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Understanding Attitudes towards Interracial Relationships among College Students

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Abstract

The number of interracial couples in the United States remains low in today's society. This study uses qualitative and quantitative survey data from Illinois Wesleyan students to investigate the motivations, perceptions, and experiences of those who are currently, or were previously, in an interracial relationship. I also explore the attitudes of those who have not dated interracial, and the media's impact on perceptions of interracial couples. I find that those who dated interracial did not see race as a deciding factor, but instead focused on personality, cultural similarities and differences, and appearances. Many students saw religion, peer and family support, and socioeconomic status as factors that influence the likelihood of dating interracial. Contradictory statements were made on the portrayal of interracial couples in the media; however, most concluded that the media images are generally positive. Better understanding these perceptions among current college students may have implications for future trends.

Interracial relationship rates have been growing over. Still, from the 2007 U.S. Bureau of the Census, Black-White marriages count for only .5% of all marriages in the United States (Field, Kimuna, Straus 2013). In 2008, 14.6% of all marriages in the United States were interracial (Garcia, Riggio, Palavinelu, and Culpepper 2012). Even though interracial dating and marriage rates are growing, this type of relationship is still stigmatized. Marriages between Whites and non-Whites was concerned a crime until the mid-1960s. It has been suggested that interracial relationships show the assimilation of races within the United States. Lower ratings of interracial relationships for a specific race demonstrate that the boundaries the race has are strong, while higher rates demonstrate the social distance slowly decreasing (Hohmann-Marriott and Amato 2008). However, these ratings do not necessarily apply to all interracial relationships, as there is a difference between how romantic and platonic interracial relationships have been accepted in the United States.

Interracial romantic relationships are significantly different from platonic relationships. There is a higher rate of platonic friendships between people of different races, but the rate of romantic relationships is low. Romantic relationships still produce the prejudices and stereotypes from previous decades that bring up the social barriers that keep different racial groups from being in more interracial relationships. A hypothetical example is this: Black men have the stereotype of being violent, and there is a belief that interracial relationships tend to be more violent. The connection between race and violence is there in many people's minds. Because these romantic relationships are still perceived with racial stereotypes, races tend to keep barriers between each other in order to avoid the assumed negatives of interracial dating.

For these reasons, I wanted to research the attitudes, motivations, and behaviors toward interracial relationships. Many studies have investigated the reasons why individuals in the

United States are more or less accepting of interracial dating and relationships. This study uses qualitative and quantitative methods to better understand college students' perceptions and experiences in interracial relationships. By conducting this survey, I hope to aid in the research and discussion of race, and whether interracial dating is still taboo in our more liberal society.

Previous Studies: Their Conclusions, Impact, and Limitations

While research on interracial dating and relationships has been a growing area of sociological research, it is still rather limited. Much of interracial relationship research has been done on Black-White couples and from the perspectives of Black or White individuals (Garcia et al. 2012; Golebiowska 2007). Many of the previous studies focused on interracial marriages rather than cohabitating and dating couples, as marriages are seen as a more permanent and intimate step in a relationship (Gullickson 2006). By limiting the studies to marriages, many relationships are being overlooked. Many individuals go through a number of relationships that do not go past dating or living together, but these relationships could provide vital information in understanding the impact of race in people's romantic lives. My study focuses on the stage that previous studies have left out, the dating stage. I also did not exclude specific races in my study, like many researchers who have only focused on Black-White unions. This allowed the participants to express themselves about any type of interracial relationship that they chose. Factors including race, religion, gender, and influences of media on one's tendency to enter an interracial relationship have been explored in previous studies, and I focused on these factors as well. By doing this, we will be able understand what is causing interracial relationships to still be off-limits in the United States.

Factors and Motivations that Affect Interracial Dating

To understand why interracial dating is still a unique subject in the United States, researchers have studied a number of different factors. While age is not one of the factors that will be addressed in this study, researchers have studied age as a factor toward the likelihood of entering an interracial relationship. From previous studies, there appears to be a generational gap in the acceptance of interracial coupling. Younger people have shown a higher tendency to accept interracial couples than older people (Golebiowska 2007; Joyner and Kao 2005). In the Joyner and Kao (2005) study, data analysis showed that tendency to be in an interracial relationship decreased with age among Blacks, Whites, and Hispanics. The study also demonstrated that there was a difference between the types of relationship: interracial dating and cohabitating coupling increased with age while marriages decreased with age. The age decline may be due to when the relationship began, as relationships started at an early age are more likely to be interracial than in the later years (Joyner and Kao 2005). This finding reflects the transition between dating and marriage, in that during our later years we become more focused on marriage and entering relationships that we hope will end in marriage. When we are older, we look at the relationship we are in to see if it is marriage material; statistically, interracial relationships are less likely to end in marriage (Joyner and Kao 2005). Vaquera and Kao (2005) suggest that younger people tend to be more accepting of interracial relationships because they have more opportunities to meet people of other races. Because research has shown that interracial dating is more common during our younger years, my focus on college students is important because it is the time when dating is beginning to focus more on marriage possibilities.

