much like plumage or jewelry, and that the use of this cue has implications for mate preferences (see Wilson & Jacobson, 1995, for a related argument). We've argued that women prefer mates who have adequate resources, and that racial minorities generally

possess fewer of these resources than Whites. We might, then, derive the prediction that women (regardless of their race) should find non-Whites to be less desirable mates than Whites. However, our goal is to address the issue of the widespread, normative prejudice that exists toward romantic relationships, and such a prediction speaks little to this issue. Indeed, our goal is to provide some explanation for why these norms are so prevalent outside of one's own relationships. In other words, we have yet to address the issue of why *others* have an interest in our mate choices, and what those interests might be.

From personal mate preferences to others' prejudice against interracial relationships

Why do others care about our mate choices? According to inclusive fitness theory, an individual's choices in mates affect not only the survival of the individual's own genes, but the genes of his or her relatives as well (Hamilton, 1964). The theory suggests that genetic relatives will have an interest in each others' survival and reproduction because of these shared genes, and that they will exhibit preferences for their relatives' mates that best ensure their continuation. Social psychologists are most familiar with 'kin selection' from work on altruism (e.g. Burnstein, Crandall, & Kitayama, 1994; Greenberg, 1979; Sime, 1983). For example, Burnstein et al. (1994) demonstrated that although people are not more likely to help a genetic relative in a non-life-threatening situation, they are more likely to provide aid to genetic relatives if the situation was life-threatening. Further evidence in support of inclusive fitness theory—evidence that is less susceptible to socio-cultural explanations—comes from Gaulin, McBurney, and Brakeman-Wartell (1997). These authors showed that matrilineal aunts and uncles invest significantly more in their siblings' children than do patrilineal aunts and uncles. For example, if Jane and John have a child together, Jane's siblings (be they male or female) will invest more in that child than John's siblings. This disparity in

investment from relatives can be explained by the fact that maternity is certain, and paternity is not. The tendency to favor genetic relatives is a phenomenon that has been found across cultures in humans (e.g. Burnstein et al., 1994), and across species as well (e.g. Greenberg, 1979).

While evolutionary models have a well-defined mechanism for explaining the role of close others in mate preferences, social structural theory is less specific. However, if we begin with the uncontroversial assumption that people want what's best for their loved ones (whether that motive is acquired through socialization or an innate predisposition), then social structural theory's arguments about mate preferences can be extended to include close others. Owing to their concern over the outcomes of their loved ones, friends and family members should prefer female close others to choose a mate that will maximize her rewards and minimize her costs. Given males' continued control over most resources, social structural theory would argue that females' close others would prefer her to secure a resource-providing mate in order to gain access to these resources (Eagly, A. H., personal communication, 19 February 2002). Moreover, and more selfishly, friends and family members may prefer female close others to find resource-providing mates so that they will not themselves be burdened by child-rearing costs.

Researchers taking a social structural perspective have established a number of mechanisms by which people are socialized not only to conform to gender role expectations, but to encourage others to conform to them as well. For example, these expectations can be communicated in such a way as to induce gender role-consistent behavior from social targets (Skrypnek & Snyder, 1982). Such expectancies can operate unintentionally, and even in the relative absence of explicit gender norms (e.g. Moscovitz, Suh, & Desaulniers, 1994). Thus, people are likely to evoke gender-role-consistent behavior in close others, and the processes that encourage role-consistent behavior elsewhere are likely to apply to mate preferences as well.

Hypotheses

As we have argued, parental investment theory and social structural theory converge on the prediction that women will be more likely to value status and resource possession in a potential mate. Close others should support this preference, either because of their vested genetic interest in the mate choices of relatives (as in the evolutionary theory), or because of their interest in the successful socialization and life-outcomes of close others (as in social structural theory). The implications for interracial romantic relationships are straightforward. To the extent that race can be taken as a heuristic cue to the ability to provide valuable resources, prejudice against interracial romantic relationships should be most apparent in the case of a relationship between a White female and a non-White male, and this prejudice should primarily come from her close others. The studies we present test various instantiations of these hypotheses.

Study 1

In the first study, we sought to investigate prejudice against real romantic relationships between people of different races. Under the guise of a study about conflict in relationships, participants were prompted to think of a past or current romantic relationship that involved disapproval from others. They responded to items directed at the source of the disapproval, and recorded their race and gender within a series of other demographic items. We predicted that non-White male participants would report more disapproval from their White female partner's family than from their own, and that White female participants involved with non-White males would report more disapproval from their own family than from their partner's family. Disapproval from one's friends and one's partner's friends was also assessed for exploratory purposes.

