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# The Attitudes and Stigmas Surrounding Modern Day Interracial Relationships

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The Attitudes and Stigmas Surrounding Modern Day Interracial Relationships

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## INTRODUCTION

Interracial relationships are defined as relationships where each person is of a different race than the other. Historically, we've seen interracial relationships between slave owners and their slaves and in recent years among many different types of people across different races other than the "traditional" black and white. The current study that will be discussed is concerning people's views on interracial relationships amid an election and 49 years after the court case *Loving v. Virginia* which overturned anti-miscegenation laws.

*Previous Studies*

In 2013, the Pew Research Center conducted a study regarding which racial demographic was most likely to marry outside of their own race. In an article written by Wendy Wang in 2015, Wang explains the varying statistics found within the study. One statistic gathered that about 12% of those who considered themselves newlyweds had married someone who was of a different race. In general, it was found that a little over 6% of all married couples married interracially, which was an increase from a previous study conducted in 1970.

Of all the people who were included in the census data accumulated by the Pew Research Center in 2013, Native Americans were more likely to marry outside of their race at a staggering 58% while 28% of Asians were to do the same. Comparatively, 19% of black people married outside of their race while only 7% of white people have a spouse with a different racial background.

Along with examining which race was most likely to marry outside of their own, this study also focused on whether males or females were more apt to marry interracially. It was found that within the black community, men were much more likely to marry someone who wasn't black, having that rate measured at 25%, while only 12% of black women followed that trend. This trend was quite opposite within the Asian community; 37% of Asian women in 2013 married outside of their race while Asian men married interracially at less than half of that at 16%.

The author believes that the increase of interracial marriages has much to do with the shifting of social norms in this country and the idea of interracial relationships

becoming more widely accepted to the general masses. Pew conducted another study later in 2014 and it showed that 37% of Americans felt as if this kind of relationship was beneficial to our society. This statistic was at 24% just four years previously in 2010.

The Pew Research Center conducted another study in 2009 concerning interracial relationships, except this time, the focus was less on which racial demographic was more likely to marry someone outside of their race, but which age group was more likely to do so. The age group that was at the forefront of the study was the Millennial generation. Per the study, Millennials are defined as those being born between the years 1981 and 2000. Later in the study, it was found that the attitudes and perspectives of the aforementioned generation differed strongly from other generations such as the Baby Boomers and Generation X. These changes in attitudes were due to three things- the life-cycle effect, the cohort effect, and the period effect. The life-cycle effect has to do with how the biological process of aging can be extremely impactful with the viewpoints you develop over time, while the cohort and period effects deal with differences in historical circumstances within each generation. As time progresses, the likeliness that a generation approves of interracial dating increases while the disapproval decreases; thus, producing an inverse effect. Taking that into consideration, the Millennial generation approved the most when asked about their personal feelings toward interracial dating. One reason behind that is the fact that the racial diversity of this country has been amplified resulting in the newer generation having the chance to be exposed to more cultures than the preceding generations. Although, when asked in 1987 how they felt about interracial coupling, members of the

silent generation, (those born before the year 1949), had an approval rating of only 36%. This number rose to 67% when members of this generation were asked again in 2009.

In an article written in 2005 by Alison Stein Wellner of the Population Reference Bureau (PRB), she hones in on how many types of media may have shaped the attitudes toward interracial dating and marriage. Another focus of the study included the objections to interracial marriage as compared to interracial dating. Wellner explains how, though the outlook of these types of relationships has evolved throughout the years but still, there are people who believe that dating outside of your race crosses a line that should never be crossed. In a study done in 1986 by Roper Reports, 70% of adults had no problem with interracial dating while that number increased to 83% in 2003.

George Yancey of the University of North Texas spearheaded a study that included over 2,500 adult participants with the goal of determining how many people were involved in an interracial relationship during October of 1999 to April of 2000. Yancey concluded the following: 35.7% of white people in America have previously dated outside of their race. The number of black people that followed suit was at 56.5% followed by 55.4% of the Hispanic community and 57.1% of Asian community.

Yancey also took into consideration how geography could affect his results. For example, one could be a resident of a rural, Midwestern town where there are proportionally more white people. You could be white and be very open to the idea of interracial dating, but there aren't others who are racially different than you within your

own community. Statistically, there are more white people than any other ethnic group in this country and sociologists have found that because of that, white people are just more isolated from other races which describes the term “propinquity” coined by many sociologists.