There is a common belief that interracial relationships are more problematic than intraracial relationships. Interracial dating and relationships have been stigmatized for decades

and are believed to have many difficulties because of cultural differences (Troy, Lewis-Smith, and Laurenceau 2006). The divorce rate is higher for interracial marriages than same-race marriages, which fuels the belief that interracial relationships are certain to fail (Hohmann-Marriot and Amato 2008; Lienemann and Stopp 2013). Those who are against interracial dating are more likely to endorse negative racial stereotypes toward a certain race, as seen with Whites against White-Black unions (Golebiowska 2007). People tend to believe that interracial relationships are less stable and would cause trouble for the children born in these relationships (Miller et al. 2004). When asked why they avoided interracial relationships, Harris and Kalbfleisch (2000) found that people expressed fear of losing one's job or limiting their career path, negative reactions from the public, and being disowned by friends and family.

Having little to no support from family and friends has shown to impact relationships, but especially interracial relationships. Lacking support from family and peers could negatively affect the satisfaction of being in the relationship and the couple's commitment (Hohmann-Marriot and Amato 2008). The Hohmann-Marriot and Amato (2008) study showed that interracial couples had fewer support groups and especially had a tendency to have little support from their parents. This factor along with others studied in their research did negatively impact the relationships, causing interracial couples to be less satisfied in their relationships than intraracial couples. Criticism from peers is especially harmful to people in their teenage years. Teens that were in an interracial relationship were more likely have trouble with friends in school (Kreager 2008). Findings reveal differences among racial groups as Blacks in interracial relationships had more peer troubles than Hispanics and Asians (Kreager 2008). Within the Latino community, researchers found that more support was given for intraracial couples or Latino-White couples than Latino-Black couples (Garcia et al. 2012). The researchers believed

that the reason Latino-Black relationships are supported less is due to racial stereotypes against Blacks.

Race is also used as a status symbol in some cases. Miller et al. (2004) discovered that more White females feared being given criticism if they dated non-Whites. The White female's family would want her to date someone who had high status and financial stability. Non-Whites with low economic status were seen as unfit. This was true for non-White females dating White males of lower status or White males dating non-White females of low status. These findings were true only for those who said they experienced prejudice from their parents as they grew older. The Miller et al. (2004) study suggests that racial stereotypes and a lack of support are factors in the tendency to date interracially.

Racial stereotypes and a lack of support from one's social groups are not the only factors, as religion and its impact on dating interracially have been studied. Conservative religious individuals are significantly more against interracial dating compared to non-religious individuals (Perry 2013). Public practice such as attending church, however, do not show a significant effect on interracial dating compared to practicing religion in private. Those who read their sacred texts more are more tolerant to interracial dating, which may be due to "more effectively [internalizing] the teachings of their faith about love and acceptance toward others (Ellison 1993; Lenski 1961), thereby influencing them to support interracial unions..." (Perry 2013). In my study, I will focus on whether or not religion has an effect on college students' willingness to date interracially.

Media portrayal impacts the likelihood of a person tolerating interracial relationships. The presence of seeing Black-White couples in the media correlated with individuals being more accepting of interracial couples (Lienemann and Stopp 2013). The study focused on how Whites

perceived interracial couples, specifically Black-White couples. However, this study only looked at correlations, and some pre-existing attitudes may have had an effect on the way the individuals interpreted the portrayals of interracial couples in the media. For example, if someone had positive attitudes about interracial relationships already, they would view the portrayals in a positive light. On the other hand, someone with bad experiences or a negative outlook on the relationships could view the same portrayals in a negative way.

A number of researchers also study interracial relationships according to gender and race. In many cases, men in certain racial groups tend to enter more interracial relationships than women. For example, Garcia et al. (2012) discovered that Latino men have a tendency to react negatively toward Latina women being with a Black man. Black women and White men are more against interracial dating than black men and white women (Schoepflin 2009; Field et al. 2013). Asian women and Black men tend to hook up more interracially than other combinations of gender and race, and Asian women date more interracially as well (McClintock and Murry 2010). Still, gender has also been shown to have no significant impact on attitudes toward interracial dating, as seen in the Field et al. (2013) research. When focusing on relationships between Black men and Black women, there was no significant difference. While the results showed Black men having a higher percentage of agreement to the statements given, the difference compared to Black women was minor (Field et al. 2013).

Besides factors such as gender, social support, and the media, many studies focus on how stereotypes negatively impact the likelihood of entering an interracial relationship. There have been a few studies that have explored factors that positively impact entering these relationships. Yodanis (2012) noticed that one of the reasons people entered interracial relationships was because the different culture of their partner fascinated them. These cultural differences

remained throughout the relationship and are enjoyed by the couple regardless of frustrations they may have caused.

Most and Least Accepted Couples

Even though the interracial relationship rate is growing in the United States, studies demonstrate how many are still against or uncomfortable with this type of relationship. Numerous individuals believe the 21st century has shown a great amount of progress, which it has. In the 19th and 20th century, 38 states banned non-Whites from marrying Whites, and in some states it was given a punishment of 10 years in prison (Miller, Olson, and Fazio 2004). In 1967, the antimiscegenation laws were ruled unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court, which ended the ban on interracial marriages. One of these progressive aspects of the 21st century is the tearing down racism and the boundaries races create to exclude one another. However, even though change has been made since the middle of the last century, differences among races are still prevalent.

