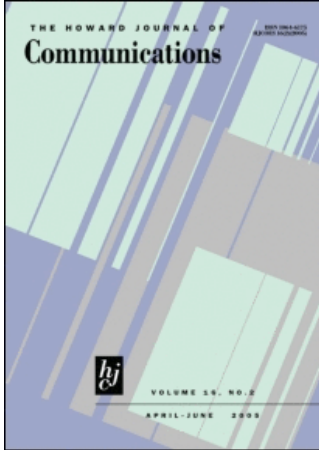


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Interracial Dating: The Implications of Race for Initiating a Romantic Relationship

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Currently, limited research exists that explores the socially taboo topic of interracial dating between African Americans and European Americans. Historically, African Americans and European Americans have had a highly destructive relationship of enslavement and oppression, which has resulted in a history of mistrust, according to P. H. Collins (African American Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment, New York, Routledge, 1990). As a result, this relationship symbolizes the institutionalized oppression embedded in race relations despite the very intimate nature of this romantic relationship. Using the centrality of race within the context of romantic relationships, this study was designed to determine how race influences the communicative process. Q-sort methodology was used, which required participants to determine what waiting, hinting, direct, and third-party intervention strategies they would use to initiate a date in both same-race and interracial contexts. Findings reveal that when comparing verbal strategies across both contexts and open-ended responses to likelihood or reality of dating interracially, participants were resistant to the idea of dating a person from another race. External factors such as family and society were cited as primary deterrents to involvement in an interracial romantic relationship. In general, participants in this study used more social distancing strategies for initiating interracial dating relationships than same-race dating relationships.

KEYWORDS *interracial, romance, dating, race, date initiation, strategies, relationships, Q-sort methodology, interracial dating.*

Address correspondence to Tina M. Harris, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Speech Communication, University of Georgia, 128 Terrell Hall, Athens, GA 30602, USA. E-mail: tmharris@arches.uga.edu. Copies of the Q-sort Items, Z Scores for Same-Race and Interracial Date Initiation, Same-Race and Interracial Q Sort Types and Strategies are available from this author.

Research indicates that attitudes toward interracial romantic relationships are complex; however, minimal attention has been given to motivating factors for involvement in such relationships. Public opinion polls (Romano & Trescott, 1992) and self-reports (Murstein, Merigihi, & Malloy, 1989) indicate that external pressures are ever present, and, consequently, relational partners are expected to dissolve these relationships for a myriad of "reasons." Currently, two theories exist that articulate why most individuals might become involved in an interracial romantic relationship. Kouri and Lasswell (1993) used the structural theory and the racial motivation theory to better understand these motivations. The structural theory posits that demographics (i.e., socioeconomic status, education, occupation, residence) and mutual attraction contribute to the initiation, development, and maintenance of an interracial marriage. Conversely, the racial motivation theory hypothesizes that interracial marriages occur *because* of racial difference, whereby at least one partner finds the racially different other more appealing *because* of her or his race.

In their in-depth interviews with interracial couples (African Americans and European Americans), Kouri and Lasswell (1993) found that 44 of the 46 interviewees were attracted to their partners due to similar values and interests, or overall compatibility (structural theory). Seven African Americans (1 female and 6 males) and 9 European Americans (7 females and 2 males) reported being attracted to each other strictly on the basis of their partners' physiological makeup (racial motivation theory). In essence, these participants seemed to exoticize the other race because their external beauty and skin color are reportedly the primary factors contributing to perceptions of attractiveness and the (interracial) mate selection experience.

In an earlier study by Murstein et al. (1989), 20 interracial couples were interviewed about the relationship between partner physical attractiveness and relational commitment. Findings reveal that partners were attracted to their mates for intrinsic reasons as well as physical attraction; however, the judges in the study observed that partner physical attractiveness for both races outweighed other criteria for mate selection. Judges also found that African American partners were much more attractive than their European American partners. Using the social exchange theory, Murstein et al. (1989) explained that "in a racially prejudiced society, African Americans would have to offer more to European Americans than vice versa to participate in an interracial romantic relationship. It was hypothesized and confirmed that African Americans would exceed their European American partners in physical attractiveness" (p. 334). Based on data analysis, Murstein et al. (1989) surmise that individuals involved in interracial romantic relationships are sometimes forced to "normalize" the relationship and justify its existence to themselves, family, and a race-consumed society. This concern is behaviorally manifested when partners choose a racially different partner whose physical beauty compensates for the "racial disparity" in the relationship.