We also tested the prediction that women's family members in particular would be more critical of their relationships than men's family members, regardless of whether the relationship was same-race or interracial. The reasoning for this prediction was derived from the

arguments mentioned earlier that women's relatives have more at stake in her mate selection than do men's relatives, and, based on evolutionary analyses, because the genetic relatedness of women's offspring is more certain than that of men's offspring.

Method

Participants Participants were 418 introductory psychology (126 males and 274 females) students who participated in a mass survey for class credit. Most analyses were based on the 61 students who reported on romantic relationships with a person of another race. Forty-four of these participants were female and 17 were male; 38 were White students reporting relationships with non-White individuals and 23 were non-White students reporting relationships with White individuals. Data from 5 individuals who reported on a homosexual relationship were not included in analyses.

Materials and procedure Participants completed a one page questionnaire as one of several unrelated questionnaires in a large classroom setting in groups of 15–40. Participants were told that we were interested in 'conflict in relationships', and were instructed to think of a romantic relationship, from either the past or present, that had been met with some form of disapproval from others. Four items then assessed perceived levels of disapproval of the relationship among the participant's (1) own friends, (2) own family members, (3) partner's friends, and (4) partner's family members. Each response was made on a 0 (there was no disapproval of the relationship) to 6 (they disapproved very much of the relationship) scale. Participants indicated their own and their partner's gender and race within the context of several other demographic items so as to obscure our interest in race. After completing the entire series of questionnaires, participants received a written debriefing, were thanked, and dismissed.

Results

Romantic relationships in general As a test of the hypothesis that women's relatives would be

more critical of their relationship than men's relatives, we compared the genders' responses on the disapproval measures using the entire sample in a 2 (Participant Gender: Male vs. Female) \times 2 (Other: Family vs. Friends) \times 2 (Perspective: Own vs. Partner) mixed analysis of variance (ANOVA), with repeated measures on the last two factors (after omitting several participants with missing data, leaving 124 males and 271 females). The analysis revealed a three-way interaction ($F(1, 384) = 13.41, p < .01$), which was driven primarily by the disapproval women perceived from their own family (see Figure 1). Consistent with our hypothesis, women's own parents were far more disapproving of the relationship ($M = 3.29, SD = 2.12$) than men's own parents ($M = 1.95, SD = 1.80$) ($t(386) = 6.04, p < .001$). Similarly, albeit not as strongly, men reported more disapproval from their (female) partner's family ($M = 1.68, SD = 1.71$) than women did of their (male) partner's family ($M = 1.22, SD = 1.70$) ($t(385) = 2.51, p = .01$). The pattern of results for participants' own friends and their partner's friends was identical to those from own family and partner's family, though not significant ($ps > .12$). Hence, consistent with the mate selection theories we discussed, relatives appear to be more critical of their female relatives' relationships than their male relatives' relationships (at least among relationships where disapproval already exists).

Interracial relationships Our main interest was how Whites' perceptions of disapproval differed from non-Whites' perceptions of disapproval, and so subsequent analyses were conducted using only the 61 participants who reported on an interracial relationship. The four measures of disapproval were subjected to a 2 (Own Gender: Male vs. Female) \times 2 (Own Race: White vs. non-White) \times 2 (Group: Family vs. Friends) \times 2 (Perspective: Own vs. Partner) mixed analysis of variance, with repeated measures on the last two factors. The analysis revealed a main effect of Perspective ($F(1, 53) = 11.35, p = .001$). Participants reported that their own family and friends were more disapproving ($M = 2.84, SD = 1.61$) than their