Within interracial dating, past studies have shown that the least accepted interracial relationship is one that includes a Black individual (Garcia et al. 2012; Field et al. 2013). With Black-White couples, Black men are seen as a threat to white purity and supremacy (Dalmage 376). White women who date Black men are considered tainted and only wanting to be in the relationship for the sex, to hurt someone, or for economic reasons (376). Both Black men and women face scrutiny from other Blacks when they date interracially, and are “accused of having lost connectedness to African Americans, being weak, and marrying...to escape [their] blackness” (379). Latinos viewed Latina-Black couples in the least positive manner within interracial couples, although there was no statistical difference compared to Latino-Latina

couples (Garcia et al. 2012). Latina-Black couples also had the least amount of social support, compared to Latina-White and Latino-Latina couples.

Not only do Whites tend to date other races and approve of dating other races instead of Blacks, Asians and to a lesser extent, Hispanics, have a similar dating style to Whites in that they are more likely to date any other race before Blacks (Robnett and Feliciano 2011). Robnett and Feliciano (2011) found that Asians are more exclusive toward Hispanics than Whites, and Blacks are more likely not to date Whites more than Asians and Hispanics. This may be due to Blacks having more negative perceptions of Whites than other races. Field et al (2013) found that Black-White unions were less acceptable than Asian-White unions. The Black students in the study also expected disapproval from parents more than parents of other races who were in interracial relationships.

Looking at how gender and race related to each other is important in studying interracial relationships. Black women, Asian men, and sometimes Latino men are the most excluded from interracial dating (Robnett and Feliciano 2011). All men, except Black men, exclude Black women but Asian and Latina women are far more accepted. Women of all races tend to want to date Black men more than Asian men. The reason Asian men and Black women have the lower rates of interracial dating was because they were less open to it. It is still unclear why this gendered racism occurs but “previous scholarship suggest that negative portrayals of Asian men’s masculinity (Espiritu 1997) and black women’s femininity (Collins 2004) may shape the exclusion of these groups” (Robnett and Feliciano 2011). Still, Asian men and Black women are more open to dating other races than those races are of dating them. White and Latina women are less likely to date Asian, Middle Eastern, and East Indian men than Black men.

Past Studies with Colleges

Within the past five years, there have been researchers who have focused their interracial relationship studies on students from junior high through college. A number of studies have used interviews, questionnaires, or a combination of the two in order to collect data from their sample. The samples have ranged from comparing middle school students with high school students, and comparing the younger generation with the older. McClintock and Murry (2010) studied how race mattered in romantic interracial relationships in an elite university. Field et al. (2013) used college students from four universities in the United States and one in Canada in order to explore attitudes toward interracial relationships. Compared to a predominately white college, students from a historically Black college viewed Black-White couples more negatively. A possible explanation for this finding is that Blacks may want to preserve their history, culture, and relationships by not assimilating into society (Field et al. 2013). This refusal to assimilate is a way to have social unity among Blacks. Similar to previous studies, it was discovered that black students showed more disapproval toward interracial relationships (Field et al. 2013). However, the results may have been skewed due to the fact that the black students came from the historically Black college, so the results may only apply to them and not Black students as a whole. Schoepflin (2009) studied an equal number of Black and Whites students at a university to learn about their experiences and attitudes toward the relationships through interviews. Gender differences were found as Black men and White women were more favorable toward interracial relationships than their counterparts (Schoepflin 2009). Students also expressed negative responses to their interracial relationships. A study was done on the Latino perspective on interracial relationships with one individual in the couple being Latino compared to Latino-Latina couples (Garcia et al. 2012). Latina-Black couples were found to be the least acceptable

interracial relationship and received the least amount of support compared to Latino-Latina couples and Latina-White couples (Garcia et al. 2012).

For the Garcia et al (2012) research, the study was limited through scenario-based questions which did not allow students to give in-depth answers. The researchers also provided little information on the scenario couples. Schoepflin (2009), while studying an equal number of Black and White students, was limited to only these two races as they were the largest racial groups at the university. Still, the numbers were vastly different as there were 120 Black students and over 2,000 White students. Field et al. (2013), while having a number of important hypotheses, tested age while using a sample that only included college students between the ages of 18 and 21 years old. Having this narrow sample lead to the data collected through the study to not support their hypothesis of younger people being more accepting. The interpretations made by Field et al. were impacted by the fact that the students came from either predominately White universities or historically Black colleges, suggesting there was a lack in diversity for both races. McClintock and Murry (2010) sample focused on Stanford students only, which may suggest the analysis and conclusions made could only apply to the one university.

My study had similar limitations to the previous works on universities. A majority of my sample focused on Illinois Wesleyan Students, although I was able to gather some data from non-Wesleyan students. However, because the data from non-Wesleyan students was small, they were excluded in this analysis. By being limited to primarily one university, there is the risk that my conclusions only apply to the Illinois Wesleyan campus. However, I did address some of the issues and limitations from past studies. My study does not focus primarily on Black-White unions or on the attitudes of Blacks and Whites. Even though Illinois Wesleyan has a large percentage of White students, Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans were included.