The Future of Interracial Dating

By the year 2000, it has been predicted that the demographic makeup of the U.S. population will consist primarily of people of color (Masini, 1993). With these increased numbers of people of color in the workplace, schools, and all other aspects of life, and higher levels of interpersonal contact, the potential for interracial relation-

ships is inevitably going to rise. Such proximity creates a unique dichotomy. For those consumed with the social significance of race, such relationships are often perceived as a threat to the racial social order. For others, this increased proximity and potential for interracial relationships is perceived as a positive interpersonal experience. As an extension, these individuals welcome the increased likelihood that interracial romantic and marriage relationships will develop. In either case, the potential and inevitability of such relationships forces individuals to reexamine their value systems and beliefs about interracial friendships and romantic relationships.

Despite this increased racial and cultural diversity, limited research exists that explores the role communication plays in the initiation of interracial romantic relationships and understanding the motivating factors that influence communication behaviors used in this context. As Orbe demonstrates (1995, 1996, 1998), racial and cultural identities influence the communicative process. In describing his model of co-cultural theory, Orbe (1998) provides six factors that he observes as influencing co-cultural communication, or communication between marginalized groups and dominant society members. These factors include: (1) preferred outcome for the relationship, or (un)conscious thought about the effects communication behaviors have on relationships with dominant group members; (2) field of experience, which is the lived experiences of co-cultural group members; (3) abilities, which refers to a person's skill at using different communication practices; (4) situational context, which involves the influence of the setting (i.e., work, home, school, social places) on the interaction; (5) perceived costs and rewards of co-cultural communication; and (6) communication approach, wherein a person chooses the appropriate communication strategy for that co-cultural interaction (i.e., nonassertive, assertive, and aggressive). Depending on the communicator, her or his characteristics, and the situational and relational factors present in the communication context, communication strategies utilized within each intercultural interaction will vary. Within an interracial context, both communicators enter this interpersonal interaction with anxieties and expectations based on their fields of experience. Because apprehensions exist, interracial interactions become more complex when both communicators have differing expectations. In either case, the cultural identities of the communicators greatly affect their interpersonal interactions and the communicative process.

As previously noted, little communication research explores the role of communication within interracial romantic relationships. In his research, Orbe (1998) observes that the situational context and preferred outcome, among other variables, influence the communication strategies used within a co-cultural context. Using this general premise, it is the goal of this study to examine the degree to which communicator racial identity influences the verbal communication strategies hypothetically favored to initiate same-race and interracial dates within a hypothetical communication context.

In a pilot study that attempted to achieve this same research goal, Harris (1994) extended the work of Mongeau, Hale, Johnson, and Hillis (1993) and measured hypothetical verbal date initiation strategies that African Americans and European Americans (college students) reported they would (or would not) use in an interracial and intraracial context. Results reveal that when the target of their romantic interest was of a different race (interracial dating), 65% of the participants were more likely to change behaviors and use more indirect verbal strategies (i.e., hinting,

waiting) as compared with their same-race initiations. While the findings reveal a relationship between verbal strategy and race, attempts to generalize are minimized due to the exploratory nature of the study. In order to further address these initial findings, the present study has been designed to extend and address the dearth of research on this topic. Because so little research has explored interracial dating, it is the goal of this study to understand the degree to which the racial identity of a potential romantic partner (target) influences the verbal strategies used to initiate an interracial romantic relationship, and, on a smaller level, the decision to enter (or not) an interracial romantic relationship.

Rationale for Hypotheses

Research in the area of interracial communication has focused on how interaction expectations of European Americans negatively affect communication with and perceptions of African Americans (Leonard & Locke, 1993; Weitz & Gordon, 1993); therefore, it is reasonable to assume that African Americans have interaction expectations and perceptions of European Americans as well. As a result, mutual expectations of African Americans and European Americans may cause individuals to change their behavioral patterns when interacting interracially (Fitzpatrick & Hwang, 1992). Because of longstanding racial stereotypes and the history of race relations in the United States, it is highly understandable why interracial interactions are perceived and received with high levels of communication apprehension.