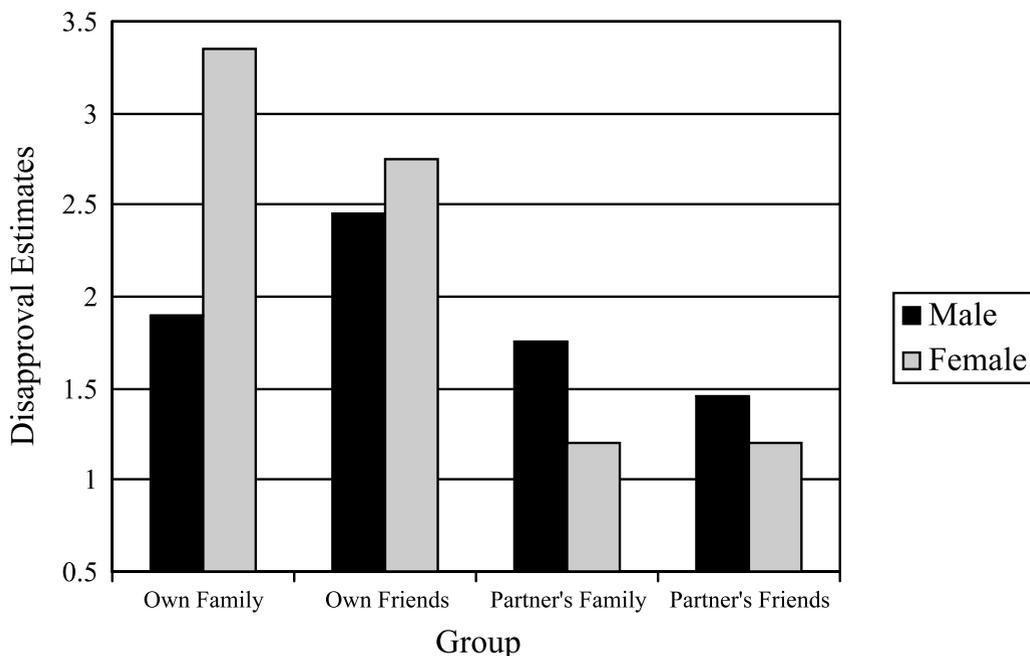


Figure 1. Disapproval ratings from partner's friends and family and own friends and family as a function of gender, for both same-race and interracial relationships.

partners' family and friends ($M = 1.69$, $SD = 1.45$).

More importantly, a three-way, Own Gender \times Own Race \times Perspective interaction emerged ($F(1, 53) = 7.88$, $p = .007$). Because the perceived reactions of family members and friends did not differ, we collapsed across the Group variable and performed separate analyses, first from the perspective of one's partner, and then from the perspective of the self. Regarding the partner's perspective, the two-way, Own Gender \times Own Race interaction was apparent ($F(53) = 8.62$, $p < .001$), and the pattern was as predicted: non-White males perceived there to be a relatively high degree of disapproval from their White female partner's friends and family (see Figure 2A). Post-hoc comparisons indicated that non-White males perceived a greater degree of disapproval from their partner's friends and family than did each of the other groups (all $ps < .05$). However, the Own Gender \times Own Race interaction was not significant for the perceived reactions of

one's own friends or family ($F(53) = 2.38$, $p > .13$). More specifically, White females did not report significantly greater disapproval from their own close others for dating a non-White male (see Figure 2B).

Discussion

Our predictions were largely confirmed, although the action seemed to be in what participants reported of their partner's family's and friends' reactions as opposed to their own. According to the non-White males involved with White females, the parents of White females were more disapproving of their daughters dating non-White males than were the parents of any other combination of race and sex. Non-White males, who lack status compared to White males, are in a precarious position if they find themselves romantically involved with a White female. Her family members, who wish for her to obtain a mate with relatively high status, strong earning potential, and the capacity to invest in offspring,

