

Interracial Relationships and Third Party Reactions

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Abstract

America's population has boomed to more than 310 million people. And of those 310 million people, a growing percentage of people are non-Caucasian, non-White. As America blends even further, it only becomes logical to see that there will be a proliferation of interracial relationships, romantic or otherwise. While interracial relationships are becoming more and more accepted, there is not a complete acceptance of interracial relationships among the general public. To this day, there are still people who, while not necessarily against interracial relationships, are not in favor of interracial relationships. Here, physiological, cultural, and gender factors are examined in how they affect the reactions of related third parties to interracial relationships.

Keywords: Race, Interracial Relationships, Third Party Reactions

Interracial Relationships and Third Party Reactions

In America, the population has ballooned to 313 million people. While the majority of Americans are still white, there are a higher number of non-white Americans than ever, and it has been predicted that whites will lose hold of being the majority of the population by 2043 (Yen, 2012). There are an increasing number of Hispanics and Asians living in America, and as such, it would be logical to see that there are more interracial relationships now than ever. If this rate of change keeps up, there will be even more interracial relationships in the future. However, while interracial relationships are generally well accepted in American society, interracial relationships have not always been viewed in a positive light and were even frowned upon. As such, it is worth examining what factors have affected the formation of interracial relationships and how such relationships are perceived relatively negatively and are not well accepted.

Physiological Influences

The biggest initial factor in relationships is physiological influences. Adler and Procter (2011) point to a study where men and women were paired together for blind dates and it was found that the people rated as more physically attractive were rated as more desirable. While physical attractiveness become less valued as the relationship progresses, it is very important when trying to initially catch someone's eye. Therefore, it's just as important for a person's romantic partner or even a regular friend to make a good first impression with said person's family and inner circle. But, do interracial relationships follow the same rules? Murstein, Merighi, & Malloy (2001) compare the aspect of physical attractiveness in interracial

relationships to endogamy, where a people trend to marrying within a caste or socioeconomic class. Murstein, Merighi, & Malloy (2001) hypothesize that one of the main caveats for a Black-White romantic relationship to work; the Black partner would have to be perceived to be more attractive than the White partner. This is because, in terms of an exchange, the physical attractiveness of the Black person has to make up for their less valued black skin. And so, while the younger generation has been more exposed to the mixing pot of different races and ethnicities, it is very conceivable that older generations of Whites have stricter views of what is attractive in a non-White person. But what affects the attitudes that skew a person's perception of physical attractiveness in a minority?

When looking at what affects perception, age is a big factor. Adler and Procter (2011) say that older people have a larger number of experiences, and, therefore, view the world differently than their younger counterparts. However, it can also be pointed out that people tend to want to keep the things around them the same, which can lead to the generational difference in how acceptable an interracial relationship is to someone of a previous generation and whether the partner of their child has an acceptable level of physical attractiveness. A possible explanation is that racial integration of everyday life was not as progressive even thirty years ago compared to now. As such, it can be somewhat inconceivable for an older person to accept an interracial relationship without a much greater return of the minority being in a higher socioeconomic class than the white partner. Mills and Daly (1995) also point to the fact that whites tended to have fewer minority friends than. Mills and Daly (1995) think the reason for this is possibly due to social conditioning and points to the fact that his study showed that Blacks tended to have more interracial relationships than Whites did in his study. The social conditioning can come from the fact that Whites tend to have less exposure to people of other races than minorities and therefore

have more of a tendency to make relationships with what they know. This would then extend to acceptance of interracial relationships as friendships, let alone romantic relationships, would be hard to get approval from family and friends.

Cultural Influences

Another issue that can lead to negative attitudes is cultural influences. Because of the history of political and economic dominance of European countries, there are many countries that have a cultural history of Whites pressuring the native people into the equivalence of indentured service or straight up slavery. As such, there is a development of the attitude that the native people are worth less than themselves, which leads to the interracial relationship being frowned upon. Adler and Procter (2011) point to ethnocentrism as a characteristic of cultural differences. Europeans viewed other cultures that differed from theirs as uncivilized and barbaric. Such was true in Australia with the English being the dominant country. Reed (2002) chronicles the town reaction to a white girl having an aboriginal man's baby in a town in Australia in the 1860s. In a small town in Victoria, Australia, Henry Johnson enlisted help to find his nineteen year old daughter, Selina Johnson, who had been missing since the previous day. When she was found, it was discovered that she had given birth to a baby of an aboriginal man, who confirmed that he was the father. This was not necessarily a spontaneous event, as it was reported after the fact that Selina and the aboriginal man had a long standing relationship that they kept secret. This caused a major uproar around town as this was absolutely scandalous in nature for them, despite the fact that both Selina and the aboriginal man had accepted each other as man and wife, even though they had not officially been married. In fact, it Reed (2001) points out that records show that arresting the aboriginal man was a pursued route and was only dropped when it was confirmed that Selina had consented to the relationship. This situation was completely

hypocritical in nature, since white men frequently had illegitimate children with aboriginal women, but did not illicit any reaction what-so-ever because over time. It became accepted. But, it was only accepted when White men had relationships with aboriginal women. It can be argued the negative attitudes toward interracial relationships evolved from the attitudes of ownership that Whites had with minorities at the time of expansion and Imperialism. In the United States alone, Native Americans were once viewed as barbarous savages that needed to be saved by integrating them into civilization, and African slaves weren't even viewed as humans, which is evidenced by laws such as the 3/5 Compromise where a slave counted as 3/5 of a man for tax purposes. As such, with this information, it needs to be analyzed how interracial contact affects racial prejudice and discrimination, and how acceptance is affected.