Hypothesis 1 is designed to test whether behavioral change is influenced by target race and the expectation of dating a person of a different race (Harris, 1994; Orbe, 1998; Weitz & Gordon, 1993). Research indicates that racial group members use multiple forms of communication as they interact with ingroup members and outgroup members (Suzuki, 1998). When communicating with ingroup members, fewer psychological barriers are present that interfere with the communicative process; however, when there are interactions with outgroup members, perceptions and interaction expectations take on greater significance. To compensate for these perceptions, individuals will adapt their communication strategies for each group (Suzuki, 1998). With ingroup members, verbal communication is used to promote group solidarity and cohesion. Conversely, outgroup communication may be more formal and restricted due to communicator apprehension and stereotyping. When these interactions become more romantic, however, communication strategies have the potential to become more accentuated. Because such relationships have traditionally been perceived as "taboo," it is logical to assume that more passive date initiation strategies will be used to avoid social judgment from ingroup members. Therefore, individuals, regardless of gender, are predicted to employ passive (avoidant) strategies that compensate for racial difference in the initiation of an interracial romantic relationship. The following hypothesis articulates this prediction:

H1: Both African American and European American men and women will report a change in their communication strategies when initiating a date with a person from a different race.

The assessment process one engages in during strategy selection is a cognitive activity that allows individuals to select verbal strategies they are most comfortable using to initiate social relationships. When a person brings her or his racial identity into the communicative experience, however, it is reasonable to assume that racial difference will influence the interpersonal skills used when interacting with members of one's own race and members of other races.

Hypothesis 2 explores the influence gender has on verbal date initiation strategies used within same-race and interracial dating contexts. In their study of trust between African Americans and European Americans, Duncan and Kalbfleisch (1996) found that European Americans had a higher level of mistrust of African Americans. This element of mistrust becomes magnified when individuals are challenged to examine their own attitudes toward interracial romantic relationships. Recent research on attitudes toward interracial dating and marriages indicate that men, the young, and European Americans had more positive attitudes toward interracial dating than did women, the old, and African Americans (Todd, McKinney, Harris, Chadderton, & Small, 1992). Conversely, Paset and Taylor (1991) found that European American women favored interracial marriage more so than African American women, suggesting that "African American women perceive interracial marriages of African American men and women as substantively more threatening to their personal and racial welfare than do white women" (p. 754). These findings imply an existing level of mistrust as experienced by African American women, which mirrors the levels of mistrust found for European American men and women alike by Duncan and Kalbfleisch (1996).

Research has also been contradictory in its inquiry of attitudes toward interracial dating and marriage. Some have found that African American women are more threatened by interracial marriages between African American men and European American women, or other non-African American women (Todd et al., 1992) although others reveal that African American women are least threatened by this interracial pairing (Dickson, 1993). In terms of the latter, African American women have themselves become more involved in relationships with European American males to remedy the discrepancy (Dickson, 1993). In either event, there are two possible reasons for mixed reports regarding African American women's attitudes toward interracial dating. First, African American women may resent interracial marriages between African American men and European American women because it places them at a relational disadvantage due to the lack of available African American men. Second, African American women who recognize this rising trend in interracial marriages are becoming more open to interracial relationships themselves for that very same reason. Given that women in general are more relationship-focused than men, it is reasonable to assume that African American women with higher education and fewer marriageable partners (Dickson, 1993; Weitz & Gordon, 1993) and European American women with increased interracial interactions will be more accepting of interracial romantic relationships than African American and European American men. Hypothesis 2 is designed to determine if any gender differences will emerge as participants select verbal date initiation strategies in same-race and interracial hypothetical contexts.

H2: Men and women will experience a change in their communication strategies when initiating a date with a person from a different race.

The hypotheses guiding this study are designed to explore the various dimensions of interracial dating and the external factors influencing the development and pursuit of such a relationship. The methods and research design measure the influence of those factors on the initiation of interracial romantic relationships.

Method

Research Participants

Participants in this study were 120 students from a large southern university. Sixty of the participants were African American and 60 were European American, with equal numbers of men and women in each racial group. The research participants were contacted through introductory communication courses, Greek organizations, campus student organizations, resident advisor courses, and from referrals made by other participants in the study.¹

Research Methodology

Q-sort methodology is the primary methodology used in this study to explore the influence of race and gender on date initiation strategies in same-race and interracial contexts. Q-sort methodology was designed by social scientist William Stephenson as a tool to better understand individual subjectivity (Stephenson, 1953). As a measure of social behavior, Q-sort attempts to understand the behaviors of the individual by identifying the person's subjectively held pattern of beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and the like. Instead of following the rule of the single characteristic referenced to many people, Q-sort proposes the rule of the single case referenced to many characteristics (Stephenson, 1953). Focusing on the relative significance of characteristics within an individual enables the researcher to understand how those judgments and beliefs influence a person's behavior.