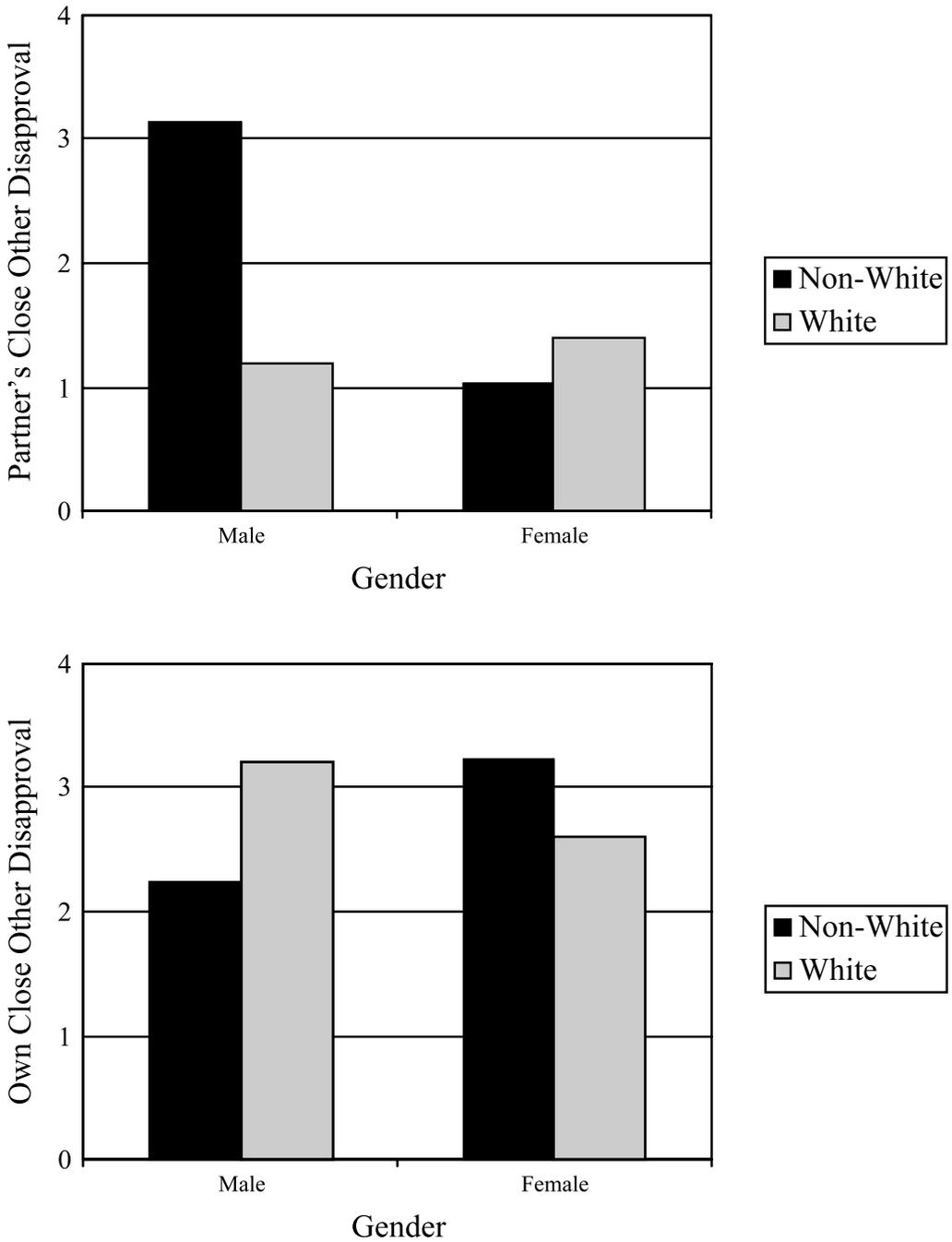


Figure 2. Combined mean disapproval ratings from partner's close friends and family (A) and own friends and family (B) as a function of participant race & gender, for interracial relationships.

should frown upon her dating a member of such a low status group. Non-White males reported that their White female partners' family members were indeed disapproving relative to their own parents—in fact, they were the only group for whom there was perceived to be more disapproval from their partner's family and friends compared to their own.²

However, a more consistent set of results would have shown high rates of disapproval of own family and friends for White female participants who were dating non-White males. While White females who were involved with non-White males did report that their parents were more disapproving than their partners' parents (and hence the index was in the right direction), their disapproval was no greater than that in the case of non-White females dating White males, or White males dating non-White females. While admittedly speculative, it may be that White females, fearing an intensively negative reaction from their close others, may have been especially secretive about a romantic relationship with a non-White male. If this were the case, close others would have never had the opportunity to express their disapproval.

However, a more general weakness of Study 1 stems from the instructions we used to obscure our interest in race. We asked participants to tell us about a relationship characterized by disapproval in hopes that some participants would report on interracial relationships (and 15% of the sample did). However, selectively focusing on relationships characterized by disapproval may have given us an unrepresentative sample of interracial relationships. For example, this essentially self-selected group of individuals may have included a disproportionate number of White females who were more willing to date non-White males because they suspected close others would not disapprove. To help resolve this problem and better uncover the reactions of White females' close others, we focus on White participants in Study 2.

Study 2

The findings from Study 1 lend partial support to our hypotheses, but because of the issues

mentioned above, we decided to take an experimental approach, using only White participants and hypothetical relationships. We asked both male and female participants to imagine their own parents' and friends' reactions to their dating someone from a number of different groups. Again, we predicted that White females would report relatively more disapproval for dating a non-White male (as compared to White males dating non-White females). By also including several high and low status potential dating partners in the experiment, we were able to investigate more systematically how White females versus White males anticipate others' reactions to their dating members of groups that vary in status (e.g. a medical student vs. someone with a prison record). The inclusion of high and low status groups along with non-White racial groups allows us to more directly address the question of whether reactions to non-White racial groups are similar to reactions to low status groups by directly comparing participants' reports of others' reactions to their dating members of each of the three group types.

We were also interested in addressing the question of parental prejudice in Study 2, and pursuant to those ends, we asked participants to tell us about their parents' prejudice while growing up. Including information on perceived parental prejudice allows for the potential discovery of boundary conditions to the predicted sex difference. Specifically, White females may anticipate that close others will react more negatively to their dating a non-White only if those close others are relatively prejudiced against non-Whites, and believe them to be of lower status.

Method

Participants Participants were 125 (64 female and 61 male) introductory psychology students who volunteered to participate for class credit. Data from five non-Whites and from two participants who improperly completed the questionnaire were excluded from analyses.