My use of a quantitative and qualitative questionnaire allowed me to gather more in-depth information on attitudes and behaviors with interracial relationships that previous studies were lacking because they only chose one of the methods.

Specifically, this research will also test the following hypotheses:

1. Non-Whites are more likely to have been a part of or are currently in an interracial relationship than Whites.
2. More men will have been in or are currently in an interracial relationship than women.
3. Those who are not religious are more likely to have been in, or are currently in, an interracial relationship than those who are religious.
4. Those who have seen positive images of interracial couples in the media are more likely to have been or are currently in an interracial relationship than those who have not seen positive images.

METHODS

In order to study the behaviors, motivations, and perceptions of individuals toward interracial relationships, I chose to use a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. My qualitative and quantitative methods arrived through providing college students a 15 minute survey on their perceptions and attitudes toward interracial dating and relationships. Some of the questions were multiple choice, while others allowed the students to type a detailed answer. By having this combination of methods, I gained a large amount of data through the survey while also gaining deeper insight.

Sample Description

The sample for this research project was restricted to college students, a majority from Illinois Wesleyan University, a small liberal arts college in the Midwest. Because this is an

undergraduate project, there were limitations on time and how I could acquire participants. Illinois Wesleyan students were emailed the link to the survey along with general information on the study and their participation. However, I also distributed the survey through Facebook, allowing college students who I knew that were not randomly selected to participate if they liked. Those who were contacted through Facebook were also given the information stated above. The Illinois Wesleyan students were chosen through systematic sampling of a list of current students at the university. Students ranged from 18 to 24 years old. This study did not include minors. I did not choose who would complete the survey from the non-Wesleyan students, as the Facebook message was uploaded for all of my friends to see, allowing any college students I know to participate.

Out of the 1,250 students contacted through email, 199 completed the survey. As shown in the table, out of the students who participated in the study, 69.5% identified as White, 11.7% identified as Black, 9.6% identified as Asian, and 5.6% identified as Hispanic. The remaining 3% all identified as being biracial. Looking at the racial demographics provided by Illinois Wesleyan on their website, 74% of the freshman class was White. The racial demographics for the upperclassmen also demonstrated a large percentage of the students being White. Because of this, the sample for my study is predominately White, however I still focus a part of my findings on race.

Survey

I created the survey using Qualtrics and distributed it between the middle of February and early April 2014. Qualtrics is an online system that provides an easy to create and use survey platform. The survey was designed to take approximately 15 minutes or less. The initial questions were developed to gather the demographics of the participant, which included age,

whether they were a student at Illinois Wesleyan University, race, gender, and religion. Following these questions, I asked a number of questions about whether they were in an interracial relationship at the time, if they would date someone of a different race, how their family and peers would react to them being in an interracial relationship, and how the media portrays interracial relationships. Follow-up questions were asked for some responses, and in some cases participants were given a chance to provide a more detailed answer through a textbox.

I coded the qualitative data myself, looking for common phrases and topics that the students talked about in their answers and combining them together. I used SPSS in order to analyze the quantitative data.

FINDINGS

Analysis from the survey data revealed that a majority (61.4%) of Illinois Wesleyan students have never been in an interracial relationship. Motivations toward entering this type of relationship were mostly impacted by appearance, personality, and cultural differences and similarities. Students did not see race as a factor impacting their choice in romantic partner. The race of the respondents appeared to relate to their willingness to date interracially, but there was no significance by gender. Comparing those who are religious and those who are not, both groups had more individuals who had never been in an interracial relationship. Still, religion did not have a significant impact on the students dating interracially. However, there was a significant finding of a correlation between race and family support. A majority of students have seen interracial couples in the media, and all but one had a positive experience seeing them. There were no significant findings on the media's impact on interracial dating. However, there were contradictory beliefs on whether or not the media portrays interracial relationships in a

positive light. Race and religion had significant effect on interracial dating while gender and the media did not.

Motivations:

The first section of my analysis focused on the students' motivations for entering interracial relationships. 61.4% (121) of the students said they had never been in an interracial relationship. The respondents were given the following statement and were asked about their level of agreement: "I would date someone of a different race." All of those who responded to this statement, whether it was agreement or disagreement, were asked to explain their answers. 110 of the students gave an explanation to their decision. Out of these students, a majority spoke about how race was not a factor in who they choose to date. Students instead spoke most often of how personality is the main reason they choose to date someone.

If I met someone of a different race that I wanted to start some sort of relationship with, I [wouldn't] have a problem with it. It all depends on who they are, not what they look like. (Male, White)

I would date most races outside my own because I would more so be looking at their personality and lifestyle. (Female, African-American)

Students said they looked more for compatibility between themselves and their partners, specifically in their personalities. Many did not care about the color of their skin because as long as they liked the person, they would date them. Along with personality, students commented on having similar values and interests with their partner. Some students mentioned how values are part of one's culture, and that cultural similarities and differences are taken into account. One such student said:

In terms of relationships, I don't think dating someone of another race would matter to me.