Procedure

At the onset of data collection, research participants were reminded that participation was voluntary and that the goal of the study was to gain a better understanding of dating relationships. Participants then signed a consent form and were given a set of Q-sort items developed by Harris (1994), which was composed of 36 index cards containing one primary tactic reflective of either a (1) waiting, (2) hinting, (3) direct, or (4) third-party intervention dating strategy. With the Q-sort items at hand, research participants were asked to imagine that they have met a person of their same race with whom they would like to start a romantic relationship. With this condition of instructions in mind, participants were guided through the two-stage sorting process. In the first stage, they were instructed to sort their cards into three different piles: (a) tactics they would most likely use, (b) tactics they would least

likely use, and (c) tactics they were unsure about using. Each participant read verbal strategies that specifically related to a cross-sex context from their gendered perspective. In the second stage, these decisions were refined by asking that the tactics be further sorted into a quasi-normal forced distribution of 9 ranks. After sorting the cards, participants recorded their responses and were then asked to complete the same task and sort the cards as if they were attracted to a person from another race and wanted to start a romantic relationship with this person. After completing the Q-sort tasks, participants were asked to respond to an open-ended question about their future likelihood of being involved in an interracial relationship. This question provided participants the opportunity to briefly explain the motivations behind the verbal strategies chosen in both dating contexts.

Results

Q-Sort: Same-Race Type Descriptions

Factor analysis of the same-race Q-sorts identified 3 distinct tactical patterns, or strategies, used by study participants. As with any z-score used in quantitative research, the z-score in Q-methodology generally ranges from +3 to -3, with a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. Positive z-scores are interpreted as dating tactics that would most likely be used and negative scores are dating tactics that would least likely be used by those participants.

Type 1, Strategic Active

The cluster members in Type 1 demonstrate a strong preference for using hinting strategies to initiate a same-race romantic relationship. The average z-score across the 9 tactics for the postulated strategy of hinting was .70. The cluster members include 15 African American males, 21 African American females, 24 European American males, and 19 European American females ($N = 79$), accounting for 66% of the participants. The hinting strategies positively endorsed by these participants allow them to subtly communicate interest in a romantic relationship with the target. The date initiation strategies include: (1) discussing mutual interests and related events, (2) determining target availability, (3) mentioning a group activity, (4) mentioning an event and asking the target to go, (5) inviting the target to study and get something to eat afterward, and (6) flirting with the target by letting her know he finds the target attractive. These tactics are passive yet somewhat direct hints used to convey interest and attraction; however, a great deal of subtlety was preferred. As indicated by the verbal content of their strategy, these participants appear to be establishing common ground or similarity with the target.

Type 2, Strategic Assertive

The second type that surfaced in the same-race sort consisted of 21 participants (5.7% of participants), including 14 African American males, 2 African American

females, 4 European American males, and 1 European American female. These cluster members are very different from the Strategic Active participants. Unlike the Strategic Active type, the Strategic Assertive participants prefer direct strategies (.983) to initiate a romantic relationship, followed by hinting (.699). The 9 most strongly endorsed assertive (stereotypically masculine) tactics, including 6 from the direct strategies, are (1) asking the target out on a specific night, (2) finding out the target's availability by asking if she is dating someone, (3) asking if the target is interested in dating someone and if the target is interested in the initiator, (4) getting to know each other better, (5) calling the target on the phone to ask her out, (6) asking the target if she wants to go out, (7) mentioning a certain event and then asking the target to go, (8) flirting with the target and letting her know he finds the target attractive, and (9) asking the target to study and get a bite to eat.

These cluster members hypothetically appear to have no reticence toward asking a person out on a date. It can only be inferred that there is a preference to communicate romantic interest to their target while being fully aware of the potential risks this behavioral pattern could create. This observation is supported partially in this cluster's strong rejection of waiting (-1.00) or having a third-party intervene ($-.67$). Because the self-reported behaviors demonstrate possible real-life tactics used to initiate a same-race romantic relationship that were very direct in nature, these behaviors may reflect gender role expectations that males and females experience as they develop into adulthood and dating relationships.