Materials and procedure Up to four participants of the same sex participated in any given

session. After being directed to individual cubicles, participants were administered a questionnaire. The instructions indicated that we were interested in how others react to our romantic relationships and emphasized that their responses would remain completely confidential. Participants provided estimates of others' reactions to 15 different potential dating partners who were members of various racial, ethnic, physical, and social groups (e.g. an engineering student, someone in the military, someone in a wheelchair, a Latino). Participants were asked to estimate their friends' and parents' reactions on a -3 (they would strongly disapprove), to 0 (they would be neither disapproving nor approving), to +3 (they would strongly approve) scale. The means for two high status potential partners (engineering student and medical student), two low status partners (former mental hospital patient and former prison inmate), and the three non-White partners (Latino, Asian, and Black) were computed for later analyses.³

Perceived parental prejudice was assessed with four statements adopted from Towles-Schwen and Fazio (2001). The questions were, 'Did your parents disapprove of your associating with members of racial and ethnic minorities while you were growing up?', 'While you were growing up, did your parents emphasize having egalitarian beliefs about minorities?', 'While you were growing up, did your parents hold prejudiced beliefs about minorities?', and, 'While you were growing up, did your parents hold prejudiced beliefs about Blacks in particular?' Participants responded on a -3 (strongly disagree) to a +3 (strongly agree) scale. The items showed adequate reliability ($\alpha = .62$). A median split was performed on the mean of the four items, parsing the participants into high versus low parental prejudice groups.

Participants then completed a set of demographic questions, where they recorded their gender. They were then debriefed, thanked, and dismissed.

Results

Study 2 allowed for a more explicit assessment of our predictions via direct comparisons between

estimates of parents' and friends' reactions to dating members of low status, high status, and non-White racial groups, as a function of participant gender. We were also interested in investigating the potential moderating effects of parental prejudice on others' possible reactions to romantic involvement with members of different status groups. Hence, the data were subjected to a 2 (Participant Gender: Male vs. Female) \times 2 (Parental Prejudice: Low vs. High) \times 3 (Group Type: High Status vs. Low Status vs. Non-White) \times 2 (Other: Parents vs. Friends) ANOVA, with repeated measures on the last two factors.

A number of main effects and interactions were subsumed by a three-way, Participant Gender \times Parental Prejudice \times Group Type interaction ($F(2, 113) = 3.38, p < .05$). This three-way interaction was apparent for both parents' reactions ($F(2, 113) = 2.84, p = .05$), and friends' reactions ($F(2, 113) = 3.35, p < .05$). Because parents' reactions and friends' reactions did not differ statistically and were highly correlated ($r_s > .60$), subsequent analyses were performed on the average of the two. The nature of the three-way interaction was made apparent when data for each of the group types were analyzed separately. As expected, the two-way, Gender \times Parental Prejudice interaction was not present for either low or high status groups ($p_s > .18$), but was apparent for non-White racial groups, $F(1, 114) = 3.68, p = .05$. Figure 3 displays these means for the three group types as a function of gender and perceived parental prejudice.

When considering reactions to high status groups, only the predicted effect of Gender emerged ($F(1, 114) = 5.43, p < .05$). As expected, females reported greater anticipated approval for dating members of high status groups ($M = 2.19, SD = .86$) than did males ($M = 1.83, SD = .93$). When considering reactions to low status groups, the expected effect of Gender again emerged ($F(1, 114) = 5.23, p < .05$) and assumed a form analogous to that for high status groups.⁴ Specifically, females reported less anticipated approval for dating members of low status groups ($M = -2.12, SD = .93$) than did males ($M = -1.70, SD = 1.00$).