Nicole Pierce of Illinois Wesleyan University directed a similar study in which she not only wanted to understand the experience of those who were involved in interracial relationships, but how the media affected college students’ perspectives of the matter. According to Pierce, one’s tolerance of an interracial relationship may depend on the portrayal of them in mass media. The more present interracial relationships between black and white individuals were in the media, the more likely it was that you’d be more accepting towards the idea. Conversely, you’d be less accepting of interracial romantic relationships if it wasn’t as prevalent in the media. This study also focused mainly on pre-existing attitudes and views on interracial relationships. For example, if someone had previously approved of interracial relationships, it was likely that they would feel the same towards seeing an interracial relationship within the media.

The researcher used both qualitative and quantitative methods to survey and ended up collecting a sample size of 199 college students in 2014. Most of the participants claimed they had been exposed to seeing interracial couples in the media, but the opinions of whether or not the media depicts interracial relationships differed.

All in all, it was found that the media did not necessarily have a significant impact on interracial relationships, like race and gender might have, but the attitudes someone might have had could have been influenced by the representation of interracial

relationships. She found that out of her 199 participants, only one person held a negative view of how interracial relationships were portrayed.

Michaela Jones and Michael Roberts of Hanover College directed a study in 2007 concerning only interracial relationships between black and white individuals and studied how participants' views correlated to certain types of racism. As other researchers have stated, because there has been an increase of the interracial relationships that we've seen over the years, the assumption can be made that there is a decrease in the racism within this country. However, though people may appear to be overtly supportive of interracial relationships, they may also have their own personal, intimate prejudices and attitudes towards the idea of an interracial relationship, the "type" of person involved in said relationships, or even the behaviors and choices of those in the relationships. This concept of aversive racism, racism that festers personally and individually, is what the focal point was of this duo's research.

Aside from discussing aversive racism, Jones and Roberts also address multiple reasons as to why one may feel negatively towards interracial relationships. One that I found particularly interesting was rooted in what this nation knows to be miscegenation. Miscegenation was an illegal practice for many years. At one point in history, 37 of out of the 50 states prohibited it. Just as many of us were taught, if something is against the law, then it must be "wrong" and not permissible. Because older generations have lived through an era where romantic interracial relationships were forbidden, they also grew up thinking it was unacceptable and immoral. Because there was a law put into place that restricted whom you could participate in a

relationship with was taken very seriously among more than half of the states, it is no wonder that many people within that generation have such harsh feelings towards that type of relationship. Also, it is no wonder that a later generation may also feel negatively towards interracial relationships. For many people, you grow up with the ideals of your parents and those around you. If those people, who hold a great deal of influential power over you, believe that miscegenation is wrong, it would be of no surprise that you adopt those ideals for yourself nor would it be a surprise if you were to pass those ideals along to the subsequent generation.

The results of the study yielded an expected result, thus supporting their hypothesis that whether someone was against or in support of interracial relationships between black and white individuals depended on their overt or subtle attitudes towards black people.

James Brook, a graduate student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, approached his research towards interracial relationships, attempting to get back to the basics of a romantic relationship. He observed what factors potentially go into making someone a suitable partner romantically and the different ideologies that exist within an intergroup such as color blindness. He took those factors and ideologies to examine the level of influence they may have on interracial relationships.

Brooks also points out that when it comes to white men and their decreasing approval status of interracial relationships, the conservatism within their political views has much to do with this. It is said that political conservatism fosters a space for group separation. As previously mentioned, the more separation you have from another

group, the more likely it is that your approval of an interracial relationship would decrease.

One hypothesis that Brooks formed stated that men will find women of their own race more attractive than women of other races. His data suggested that yes, the men he surveyed, aged 18-21, are indeed more attracted to women within their own race than women of others. Another probing hypothesis was whether the same men found there to be similarities between women of their own race or others and again, his data supported the hypothesis.

One fascinating question that Brooks had was concerning the prediction of romantic attraction to members outside of your race. He found that when one had previous experiences with interracial relationships, whether they be personal or not, and had higher levels of agreeance of multiculturalism and its impact on society, the more likely the participant's attraction to another member of another race would be apparent.