Type 3, Strategic Passive

Members of the final cluster in the same-race sort prefer to wait for the target to initiate or indicate romantic interest in them. By engaging in waiting behaviors, Strategic Passives avoid using any strategies that denote interest in becoming involved in a romantic relationship. These cluster members are 1 African American male, 7 African American females, 2 European American males, and 10 European American females who all preferred to wait. Each of the 6 most strongly endorsed tactics are drawn from the postulated waiting strategies, which include: (1) letting the target ask her out, (2) waiting for the target to indicate interest, (3) talking to friends but not mentioning interest, (4) hoping the target would ask her out, (5) strategically placing herself where the target will be, and (6) talking about mutual interests and a related event. As evidenced by their choice in strategy, these cluster members appear determined to avoid behaviors that would reveal their attraction to the target.

The participants in this cluster are primarily female (17/20), which may further explain their self-reported behaviors and preference for waiting strategies. Because dating scripts for heterosexual romantic relationships have taught women to engage in passive behaviors while the male actively initiates the date, it is possible that the cluster members for Type 3 are comfortable waiting for the male to initiate. Given that 3 males prefer waiting strategies as well, it is plausible that their behaviors may be attributed to interpersonal characteristics and qualities (i.e., shy, introverted, fearful of rejection).

Q-Sort: Interracial Type Descriptions

Factor analysis of the interracial Q-sorts identified 4 distinct tactical patterns, or strategies, used by study participants. These accounted for 56% of total variance or 99% of trace.

Type 1, Strategic Passive

The first of the 4 types that surfaced in the interracial sort, Strategic Passive, consists of 54 participants (11 African American males, 20 African American females, 7 European American males, and 16 European American females) who prefer to use waiting strategies to initiate an interracial date. Seven of the most preferred tactics represent a waiting strategy: (1) waiting for the target to ask him or her out, (2) letting the target flatter him or her, (3) waiting for the target to indicate interest in him or her, (4) trying not to let the target know about his or her interest in the target, (5) discussing mutual interests and an event, (6) just hoping the target asks him or her out, and (7) flirting with the target about his or her attractiveness but avoiding direct date initiation.

The strongly rejected tactics are direct in nature and specifically communicate romantic interest. As their strategy choice indicates, there appears to be little desire for cluster members to communicate attraction. It is plausible that their preference for waiting instead of using a direct strategy is an attempt to conceal interest in an interracial relationship because of external factors (i.e., family, society) and the taboo nature of such relationships, or a lack of interest in dating an outgroup member. By waiting for the target to indicate interest, the participants appear to be purposely avoiding any attempt to communicate romantic interest to a person from a different race.

Type 2, Strategic Contextual

The next type to surface demonstrates a preference for using hinting and direct strategies. These 35 cluster members (7 African American males, 3 African American females, 13 European American males, 12 European American females) prefer to communicate attraction by creating social interactions where they are (1) discussing mutual interests, (2) inviting the target to an event and hoping the target expresses interest in going, (3) mentioning a group activity to the target, (4) mentioning an event and inviting the target to go, (5) inviting the target to study and get a bite to eat, (6) calling the target to say hi, (7) asking the target out on a particular night, and (8) asking if the target is currently dating anyone.

The verbal content of these tactics is neutral in communicating romantic interest in the target. The Strategic Contextual participants appear careful in determining the target's level interest before asking for a date. These cluster members may demonstrate a preference for these strategies in an effort to create a communication climate conducive for the two to get to know each other without ego threat taking place. The Strategic Contextual participants develop their strategy by drawing on some hinting tactics and some direct tactics, while strongly rejecting other hinting

and direct tactics, and some waiting and third-party strategies. The majority of the rejected direct strategies appear to be hypothetical overt displays of romantic interest, which does not fulfill the purpose of initiating a date with the target.

Given that this study was conducted at a predominantly European American institution, it is reasonable to assume that the European American students have had limited interracial contact. Therefore, when they were asked to initiate an interracial date, participants may have been hesitant to use direct strategies due to communicator apprehension within an interracial context. It is also possible that stereotypes and negative attitudes toward interracial romantic relationships may directly influence the use of passive verbal strategies.

Type 3, Strategic Flexible

The Strategic Flexible participants consist of 8 African American males, 5 African American females, 9 European American males, and 1 European American female. These participants prefer using both hinting and direct strategies to initiate an interracial date, which may be indicative of openness to dating interracially or approaching someone from a different race "on the surface." The most preferred tactics are (1) hinting about the target's attractiveness, (2) asking the target out on a specific night, (3) inquiring about the target's availability, (4) inviting the target to study and get a bite to eat later, (5) asking if the target is presently dating anyone and would he like for the two of them to get to know each other better, (6) discussing mutual interests and an upcoming event, and (7) telling the target she has been watching the target for a long time.