However, I do acknowledge that people [that are of different] races may come from a different

culture than I do, including customs, religions, and/or beliefs. When I date, I think in the “long term” so I would not want to date someone of a different race if their desires for their future differed from mine based on possible customs/religion/beliefs due to their race. (Female, White)

This perception is echoed in previous studies which find that interracial relationships are sometimes regarded with disapproval due to the misinformed belief that they are always difficult because of cultural differences (Troy et al. 2006).

Even though the students spoke of not seeing race as a part of their decision-making when choosing their dating partners, some of them did write about physical attraction being a factor. This begs the question of how physical attraction factors in without race being an issue.

One student wrote:

if i found that person physically and emotionally attractive i would want to date them, race does not matter to me (Female, White)

Out of the 110 responses, 20% (22) of the students spoke directly about physical appearance.

When coding the responses, I made the distinction between physical attraction and being attracted to someone. Physical attraction is based solely on the person’s body and appearance.

When an individual says they are attracted to someone, physical appearance is still a factor, however, they are looking beyond the appearance of the person and including their personality, behavior, and possible other factors. In a number of responses, it was unclear when a student said they had to be attracted to the individual, whether they meant physical, emotional, or both types of attraction. Those that were unclear were not included in the 22 discussed above.

Taking the above mentioned explanation, the student says that race does not matter, but physical attraction does. It has been shown that race, along with gender, are perceived very early when an individual looks at another (Apfelbaum, Norton, and Sommers 2012; Ito and Urland 2003). Humans regularly categorize anything they see, including people. As Ito and Urland

(2003) found, some categories are encoded in the brain rather automatically, and two of those categories happen to be race and gender. Still, race and gender are both socially constructed concepts. They are constructed by our social practices. The students saying that physical appearance and race are not connected may be a result of what is called color blindness. Recent work has shown that people tend to avoid recognizing that they see race (Apfelbaum et al. 2012). While this may come from a well-intentioned desire to avoid racism and bias, Apfelbaum et al. (2012) found that White individuals who avoided race held more bias toward Blacks compared to Whites who talked about race. The case of good-intentions may have occurred during the survey provided in this study, as many of the students clearly stated that race was not a factor when deciding on a romantic partner. Whites tend to take racial aspects of life, in this case interracial dating, and attempt to “explain the product of racialized life...as nonracial outcomes...” (Bonilla-Silvia 2006). When someone says “It’s not about race, but” or “Race is not a factor, but” and give other examples of why interracial relationships can be problematic, it gives the person the chance to come up with other reasons that appear nonracial (Bonilla-Silvia 2006). One student provides a possible example of this concept:

I was raised in a family where interracial relationships were not disapproved of but were also not recommended. I personally do not see anything wrong with interracial relationships but I do recognize that there are possible issues that can come from these relationships...such as cultural beliefs/customs that can cause misunderstandings and also the problem of how their children would identify themselves and/or be accepted by both their parents cultures... (Female, White)

This student began to focus on the possible children of an interracial relationship and explains that it would be difficult for them. As Bonilla-Silva (2006) found, respondents will say they see nothing wrong with interracial relationships but will point out concerns or reasons why the

relationship would be difficult. In many cases, children and how their lives will be are used as reasons.

There were significantly fewer students who expressed negativity toward interracial dating, but these responses were not expressed harshly. Those who said they disagreed with the statement “I would date someone of a different race,” gave explanations of not being attracted to those of other racial groups. Again, some of the responses were not clear on their definition of attraction, whether emotional or physical, so analysis on their statements was limited.

I have grown up in a completely Caucasian family. I have found that I am not attracted to people of different races. It isn't that I would be ashamed of it or anything, I am just not attracted. / In addition, I want my kids to look like me ☺ (Female, White)

From the female in the above quotation, lack of physical attraction can be implied. She mentioned her family being White, and comparing this to other responses, it shows that family background is another influence on interracial dating. Another student had mentioned how there were interracial couples within their family, and that they did not have any issues with that type of relationship. However, another student who also had interracial couples within their family expressed how that negatively impacted their feelings toward interracial dating:

I have seen too many of my relatives hurt by their significant others of different races. I certainly don't believe it's not possible or that there is anything wrong with it, but I personally have not grown up around other races, and those that I have grown up around have hurt the ones I love.
(Female, White)

These responses show how previous experiences, even the experiences of others, can impact one's willingness to enter an interracial relationship. One student had observed positive interracial relationships and was not against dating someone of another race, while another student had observed negative experiences and was against dating interracially.

Although there were questions that dealt specifically with friend and family support, some of the students mentioned these in their responses to the “I would date someone of a different race,” statement. Although a more thorough analysis will be done on the subject under the section *Family and Friend Support*, 9 of the students brought up family or friends in their motivation explanation.