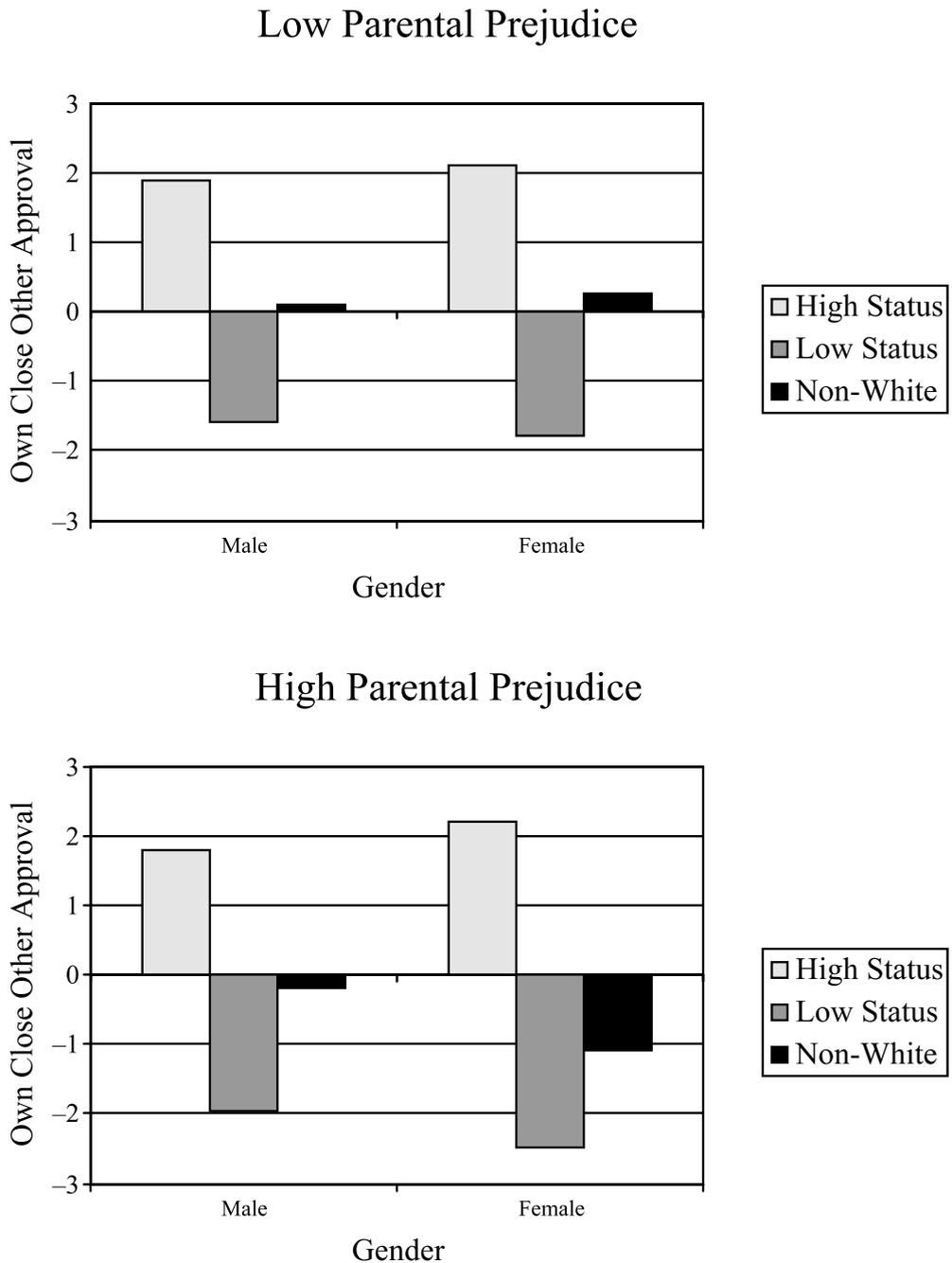


Figure 3. Perceived approval of own parents for dating members of high status, low status, and non-White groups as a function of gender and perceived parental prejudice.

An effect of parental prejudice also emerged ($F(1, 114) = 11.29, p < .01$) such that participants with relatively prejudiced parents expected less approval of dating members of low status groups ($M = -2.25, SD = .79$) than did participants reporting relatively lower levels of parental prejudice ($M = -1.64, SD = 1.04$). In sum, anticipated reactions to dating members of both high and low status groups were as predicted by the mate selection theories.

When considering non-White racial group members, a non-surprising main effect of Parental Prejudice emerged ($F(1, 114) = 14.87, p < .001$). Participants who reported higher levels of parental prejudice also reported that others would be less approving of their dating non-Whites ($M = -0.70, SD = 1.21$) compared to those who reported lower levels of parental prejudice ($M = 0.20, SD = 1.26$). However, it is the Gender \times Parental Prejudice interaction reported earlier that provides evidence for the prediction that partner race serves as a stronger indicator of status for females than for males, but only among individuals who perceive their parents to be relatively prejudiced against non-Whites. For people who reported low levels of parental prejudice, t tests against the scale neutral point indicated that there was little disapproval anticipated for dating non-Whites for either male ($t(34) = .55, p = .59, M = 0.13, SD = 1.38$) or female ($t(30) = 1.44, p = .16, M = 0.29, SD = 1.12$) participants, and males' and females' estimates did not differ ($t(64) = .59, p = .60$). For people who reported high levels of parental prejudice, however, gender differences were evident. Specifically, females reported that others would be relatively disapproving of their dating non-Whites ($t(27) = 4.99, p < .001, M = -1.02, SD = 1.09$), whereas males did not ($t(23) = 1.21, p = .24, M = -.31, SD = 1.26$). These two estimates differed significantly ($t(50) = 2.19, p < .05.5$).⁵