Dixon, Durrheim, Tedoux, Tropp, Clack, & Eaton (2010) analyze the state of affairs in South Africa where apartheid was abolished later than slavery in America. In South Africa, he points to the paradoxical nature of the country. He points to the fact that one side of the history of South Africa points to that of progress towards freedom from discrimination and equality for all. However, on the other side of the coin, there is the continuing tale of racial inequality and discrimination. The disparity of poverty and unemployment remain wide apart. However, Dixon, et al.'s study (2010) shows that while it is widely believed that the state of racial relations has improved to the state of equality, most Blacks in South Africa feel that there is still widespread discrimination, there is still deprivation. There is not much empathy, not much understanding between Whites and Blacks. And so, is there enough understanding between Whites and minorities in America? While there has certainly been progress in America, there is still an issue of lack of empathy and understanding in America between Whites and Blacks due to the possibility that there still has not been enough positive contact to overcome the stigma that

slavery created. Lack of empathy and understanding lead to the results that show Whites are still less comfortable with multiracial relationships than minorities (Bonam, 2009). And as the relationships get intimately closer, from the level of a working relationship to that of a romantic relationship, Whites progressively get less and less comfortable with the relationship. Why? The residue of a culture of White dominance over minorities still manifests itself in subtle ways that devalue colored skin, but to the extent of which nobody truly understands. This leads to an attitude of skepticism at interracial relationships that exists today.

Gender Influences

Finally, as with most societal issues, there is a gender line that divides the actions of men and women into separate categories. Going back again to the case of Selina Johnson (Reed, 2002) in Victoria, Australia, what if the roles were switched? As mentioned previously, there were cases where White males impregnated aboriginal women. Also mentioned previously, these cases did not have anywhere near the scandal that Selina Johnson's had. Why? The perception of males and females are quite different. Adler and Procter (2011) define gender roles as roles society expect men and women to follow. Gender roles dictated that Selina should not have had a romantic relationship with the aboriginal man. However, as mentioned earlier, men suffered no consequences of the same situation due to the fact that their gender roles expected what appears to be the opposite side of the spectrum. Mills (1995) found in his study that women tended to be more negatively prejudiced than men were. Murstein, Merighi, & Malloy (2001) believe that women are more dependent on their relationship quality for their self-concept. Mills (1995) also supports that assumption. These preconceptions are products of social conditioning in which men are conditioned to be "bread-winners," whereas women are conditioned to be "mothers." This preconception has been present throughout all of the history of man and has only recently begun

to change. As such, it can be concluded that social conditioning has created a negative attitude towards interracial relationships that do not promote the acceptance of them within one's own family and friends, especially if a white girl is involved.

Limitations

One limitation that shows up pretty much in all of the studies, however, is sample size. While the sample size was decent, it is legitimate to question how the numbers would average out if the sample sizes were increased to five times its current size. A sample size of 100 probably is not reflective of even a section of a city let alone something that can be regarded fact, since a sample size of 100 more than likely does not cover a large demographic of people and therefore cannot be representative of the general public.

A second limitation somewhat ties into the first limitation in that there was a small number of demographics being represented. One study limited itself to college students in a certain class. One study limited itself to males in one city. Basically, all of the studies really focused in one demographic group, but neglected a large number of others, which is relatively fine for their goals, but still is not a very representative study nonetheless.

Future Research

An area of future research probably focuses on regional attitudes rather focusing in on one demographic in one city, because doing such really limits the perspectives that you get as data which can misrepresent the general populous as a whole. For example, there are a generally a larger number of blacks in the southeast than in other parts of the country. So it's possible that attitudes toward romantic relationships between blacks and whites in the southeast are drastically different than in the Midwest or the Rocky Mountains region. Also, rather than focusing on the

poster child black-white relationship, there should be more work about white-Hispanic, white-Asian, black-Hispanic, and a number of other situations because it might be that the attitudes toward black-white relationships are viewed much differently than say white-Asian relationships. Then, do regional comparisons with the different types of interracial relationships for even more insight into interracial relationships. Do the statistics provided by people such Murstein hold when applied to larger numbers of demographics? Also, how to third party reactions to interracial relationships compare across all races, not just white and black?

In conclusion, third party reactions to interracial relationships are deeply affected by physiological, cultural, and gender influences. There is data that shows interracial relationships still are not fully accepted by the public, and history shows similar mind sets in the past that have managed to endure to today. Such mind sets are a result of social conditioning and the cultural history of European dominance. Therefore, it is paramount to gather more and better data that show how demographics compare to each other and region to region of the United States.

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