Race

To continue my analysis, I focused on my quantitative data on race. Table 1 demonstrates the distribution of the respondents according to how they racially identify. Out of 199 students who gave their racial identity, 69.5% (137) identified as White. From the remaining 30.5%, 23 identified as Black, 19 identified as Asian, 11 identified as Hispanic, and 6 identified as biracial. Table 5 demonstrates the effect of race on if the person has been or is currently in an interracial relationship. By looking at the Chi-Square value of .000, the relationship between race and being in an interracial relationship is greatly significant at the 1% level. Focusing on the respondents who have been in an interracial relationship, more respondents who identified as Black have been or are currently in this type of relationship. 56.6% of Blacks have been or are in an interracial relationship compared to 52.6% of Asians, 36.4% of Hispanics, and 32.8% of Whites. Focusing on the respondents who have not been in this type of relationship, more Whites have not been part of an interracial couple compared to the remaining races. 66.4% of Whites have not been in this relationship compared to 63.6% of Hispanics, 47.4% of Asians, and 43.5% of Blacks. Looking at the data as a whole, more Black students on the Illinois Wesleyan campus have been a part of an interracial couple. The smallest percentage of students who have not been in this relationship was also Blacks. The percentages of non-whites being in interracial relationships are higher than those who identified as White.

The data collected does confirm the hypothesis that more non-White students have been or are currently in an interracial relationship than White students. The data could also give support to the idea of opportunity. Lack of opportunity is a possible reason why White women date Black men when they are more willing to date Asian men (Herman and Campbell 2011). There is also the point that Blacks are “geographically distributed more widely than Asians” (Herman and Campbell 2011), so White woman have a higher chance of being in contact with a Black man compared to an Asian man. In this case, because there are more White students on the Wesleyan campus, there is a higher chance of being in contact with a White student than a non-White student. Similar to the study done by Field et al (2013), this study was done at a predominately White university. While there is a growing amount of non-White students, there is still a lack in diversity at Illinois Wesleyan University. Because there are more White students than non-White students, dating intracially for non-Whites becomes difficult. As one student commented:

There usually are not enough attractive Asian guys. (Female, Asian)

Another student had a different viewpoint on how opportunity for interracial relationships affected her:

I was raised in a traditionally African home, went to a predominately white school and lived in a neighborhood that was mostly occupied by minorities (like other African immigrants, African Americans, etc.). So I basically grew up around a wide range of people and that definitely made me very open to dating people of different races and cultures... (Female, Black)

Comparing these two students out of the numerous responses that mentioned opportunity, opportunity with diversity in one’s life does affect whether an individual takes part in interracial dating. For some, interracial dating may be considered an only option, while for others it is a way to gain new experiences and learn about other races and cultures.

Race has a significant effect at the 5% level on whether a student at Illinois Wesleyan will date interracial. Those who said they had never dated interracial were given the statement “I would date someone of a different race” and asked to mark their level of agreement. Table 6 demonstrates the results of this statement. While a large majority of all the students, regardless of race, answered with levels of agreement to the statement, the distribution between Strongly Agree and Agree are significantly different. Again, a higher percentage of those who marked Strongly Agree were Black, with 66.7%. Hispanics and Asians had the next highest percentage, 57.1% and 33.3% respectively, while White students were 23.3%. For those who marked Agree, more White students marked this option as 57.8% of them compared to 55.6% of Asians, 42.9% of Hispanics, and 11.1% of Blacks. This data does not confirm nor disconfirm the hypothesis that non-White students are more likely to enter an interracial relationship. Out of 120 responses, only 9 students responded with either Disagree or Strongly Disagree. From those 9, 7 of the students were White. The data does show that non-Whites have a higher level of agreement to the statement.

Religion

Religious beliefs showed significance in only one part of the questionnaire. There is a significance at the 1% level between religion and the statement “If I dated someone of a different race, my family would be okay with it.” From the 178 responses, a majority of the students were religious. In the questionnaire, the students were asked to mark their religion out of the list or to mark Other if it was not an option. When I first did the bivariate analysis on the effects of religion on the statement, the different religions were used and there appeared to be a significant effect. However, because there were a small number of individuals who marked certain religions, I decided to combine all of them into one category and do the bivariate analysis again. This

analysis is shown in Table 7 and the significance was the same. While a majority of religious and non-religious Illinois Wesleyan students believed their family would be okay with them dating interracially, there were more religious students who said they would not. For the religious students, 19.5% said they disagreed with the statement and 1.7% said they strongly disagreed. For the non-religious students, 10% said they disagreed and 8.3% said strongly disagree. In total, 21.2% of religious students did not think their family would approve of them dating interracially compared to 18.3% of non-religious students.

Having support from one's social group is a major factor to interracial dating. When asked for additional factors or information that they would like me to know, many of the Wesleyan students mentioned support from friends and family as a factor. Having a diverse social network has been shown to influence the likelihood of a person dating interracially (Clark-Ibáñez and Felmlee 2004). For friends, having a diverse group of friends is significantly connected to dating interracially at least once or twice. Familial support has a strong influence on the interracial relationship too, as a lack of support from the family could make it difficult to continue the relationship (Hohmann-Marriott and Amato 2008). External disapproval, whether through friends or family, has proven to have a negative effect on interracial dating.

