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Impact of the Attractiveness Bias on Acceptance of Interracial Relationships

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IMPACT OF THE ATTRACTIVENESS BIAS ON ACCEPTANCE
OF INTERRACIAL RELATIONSHIPS

A Thesis Presented to
the Faculty of the University Honors Program
Northeastern Illinois University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
of the NEIU Honors Program
for Graduation with Honors

Jackelyn Castaneda
May 2022

HONORS SENIOR PROJECT
ACCEPTANCE AND APPROVAL FORM

Jackelyn Castaneda

Impact of the Attractiveness Bias on Acceptance of Interracial Relationships

This thesis has been reviewed by the faculty of the NEIU Honors Program and is found to be in good order in content, style, and mechanical accuracy. It is accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the NEIU Honors Program and graduation with honors.



May 16, 2022

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Faculty Advisor

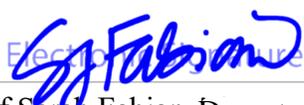
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ABSTRACT

Even though interracial marriage became legal in 1967 changes have been slow (Field, Kimuna, & Straus, 2013): e.g., Interracial marriages have increased from roughly .7% in 1970 to about 3.9% in 2008 (U.S. Census Bureau). However, Americans have slowly become more accepting, and according to the U.S census (2010), there are over 5.3 million interracial couples in the United States. There are many factors that could have influenced this change, one of them may reside in a well-studied phenomenon that is our tendency to perceive those who are attractive as “good” (Lemay Jr., Clark, & Greenberg, 2010); that is, the physical attractiveness stereotype that associates beauty with goodness. This study investigates the role of physical attractiveness on the acceptance of interracial relationships. Participants evaluated mono and interracial couples that were comprised of a mix of Caucasian, Latin/x, and Asian individuals who were high or low in attractiveness. This study used a Qualtrics survey to collect feedback on participants’ perceptions of mono- and interracial couples. The analysis test is a 2 (attractiveness: high versus low) x 2 (monoracial vs interracial) within-subjects ANOVA. Results show that attractive couples of all types were evaluated more positively. The implications of the results of this study could shed light on the internalized stigma individuals have towards interracial relationships and one of the mediating factors that might affect it. This study will also contribute to the growing literature of the attractive bias phenomenon and expand our knowledge of interracial relationships beyond Black-White relationships.

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IMPACT OF ATTRACTIVENESS BIAS ON INTERRACIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Marriage is considered a common cultural practice that many people in the United States cherish as a long-standing tradition. Different eras of marriage include institutional (in which marriage revolved around things like food production, shelter and protection from violence), companionate (centered around intimate needs such as to love, to be loved), to self-expressive. The self-expressive era of marriage, which began during the mid-1960's, is focused on marriage increasingly for self-discovery, self-esteem and personal growth. During this era, many forces came together to create a climate in which self-discovery and self-expression are emphasized (Finkel, 2017).

As part of this fight for self-expressive marriage, interracial marriage finally became legal in 1967. Though over 50 years have passed since that legislation, changes have been slow (Field, Kimuna, & Straus, 2013). While interracial marriages have increased from roughly .7% in 1970 to about 3.9% in 2008 (U.S. Census Bureau), some (e.g., Skinner, 2018) say that there is still a stigma surrounding interracial relationships. This study aims to examine perceptions of interracial relationships and to investigate the role of the attractiveness bias on acceptance of interracial couples.

Explicit Bias

The negative bias surrounding interracial relationships, whether explicit or implicit, is important to recognize as a limiting factor that could cause potential harmful effects and added stress on the couple. Many cultures have these stigmatized views ingrained within the values of the culture. For example, one study found that Latino men were especially likely to report negative emotions when reading about a Latina American woman dating an African American man (Garcia et. al, 2012). This suggests that Hispanic culture tends to have this ingrained bias

that Latina women do not belong with African American men, suggesting that interrelationships between the two leads to negative connotations.