### *Current Study*

Though the previous studies have provided me with a strong and solid platform to conduct my study, my research differs slightly. The motivation behind my research was a bit personal, but also of great interest. I not only wanted to figure out the lingering attitudes towards modern day interracial relationships, I also wanted to see how people felt about them during the time of a political election.

Regardless of which candidate you voted for or where you stand in politics, it can be (arguably) said that this election was the most surprising, exhausting, and jarring

election this country has seen to date. Many things were said across party lines over the course of the campaign season and I wanted to see how it would influence, if at all, the attitudes and stigmas surrounding current interracial relationships. I also wanted to decipher if people's tolerance toward interracial relationships had anything to do with their own experiences with one, or the experience of someone close to them.

I wanted to understand where citizens of America are currently and the progression we have made regarding interracial relationships. Past studies have shown that approval and tolerance may come from differences in gender and race. Current studies are being done that target people of a dissimilar generation and area. One can gather that interracial relationships are becoming more widely accepted in this country, in spite of the wounds, many which are still fresh and open, that this country has endured.

### *Findings*

I recruited eighty-one participants through a survey with several identifying demographics, such as age, level of education, and geographic location. Three questions and accompanying results that I found intriguing were the difference in the amount of people who belonged to a religious institution, the geographic location of the participant and if interracial relationships were widely accepted in your community. Almost 63% of all participants currently lived in the Southeast region of the United States, while about 65% of participants had a religious affiliation of some sort. About 65% of participants agreed that the idea of miscegenation was accepted in their present community. These statistics together were very thought provoking to me simply

because of what history portrayed for our country. Historically, the Southeast has been a very conservative region. Along with it being a conservative area, it has also been a fervently religious one, as well. History tells us of the slavery, discrimination, prejudices and the lasting effects that have plagued this region and penetrate our teachings and way of life. It is no secret that a person of African descent could be jailed, beaten, or even suffer fatal consequences for speaking with someone who was white, let alone engaging in an interracial relationship of any kind. With that being said, the assumption can be made that most people within the study currently reside in the Southeast region, have some type of religious affiliation, and are tolerant of interracial relationships, despite what has happened throughout history, what is currently happening in our own backyards and throughout Capitol Hill.

Within my study, there were a few questions that were asked on a Likert-type scale. Interestingly enough, almost 77% of people said they would be extremely comfortable if their child were to date interracially, while almost 73% said they were extremely comfortable with interracial relationships as whole. Still, there were about 2% of people who would definitely not be comfortable with their own child being in an interracial relationship.

Among the written responses from those who had been in an interracial relationship prior to the study, some of the comments included the relationship coming to an end because of language barriers, religious differences, or the viewpoints of their parents or their partner's parents. For one individual, the experiences, either positive or negative, depend on the race of their counterpart. When asked what types of challenges

they have had to face, some participants have pointed out the glares they receive while in public. Others explain they fear being looked down upon by the race of their partner. There is the challenge of also having to explain to your child why you are getting treated the way you are and why they may not be able to find their niche within their communities.

#### *Gaps in Available Research and Recommendations*

In the future, I would like to see research conducted since the very divisive election has come to an end. Currently, America has a President who has made stark remarks regarding people of other races besides his own and I would be interested in seeing how opinions differ of interracial relationships, if at all. I also found there to be a slight gap in research being done on the children who are the product of mixed race relationships and their personal attitudes towards interracial relationships. If children feel appreciative of their experiences being a product of such relationship or if they feel resentful would be an extremely intriguing hypothesis to test. One aspect that I would explore even further is the dynamic of interracial relationships outside of heterosexual couples.

#### *Conclusion*

My intention was to shed further light on the progress of this topic and further the conversation that seems to make so many Americans uncomfortable. At a time where this country is as divisive as it has been in quite some time, we need to create a space to talk about things that might be issues for some, but not for others. We also need to deter from shying away from issues that may not affect the majority, simply

because it is something the majority has not experienced or can relate to. From the data, we have indeed found that generally, people are more accepting of interracial relationships across certain demographics such as age, religious preference and geographic region. Someone who may not approve of interracial relationships should be able to freely engage in conversation without fear, but we also need to address racism for what it is and discuss how it may influence our attitudes towards certain behaviors, groups of people, and our way of life. America is a melting pot of cultures, religions, colors, and creeds. Instead of politely tiptoeing away from this topic, we need the conversation to continue even if it is uncomfortable.

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