Even though religion proved to have statistical significance when viewing its effect on family support, this was not the case for support from friends. Religion also did not have a significant effect on entering an interracial relationship. While 18.5% of religious students showed some level of disagreement on dating someone of a different race compared to 6.1% of non-religious students, my bivariate analysis showed the relationship was trivial at best. Because of these findings, my hypothesis of non-religious students are more likely to interracially date is disconfirmed.

Family and Friend Support

Support from friends and family was a common theme among all of the students. Friends and family's perceptions on the relationship were talked about in a number of questions. When students were asked if they thought interracial couples were more likely to be incompatible, a large number of them replied that it was not race that caused the problems but pressures from friends and family, as seen in this example:

In some cases, this can be true, but only because of ideals passed down by families and the sort of stigmas that an interracial relationship might have, causing someone to not pursue such a relationship. The sort of societal and familial pressure felt by those involved, might scare someone from having a relationship with someone of a different ethnicity. (Male, Asian)

There is the fear of rejection from friends and family by crossing the color line and dating interracially (Dalmage 382). Because of "border patrollers", or those who think they are obligated to discourage people from interracial relationships, and the fear of losing their connection to their friends and community, some individuals end their relationships (374). One student wrote about how a friend's relationship ended because of family pressure:

Possibly. I think that it is very likely that the people may be compatible but because of societal or family pressures, this may become more difficult. I have a friend who is Caucasian and she started [dating] a man whose family was from India. Although the two got along well, ultimately his family pressured him to break up with my friend because she was not Indian. (Female, White)

This student mentions the family pressures that a friend and her partner had to face, and in this case it led to the relationship ending. Other students showed the same thinking on family and friends being large influencers on people's relationships. Another Wesleyan student wrote of a similar story of how family pressure caused problems for the people involved in the relationship:

No [I don't think interracial couples are incompatible], but I do think it can cause issues with families (just out of personal experience). My family is ultra conservative and my extended family

is pretty racist, so that caused a lot of issues when I dated someone of a different race. I've had friends' who have been in interracial relationships, and ran into issues because their boyfriend's parents didn't like them since they weren't of their race/religion. (Female, White)

As seen in previous studies, a lack of support has a negative impact on interracial dating (Hohmann-Marriott and Amato 2008; Clark-Ibáñez and Felmlee 2004).

Nonsignificant Findings

Statistically, gender did not have a significant effect on entering interracial relationships among the Wesleyan students. 38% (54) of the female students and 35.2% (19) of the male students have been or are currently in an interracial relationship. When given the statement “I would date someone of a different race”, only 8.8% of the male students and 7.1% of the female students marked a level of disagreement. The data collected disconfirms my hypothesis that men are more likely to enter an interracial relationship than women.

Statistically, seeing positive images of interracial couples in the media did not have an effect on students interracial dating. 94.7% of the students had seen an interracial couple in the media and 90.3% of those students reacted positively to the portrayals. However, when given the statement “The media gives a positive image of interracial couples”, 23.1% of the students marked a level of disagreement. This data, nevertheless, does not confirm my hypothesis that students who have seen interracial relationships portrayed positively in the media are more likely to interracially date than those who have not.

Discussion

In this article, the four hypotheses in my quantitative analysis regarding attitudes and perceptions toward interracial dating, along with comments on each are outlined below:

Hypothesis One: Non-Whites are more likely to interracially date than Whites. Some support was found for this hypothesis; however the sample was primarily of White students. Non-White students showed higher agreement with dating interracially than Whites; however a majority of the students regardless of race were okay with interracial dating.

Hypothesis Two: Men are more likely to date interracially than women. There is no support for this hypothesis in this study. Again, the sample was skewed as a majority of the respondents were female.

Hypothesis Three: Non-Religious students are more likely to date interracially than religious students. There is no support for this hypothesis. There were significant findings that religious belief had an effect on family support of interracial dating.

Hypothesis Four: Students who have seen positive images of interracial couples in the media are more likely to date interracially. There is no support for this hypothesis in this research. The sample had a large majority of students who have seen positive portrayals which may have negatively impacted the results.

With my qualitative analysis, I find that students at Illinois Wesleyan University do not see race as a factor in who they choose to date. It is not only that they do not see race as a factor, but they do not see race at all. These findings may be a result of color blindness, and people's tendency to talk about a racial issue with nonracial themes. Although a majority of students at Illinois Wesleyan have not dated interracially, most of those who have not are willing to try.

Conclusion

My conclusions are limited due to the amount of students I was able to gain responses from, the diversity of the responses and the university, and that this particular study was done at

only Illinois Wesleyan. Because of this, future research needs to be done that compares the results between schools, especially between more than two and in different regions of the United States. Still, the conclusions found in this study are significant. It is important to know how college students feel about interracial relationships, especially college students at this time in the 21st century. With the rise of equality in different aspects of society including gay marriage and all types of sexual orientation, it is important to see if equality in interracial dating is present. While the number of interracial couples and marriages in the United States is growing, the number is still lower than 20%. Focusing on college students is beneficial, as their age group appears to be a majority of the people bringing into question all of the inequalities in our society.