General discussion

The studies presented here extend current theories of mate selection in a couple of important ways. In Study 1, participants reported on actual romantic relationships

where there was some degree of disapproval. Regardless of race, females reported more severe disapproval from close others than did males. Male participants agreed—they reported that their female partners' parents and friends were more disapproving of the relationship than their own parents and friends. As implied by both parental investment and social structural theory, the consequences of a low status mate choice are more severe for women, presumably because they are forced to care for offspring and depend on the resources provided by males to do so. Thus, close others should attend more to women's mate choices, and they appear to be more disapproving of those choices if they are seen as inappropriate. Consistent with this reasoning, Study 2 provided evidence for the hypothesis that females anticipate close others' approval of a romantic relationship to be more dependent on their partner's status than males do.

Our main interest, however, was in showing that race can serve as a cue to status in mate selection. In Study 1, non-White males who were romantically involved with White women (either presently or in the past) perceived strong disapproval from their partners' parents and friends, as compared to all other combinations of race and sex. In Study 2, dating partner was manipulated on a within-subjects basis, and participants imagined their family's and friends' reactions to hypothetical dating partners from a variety of groups. Here, White women reported relatively negative reactions from family and friends to their dating someone from a non-White racial group as compared to men, a pattern that mirrored the results for status. In other words, White women appear to receive more pressure to date and marry White men than White men receive to date and marry White women. That this pattern held regardless of the particular racial group in question (as in the results of Study 2) provides strong evidence that being non-White does in fact act as a heuristic cue to lower status to some Whites, and as such operates as heuristic cues typically do—without attention to information about specific instances, such as the different average incomes of Asians, Blacks, and Latinos.

However, this pattern held true only for people who reported relatively more parental prejudice while they were growing up. For those reporting relatively less parental prejudice, there was no evidence that families were more disapproving of women dating a member of a non-White racial group than men dating a member of a non-White racial group. This is not to suggest that non-prejudiced Whites are unaware of non-Whites' lower status with respect to income or earning potential. Indeed, part of our argument is that most everyone is aware of these race-based disparities, which in turn makes race a convenient heuristic by which to assess status—for some. It appears that only relatively prejudiced Whites are willing to use race information as a legitimate heuristic cue to status. Non-prejudiced Whites, on the other hand, seem to make an effort to avoid using race as an indicator of a potential mate's ability to provide resources.

Social structural versus sociobiological explanations

This research was not intended to compare the merits of social structural and evolutionary explanations of mate selection. Indeed, it was argued earlier that the two theories agree on the critical hypotheses tested here. Regarding the traits that men and women are thought to seek in mates, the differences between the two theories' predictions are rather subtle, and differ more with regard to men's preferences—for example, evolutionary theories emphasize men's preference for fertile mates, whereas structural theories emphasize men's preference for mates with good domestic skills (Eagly & Wood, 1999). Hence, both can account for our critical finding that race can serve as a cue to status in mate selection.

However, one aspect of our results might call into question inclusive fitness theory's assumption that people are critical of others' mate choices because they have a vested genetic interest in them. According to the theory, people should prefer their female family members to acquire mates with status and resources because such mate choices increase the probability of survival of their own genes.

Women's *friends*, on the other hand, do not necessarily have a vested genetic interest in their reproductive success, and so should not necessarily be as critical of mate choices that violate these preferences. In both studies, participants reported reactions from friends that very closely matched those of their family members. Because social structural theory emphasizes the socialization forces that steer individuals into gender role-consistent behavior, and (as mentioned earlier) it places little emphasis on genetic relatedness, those forces should act through close others to promote gender role-consistent behavior whether or not those close others are genetically related. Thus, social structural theory appears to be better able to account for the similar reactions to actual and potential relationships from family members and friends.

However, anthropological records strongly suggest that it has only been in the past few thousand years or so that humans have moved away from clan-like social settings, where one could be fairly certain that people living in one's immediate proximity were genetically related (Price & Feinman, 1993). Proximity would have been a reliable cue to genetic relatedness then, and it is likely that the use of this cue has carried over to modern times. Therefore, an evolutionary theorist might argue that individuals attempt to promote the survival and successful reproduction of all close others, as long as they seem sufficiently 'close'. According to this explanation, our family members and friends react similarly to our romantic relationships because both groups implicitly assume genetic relatedness. However, there are certainly limits to this explanation—limits that ought to be explored in future research.