Hispanics are not alone in harboring discomfort: Asian/Asian American participants reported greater instances of conflict in their current or past interracial relationships than did Latino/Latino American participants (Shenhav, Campos, & Goldberg, 2016). Furthermore, the greater the reported discrepancy with parents over intercultural dating attitudes, the greater the likelihood of conflict over intercultural dating relationships. Results also showed that first- and second-generation participants reported more conflict with their parents over their previous interracial relationships. So, not only is culture a factor in parental disapproval of interracial relationships, but it also appears that participants' generational status also plays a role in acceptance or rejection of interracial relationships. Even when people may explicitly say they are accommodating, even accepting, of interracial relationships for others, a study found that despite their positive attitudes for other's engagement "neither White men nor White women are very likely to actually engage in interracial relationships themselves" (Herman & Campbell, 2012). We are finding that these globally positive attitudes do not actually translate towards high rates of actual marriage for themselves, therein suggests that there is still hesitancy in engaging in long term relationships with those who are not of the same race.

Implicit Bias

If it is not explicit bias, there is evidence to suggest that many people do have some form of implicit biases against interracial couples. According to Skinner and Hudac (2017), who designed a series of studies examining implicit bias against black individuals. While most white Americans self-report (i.e., explicitly) little to no racial bias against Black people, they tend to

show robust implicit, or unconscious, biases. This suggests that poll statistics may not be truly painting the whole picture and that we must delve deeper into the ingrained bias we have against people of color, including how this affects interracial relationships. In fact, one of the primary emotions associated with racial bias is that of disgust, more specifically the levels of activation in the *insula* — an area of the brain implicated in the perception and experience of disgust (Liu, & et. al., 2015). Disgust has been linked to dehumanization and that can lead to incidents of violence and cruelty. Skinner and Hudac (2017) found that there were higher levels of disgust when participants were shown images of interracial couples. This could be one of the reasons for many cases of violent acts made against those in interracial relationships

Attractiveness Bias

Nevertheless, and in spite of these and other (e.g., socioeconomic) obstacles, Americans have slowly become more accepting of interracial dating and couples, and according to the U.S census (2010), there are over 5.3 million interracial couples in the United States. Many factors could have influenced this change, such as the increasing diversity in America that has allowed for more opportunities for different racial groups to mingle and which consequently led to the increase chances of interracial relationships.

In addition to growing acceptance of diversity and relationship diversity, another factor to consider in relationship acceptance may reside in a well-studied phenomenon that is our tendency to perceive those who are attractive as “good” (Lemay, Clark, & Greenberg, 2010); that is, the physical attractiveness stereotype that associates beauty with goodness. This describes a set of beliefs and expectations that grant social advantages to those who are considered attractive (Griffin, & Langlois, 2006). We have seen a variety of effects arise from this bias such as attractive people having advantages from hiring positions to mate selection. It can also impact

one's judgment of a person's personality traits and characteristics. When assessing potential job candidates and university applicants, positive biases were made toward highly attractive other-sex targets, but negative biases arose toward highly attractive same-sex targets (Agthe, Spörrle, & Maner, 2011). This suggests that things, such as job evaluations, which are meant to be objective, can actually be affected by attractiveness bias in both positive and negative ways, and be a factor in which individuals may be influenced by when accepting interracial couples in society.

Eagly et al., finds that attractive people have higher levels of "social competence; intermediate for potency, adjustment, intellectual competence, integrity, etc." than unattractive people. These attributes would be considered favorable traits and representative of successful people, therefore affirming the theory that "what is beautiful is good". These factors led us to test the relationship between attractiveness and approval. In this study, we wanted to test on similar positive attributes to test whether this phenomenon will also apply to the unattractive and attractive interracial couples in this survey. These positive attributes are happiness, commitment, and overall approval which we use to determine how people will perceive attractive versus unattractive interracial couples as being in successful relationships based on these attributes. Happier couples signify a fulfilled relationship, commitment indicates successful long term, and approval will confirm how these interracial couples are perceived by society, and by the participants, as a good or bad unit. We suspect that because attractiveness leads to more positive attributes, the interracial couples who are more attractive will most likely be rated higher on these variables of happiness, commitment, and approval

Aims and Hypothesis

The attractiveness bias is the primary factor we will be exploring in this paper to determine whether it affects the acceptance of interracial couples. This study will utilize less studied minority races, i.e., Asians and Latinx couples to add to the underrepresentation of these groups in the literature currently available for these subgroups. We predict that the attractiveness bias will have an effect on the overall acceptance of interracial couples.