When analyzing the data, new questions were raised that I was unable to answer. For example, some of the students who said their family or friends would not approve of them dating interracially were still willing to do so. How do these students feel knowing that their friends and family would not support their relationship? Why would they try to date interracially and do they think they would be able to keep their friend and family pressure from influencing their relationship? A question that was asked in the questionnaire that, in the final analysis, was not included in this report because it was no longer relevant to the main objective of the study of students' tendency to date interracially, was if the students have seen anyone act negatively toward an interracial couple; 62.8% of the students had. Further research needs to focus on students who have seen this negativity, whether they intervened or not, and the reactions toward the negativity. As Heather M. Dalmage writes in "Discovering Racial Borders", people who date interracially, especially those who are part of a Black/White couple, are sometimes bombarded with negativity from familiar faces and strangers. Some of the negative responses eventually affect the lives of the couple, forcing them to move from their communities (Dalmage 378).

Conducting research on the disapproval faced by interracial couples and how outsiders respond to seeing this disapproval would be beneficial in understanding how interracial relationships are sometimes considered a risk.

This research shows that interracial dating is still a taboo subject. While many of the students were tolerant toward interracial dating, some noted that their friends or family are not. Some students have experienced or witnessed societal pressures against interracial dating. This study demonstrates how non-Whites are more likely to date interracially than Whites and that religious background has some influence. Finally, this research shows that color blindness appears to be very common and is a large part of how students view interracial relationships.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents according to various demographic characteristics (n=199)

| Characteristic | Number | Percent |
|----------------|--------|---------|
| Age | | |
| 18 | 24 | 12.1 |
| 19 | 34 | 17.1 |
| 20 | 45 | 22.6 |
| 21 | 53 | 26.6 |
| 22 | 35 | 17.6 |
| 23 | 5 | 2.5 |
| 24 or older | 3 | 1.5 |
| Race | | |
| White | 137 | 69.5 |
| Black | 23 | 11.7 |
| Hispanic | 11 | 5.6 |
| Asian | 19 | 9.6 |
| Other | 6 | 3.0 |
| Gender | | |
| Male | 54 | 27.6 |
| Female | 142 | 72.4 |
| Religion | | |
| Religious | 125 | 63.8 |
| Non-Religious | 61 | 31.1 |

Table 2. Distribution of respondents according to the question “I would date someone of a different race.” (n=119)

| Response | Number | Percent |
|-------------------|--------|---------|
| Strongly Agree | 34 | 28.3 |
| Agree | 65 | 54.2 |
| Disagree | 8 | 6.7 |
| Strongly Disagree | 1 | .8 |
| Don't Know | 12 | 10.0 |

Table 3. Distribution of respondents according to the question “If I dated someone of a different race, my friends would be okay with it.” (n=189)

| Response | Number | Percent |
|----------------|--------|---------|
| Strongly Agree | 98 | 51.9 |
| Agree | 86 | 45.5 |
| Disagree | 3 | 1.6 |
| Don't Know | 2 | 1.1 |

Table 4. Distribution of respondents according to the question “If I dated someone of a different race, my family would be okay with it.” (n=189)

| Response | Number | Percent |
|-------------------|--------|---------|
| Strongly Agree | 59 | 31.2 |
| Agree | 74 | 39.2 |
| Disagree | 31 | 16.4 |
| Strongly Disagree | 7 | 3.7 |
| Don't Know | 18 | 9.5 |

Table 5. Bivariate table showing the effect of race on whether the respondent has been or is currently in an interracial relationship. (percent)

| Past or current interracial relationship | White | Race Black | Hispanic | Asian | Other |
|--|---------|---------------|----------|--------|-------|
| | (n=137) | (n=23) | (n=11) | (n=19) | (n=6) |
| Yes | 32.8 | 56.5 | 36.4 | 52.6 | 100 |
| No | 66.4 | 43.5 | 63.6 | 47.4 | 0 |

$$\chi^2=82.411***$$

***= significant at the 1% level ($\alpha = .000$)

Table 6. Bivariate table showing the effect of race on the statement “I would date someone of a Different race. (percent)

| Would date interracially | White | Black | Race Hispanic | Asian | Other |
|--------------------------|--------|-------|------------------|-------|-------|
| | (n=90) | (n=9) | (n=7) | (n=9) | (n=4) |
| Strongly Agree | 23.3 | 66.7 | 57.1 | 33.3 | 0.0 |
| Agree | 57.8 | 11.1 | 42.9 | 55.6 | 75.0 |
| Disagree | 7.8 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 25.0 |
| Strongly Disagree | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 11.1 | 0.0 |

$$\chi^2=32.988**$$

**= significant at the 5% level ($\alpha = .034$)

Table 7. Bivariate table showing the effect of religion on the statement “If I dated someone of a different race, my family would be okay with it.” (percent)

| Family approval | Religion | |
|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| | Religious (n=118) | Non-Religious (n=60) |
| Strongly Agree | 31.4 | 33.3 |
| Agree | 38.1 | 43.3 |
| Disagree | 19.5 | 10.0 |
| Strongly Disagree | 1.7 | 8.3 |

$$\chi^2=20.067***$$

***=significant at the 1% level ($\alpha=.010$)

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