Limitations and conclusion

The use of race as a cue to status certainly cannot account for all of the dynamics of prejudice against interracial romantic relationships. In considering only Whites in Study 2, for example, we neglected the perspective of non-Whites and the unique factors affecting the likelihood of their becoming romantically involved with Whites. Black women in particular are

thought to be discouraged from dating White men, which may then reduce the number of White male–Black female relationships (Todd et al., 1992). Variability among non-White minorities' views on interracial relationships might suggest that factors other than status play a role in prejudice against interracial romantic relationships, especially among non-Whites. But despite the myriad factors presumably at work, census data on marriages between Whites and non-Whites in general are consistent with mate selection theories: there are fewer White females married to non-White males (2.3% of all marriages) than there are White males married to non-White females (2.7% of all marriages) in the United States (US Bureau of the Census, 2000). On the other hand, these same census data suggest that actual interracial mate selection patterns are sometimes inconsistent with the mate selection theories considered here, and future work should investigate conditions under which actual mating patterns defy these social forces.

As a final limitation, we must acknowledge some ambiguity in the critically important concept of 'status'. On the one hand, status can be synonymous with prestige, i.e. one's standing with others or a symbolic ranking in a social hierarchy. On the other hand, the concept of status in theories of mate selection has been most closely associated with the possession of important resources (e.g. Buss, 1998). However, we would advance the position that these two perspectives are not very disparate. Resource possession (and the power it implies) is likely to be summarized in a judgment of prestige. Status may itself be a heuristic used to judge resource possession and power (i.e. it may serve as an abstract representation of resource possession). Like money, people may come to view prestige as a desirable concept in its own right, even though fundamentally it may be determined solely by what it affords—the acquisition of resources that will help insure the survival of offspring.

In sum, novel predictions about an important kind of prejudice—interracial relationships—were derived from evolutionary and social structural theories of mate preferences.

The predictions were mostly supported by the data from both real and hypothetical relationships. It is important to keep in mind that, simply because the source of prejudice discussed in this paper may be at least partially the product of an evolved adaptation, it does not mean that this prejudice is inevitable. On the contrary, it is an optimistic finding that participants (especially women) with less prejudiced parents reported that close others would not disapprove of their dating non-Whites. Status may continue to be an important trait in mate selection, but the cues we use to assess it apparently can change.

Notes

1. Evolutionary theories of mate preferences have been criticized for ignoring within-sex differences, and social structural theories have been criticized for ignoring cross-cultural between-sex differences. It should be pointed out that theorists in both camps have more recently begun addressing both between-sex and within-sex differences (for reviews, see Eagly & Wood, 1999; Gangestad & Simpson, 2000). Our intention is not to oversimplify either theory, but for the purposes of the present research, we focus on between-sex differences in mate preferences.
2. That the results from friends (both own and partner's) resembled those from family may seem more amiable to a social structural account, because the theory places little emphasis on genetic relatedness. While this study was not designed to provide disconfirming evidence for one theory or the other, the results afford some interesting speculation on which theory can best account for them. We address this issue in the general discussion.
3. Pilot participants provided status estimates for a number of potential groups selected to represent different degrees of status according to the theories of mate selection (e.g. ability to acquire resources, earning potential). The two lowest and two highest rated groups, whose status estimates differed significantly, were selected for the present study. Participants' responses to the two high status groups were highly correlated ($r_s > .60$), as were responses to the low status groups ($r_s > .50$), and non-White racial groups (alphas $> .78$). That responses to Black, Latino, and Asian groups were so correlated despite Asians' higher incomes is consistent with the

notion that heuristic cues are often accurate in only the most general sense.

4. Males' and females' differential sensitivity to status was assessed more directly in an analysis comparing their responses to high versus low status groups. The predicted Gender \times Group Type interaction was highly significant ($F(1, 114) = 9.58, p < .01$), indicating that the difference in anticipated approval for dating members of high versus low status groups was greater for females ($M = 4.31, SD = 1.47$) than for males ($M = 3.53, SD = 1.30$). This finding provides empirical validation for the theoretical premise that partner status should matter more to females than to males.
5. Analyses were also conducted on participants' estimates for the three non-White races separately. Although the results were somewhat weaker, the predicted Participant Gender \times Parental Prejudice interaction was at least marginally present for Asians ($F(1, 114) = 2.64, p = .10$), Blacks ($F(1, 114) = 2.29, p = .13$) and Latinos ($F(1, 114) = 4.14, p = .04$), and in each case took the predicted form. Specifically, among participants who reported relatively less prejudiced parents, males' and females' estimates did not differ (all t s < 1), but of those with relatively prejudiced parents, the estimates of females relative to males reflected more anticipated disapproval in the case of Asian ($t(50) = 1.77, p = .08$), Black ($t(50) = 1.57, p = .12$), and Latino ($t(50) = 1.90, p = .06$) mates.

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