Hypothesis 1: The couples who are more attractive will gain higher levels of approval than unattractive couples.

Hypothesis 2: Monoracial couples will have more approval than interracial couples.

Hypothesis 3: Interracial attractive couples will be perceived to be happier and more committed than interracial unattractive couples.

METHOD

Participants

108 students from a Midwestern university with a mean age of 25 years old. Male (N=20), Female (N=99), Non-Binary (2). There were 57% Hispanic/Latinx, 24% White, 10% African American, and the rest made up 5% and below of the ethnicity background. 18% of participants had been or were currently in an interracial relationship.

Research Design

This study design was a 2 (physical attractiveness, low vs high) x 2 (monoracial vs interracial) within-subjects factorial. Dependent variables were commitment, happiness, and overall approval.

Measures

A Qualtrics survey was used to collect feedback on participants' perceptions of mono- and interracial couples. There were three sets of monoracial (i.e., White-White, Latino-Latina, Asian-Asian) couples and six sets were interracial couples. Interracial couples were (listed as male-female couple type) White-Latina, White-Asian, Latino-White, Asian-White, Latino-Asian, Asian-Latina. These couples were represented by photographs obtained from the Chicago Face Database (CFD) (Ma, Cornell, & Wittenbrink, 2014). Two sets of couples were created: one with nine sets of attractive and one with nine sets of unattractive couples. Attractiveness was based on the ratings provided in the CFD. The following questions were included for each couple: attractiveness, happiness, compatibility, predicted relationship duration, commitment, understanding, acceptance by friends/family, and positivity/negativity ratings on a Likert

Scale, followed by a set of demographic questions that included gender, age, ethnicity, inter-relationship status, etc.

Procedure

Participants were recruited using the SONA system and filled out an electronic Qualtrics survey individually. A consent form was given before the survey that they signed in order to participate. Compensation was given in the form of extra credit (SONA points) for classes. Participants viewed pictures of 18 different couples varying in physical attractiveness and ethnic composition. All participants were assigned to evaluate attractive and unattractive monoracial and interracial couples.

RESULTS

Happiness Variable

A 2 x 2 within-subjects ANOVA performed on the dependent measure of happiness yielded a significant main effect of couple type, $F(1, 116) = 35.55, p < .001$, such that monoracial couples ($M = 5.46, SD = 1.32$) were rated significantly higher on perceived happiness than interracial couples ($M = 5.09, SD = 1.37$). A significant main effect was also found for attractiveness, $F(1, 116) = 87, p < .001$, such that attractive couples ($M = 5.73, SD = 1.95$) were perceived to be happier than unattractive couples ($M = 4.81, SD = 1.46$). The interaction between attractiveness and couple type was marginally significant, $F(1, 116) = 3.61, p < .060$ with attractive monoracial couples ($M = 5.85, SD = 1.23$) rated the highest on happiness and unattractive interracial couples ($M = 4.56, SD = 1.50$) rated the lowest. Mean differences in scores are shown in Figure 1. A Tukey post hoc analysis on happiness yielded significant comparisons among couple

types and attractiveness where all comparisons are significantly different, except for that between attractive monoracial and attractive interracial couples.

Commitment Variable

A 2 x 2 within-subjects ANOVA performed on the measure of commitment yielded a significant main effect by couple type, $F(1, 113) = 31.51, p < .001$, such that monoracial couples ($M = 5.71, SD = 1.37$) were rated significantly higher on perceived commitment than interracial couples ($M = 5.33, SD = 1.38$). A significant main effect was also found for attractiveness, $F(1, 113) = 38.27, p < .001$, such that attractive couples ($M = 5.83, SD = 1.31$) were perceived to be more committed than unattractive couples ($M = 5.22, SD = 1.44$). The interaction between attractiveness and couple type was marginally significant, $F(1, 113) = 4.53, p < .0035$ with attractive monoracial couples ($M = 5.93, SD = 1.31$) rated the highest on commitment and unattractive interracial couples ($M = 4.94, SD = 1.45$) rated the lowest. Mean differences in scores are shown in Figure 2. A Tukey post hoc analysis on commitment yielded significant comparisons among couple types and attractiveness where all comparisons are significantly different, except for those between unattractive monoracial and attractive interracial couples, as well as attractive monoracial and attractive interracial couples.

