

A Note on Family Acceptance Involving Interracial Friendships and Romantic Relationships

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ABSTRACT. Perceptions of family acceptance concerning interracial friendships and romantic relationships were investigated in a group of 142 undergraduates. The Assessment Scale of Interracial Relationships (ASIR) was constructed by the authors and administered to 68 men and 74 women recruited from introductory psychology courses. Results showed that both men and women held negative attitudes toward interracial relationships, although Black students held more favorable attitudes than did White students. These findings also showed that the women were less accepting of interracial friendships and romantic relationships than the men were. Both Black and White students indicated that family perception of these interracial relationships would be negative.

THERE HAVE BEEN A NUMBER OF INVESTIGATIONS into interracial friendships and romantic relationships (Davidson & Schneider, 1992; Hallinan & Williams, 1987; Jarmon, 1980; Patterson, Sedlacek, & Perry, 1984). Previous research has shown that Blacks have a more favorable attitude toward interracial romantic relationships than Whites (Davidson & Schneider, 1992), and that more Blacks than Whites believe that interracial relationships of any degree are unacceptable to Whites (Jarmon, 1980; Passet & Taylor, 1991; Todd, McKinney, Harris, Chadderton, & Small, 1992). Hallinan and Teixeira (1987) also found that interracial relationships diminish with age.

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Despite burgeoning research, no reported studies have examined the relationship between perceptions of family acceptance and attitudes toward interracial relationships. We conducted this study to examine this issue. We hypothesized that subjects who reported more favorable attitudes toward interracial relationships would report greater family acceptance of such relationships and that subjects who held more negative views toward interracial relationships would report less family acceptance. We also hypothesized that Black participants would report more favorable attitudes toward interracial relationships than Whites, as previously reported in the empirical literature.

Method

Participants

Participants were 142 undergraduate college students (68 men and 74 women) recruited from three general psychology courses at a small midwestern university. They ranged in age from 18 to 30 years with a mean age of 20.3 years ($SD = 3.1$).

Instruments

We constructed the 16-item Assessment Scale of Interracial Relationships (ASIR) to measure the degree of prejudicial attitudes, the acceptance of interracial friendships and romantic relationships, and family acceptance of interracial relationships. The ASIR was organized into five categories: race, friendships, romantic relationships, negative attitudes, and family acceptance. Five demographic variables related to age, gender, race, college major, and year in school were also included in the questionnaire, which used a 5-point Likert-type scale format ranging from *strongly agree* (5), *neutral* (3), to *strongly disagree* (1).

Procedure

The students were administered the ASIR in a standard, uniform group format. Participation was voluntary, and the students were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Data were collected from 100% of the participants.

Results and Discussion

We calculated Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients between each of the category scores and age, gender, and race. No statistically significant results were found ($p > .01$). Five independent groups two-tailed t tests were used to compare the five category scores for men and women: race, $t(140) = 2.32$, $p < .05$, and negative attitudes, $t(140) = 2.72$, $p < .05$, produced statistically significant differences for gender. Both men and women reported that race made a difference

in determining friendships and romantic relationships, but women reported more negative prejudicial attitudes toward interracial relationships than did men. There was no statistically significant relationship between gender and friendships, romantic relationships, or family acceptance ($p > .05$).

Independent groups two-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were performed to compare differences for each of the category scores among five subcategories of race: White ($N = 97$), Black ($N = 29$), Hispanic ($N = 7$), Asian ($N = 5$), and other ($N = 3$). There was a statistically significant relationship between friendship and race, $F(4, 136) = 2.93$, $p < .05$; Blacks indicated that they had more friendships with people of other races than did Whites. A statistically significant relationship was also found between negative attitudes and race, $F(4, 136) = 3.45$, $p < .05$; Whites indicated a higher degree of negativity and prejudicial attitudes toward those of other races than did Blacks. No statistically significant results were reported between family acceptance and race, age, or gender. Overall, perceptions of family acceptance of interracial friendships and romantic relationships were negative.

The finding that women are more likely than men to hold greater prejudicial attitudes toward interracial relationships may be due to social conditioning. The finding that Blacks indicated a greater tendency to accept friendships with people of different races than did Whites was not surprising. As a minority, Blacks are forced to interact and associate with a dominant White society in myriad situations that foster greater opportunities for interpersonal relationships. The most significant limitation of this study is the lack of standardization of the questionnaire and the fact that there were few non-White participants.

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