Approval Variable

Finally, a 2 x 2 within-subjects ANOVA was used to analyze the dependent measure of approval, a significant main effect was found for couple type, $F(1, 118) = 76.1, p < .001$, such that monoracial couples ($M = 6.04, SD = 1.46$) received significantly

higher levels of approval than interracial couples ($M = 5.36, SD = 1.40$). A significant main effect was also found for attractiveness, $F(1, 118) = 70.1, p < .001$, such that attractive couples ($M = 6.12, SD = 1.37$) received more approval than unattractive couples ($M = 5.28, SD = 1.48$). The interaction between attractiveness and couple type was significant, $F(1, 118) = 13.4, p < .001$ with attractive monoracial couples ($M = 6.34, SD = 1.39$) rated the highest on approval and unattractive interracial couples ($M = 4.82, SD = 1.44$) rated the lowest. Mean differences in scores are shown in Figure 3. A Tukey post hoc analysis on approval yielded significant comparisons among couple types and attractiveness where all comparisons are significantly different, except for that between unattractive monoracial and attractive interracial couples.

DISCUSSION

Results suggest that attractiveness bias does hold significant influence over people's approval and perception of interracial couple happiness and commitment. Our first hypothesis was supported in that monoracial couples would be more approved overall than interracial couples. The second hypothesis is supported in that attractive couples received higher overall approval than unattractive couples. Findings also support that people perceived the interracial attractive couples to be happier and more committed than interracial unattractive couples. Interestingly, attractive interracial couples were perceived to be as happy as attractive monoracial couples and significantly happier than unattractive couples of all types.

We know from previous research that attractiveness tends to lead to more benefits and favorable circumstances than for unattractive individuals, therefore, the results can be

suggested to confirm that participants rated attractive individuals more favorable, simply because they were attractive. We know there is bias against interracial couples and our data demonstrate the impact of physical attractiveness on many measures. In terms of attractiveness, research (e.g., Wu et al., 2014) suggests that interracial daters perceive their partner as more attractive than monoracial daters which indicates that being with someone who is a different race leads to increase perceptions of attractiveness because of the thrilling notion of the “forbidden fruit”. Despite the trend in increasing interracial relations, the results suggest that there still seems to be a trend that monoracial couples will receive more approval and perceived commitment and happiness than interracial couples overall. This only changes slightly, if the interracial couples were attractive, which seems to have boosted their ratings to be level with monoracial couples in ratings of happiness.

Given that our sample was ethnically diverse with a high percentage of minorities, we see that that does not equate to a more approving view of interracial relationships. Reviewing past literature with majority of studies being on White individuals and couples, it is almost always conclusive that that population continues to have disapproving views on interracial relationships. However, we see that that does not change in an ethnically diverse population, which is also astounding considering the couples shown were of minority races who may resemble the same race of the participants (Latinx and Asian couples). Looking at another statistic, 18% of the participants had been or are currently in an interracial relationship themselves. It is interesting to see that despite those who were part of that population, we still see

significant findings in disapproving, less happy and less committed individuals who were in interracial relationships.

The implications of the results of this study could shed light on the internalized stigma individuals have towards interracial relationships and one of the mediating factors that might affect it. This study contributes to the growing literature of the attractive bias phenomenon and expands our knowledge of interracial relationships beyond Black-White relationships. For future studies there could be finer-grained analysis of the different types of interracial couples on these dependent measures. E.g., minority-minority compared to white-minority couples, control group of average looking couples.

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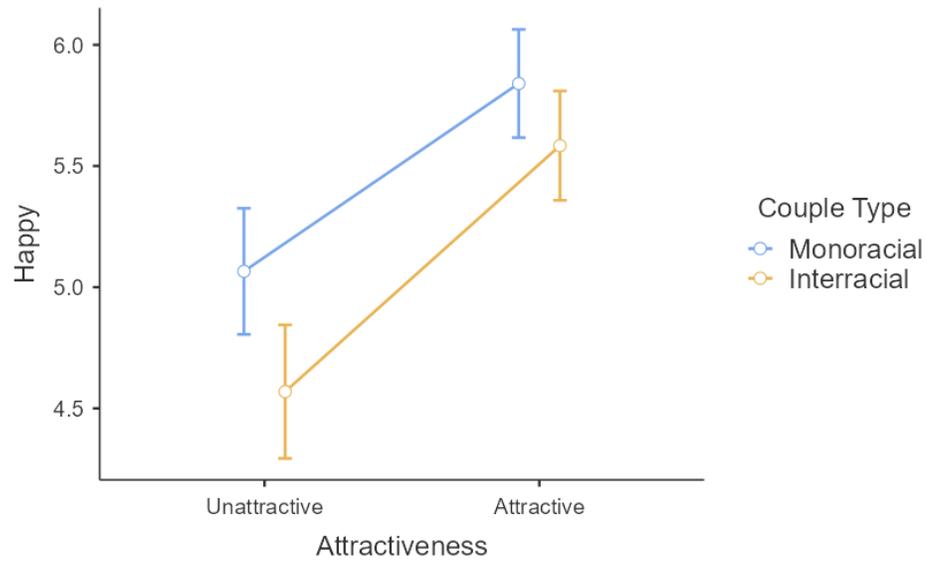
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Figure 1

Interaction of Happiness Scores

Attractiveness * Couple Type



[5]

Figure 2

Interaction of Commitment Scores

Couple Type * Attractiveness

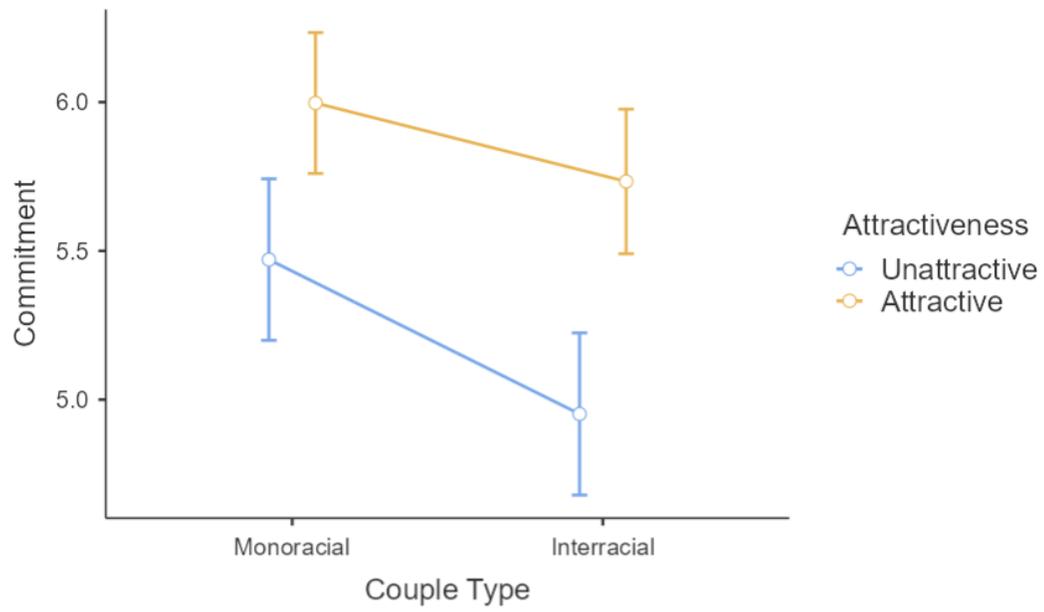


Figure 3

Interaction of Approval Scores

Attractiveness * Couple type