As the items indicate, these cluster members appear flexible in their use of date initiation strategies, which may be attributed to the participants' comfort or personal experience with interracial interactions. Such flexibility may be grounded in positive past experiences or their repertoire of communication skills as influenced by social context. The strategic verbal behaviors chosen by these cluster members connote a preference for conveying romantic interest to their target.

Type 4, Strategic Intervention

The final cluster in the interracial dating sort is different from the others. Although they are few in number ($N = 7$), these cluster members are distinct because they prefer using a third-party, particularly a friend, to initiate an interracial date. These 4 African American males, 2 African American females, and 1 European American male most prefer (1) talking to friends about interest and wait for a response, (2) mentioning interest to a friend and hope the target would initiate, (3) flirting by letting the target know the respondent finds her attractive, (4) having a friend arrange a double date, (5) having a friend mention the respondent's interest to the target and wait for the target to initiate, (6) having a friend mention the respondent's interest and then ask the target out himself, and (7) waiting for the target to ask him out.

Reliance on the friend to coordinate or advise about the development of the relationship may be indicative of the high level of trust the participants have in the

friends' judgment of their dating behaviors. By using a third-party, participants may be attempting to provide a buffer in the event they are rejected. The third-party may minimize the emotional trauma of direct rejection by acting as a go-between for both initiator and target. The initiator may perceive such rejection as a greater ego threat since they may be rejected by a person from a different race, thus compounding the feelings of rejection.

Hypothesis 1

The primary objective of the current study was to determine if both African American and European American men and women will experience a change in their date initiation strategies when initiating a date with a person from a different race. To test this relationship, the strategic patterns discovered in the same-race sort were correlated with those found in the interracial sort. Responses to the open-ended question about future likelihood of becoming involved in an interracial romantic relationship were used to probe these groups further. Because participants were forced to choose verbal strategies in both hypothetical situations, the researchers did not want to assume attraction when participants could not realistically visualize themselves dating a person from a different race. Participants were not asked to explain and compare their behaviors across both contexts; therefore, our interpretations are limited to assumptions based on behavioral patterns observed across dating contexts.

No or minimal influence of race on date initiation strategy

There are 3 combinations of strategies that are highly similar. Same-Race Strategic Actives correlate with Interracial Strategic Contextuals at $r = .929$; the Strategic Assertives from the same-race sort correlate with the Strategic Flexibles from the interracial sort at $r = .883$; and the Strategic Passives from the same-race sort correlate with the Strategic Passives from the interracial sort at $r = .865$. There are 41 participants in these combinations, who represent 35% of the sample.

Of these 41 participants, 25 are in the Strategic Active/Strategic Contextual, 6 are in the Strategic Assertive/Strategic Flexible combination, and 10 are in the Strategic Passives/Strategic Passive combination. Participants in this behavioral pattern include 7 African American males, 7 African American females, 14 European American males, and 13 European American females. In both dating situations, participants utilize the same hinting strategies to initiate a date. Participants in the Strategic Passive/Strategic Passive combination prefer to wait on the target to initiate a date in the same-race and interracial dating contexts.

Although similar approaches to initiating a date are used in both the same-race and interracial dating context, several cluster members ($N = 23$) briefly shared that the likelihood of them dating interracially in the future was very slim, which may be attributed to the lack of availability of other-race persons in their usual circles. As explained in their open-ended response, participants would not date interracially due to "obvious" racial differences, stereotypes they had come to believe, not finding another race attractive, complexities associated with interracial relationships, social

perceptions of interracial dating as taboo, and finding only members of their own race attractive.

Moderate influence of race on date initiation style

The majority of the participants (61, or 50%) were moderately influenced by race, including 14 African American males, 21 African American females, 13 European American males, and 13 European American females. There are 5 combinations of strategies that are moderately similar. Same-Race Strategic Actives correlate with Interracial Strategic Passives at $r = .582$; Strategic Assertives from the same-race sort correlate with Strategic Contextuals from the interracial sort at $r = .492$; Strategic Actives from the same-race sort correlate with Strategic Intervention from the interracial sort at $r = .441$; and Strategic Passives from the same-race sort correlate with Strategic Intervention from the interracial sort at $r = .521$.

Of those 61, there are 39 participants who conform to more passive date initiation strategies when approaching a person from a different race. Those in Strategic Active/Strategic Passive combination ($N = 34$) prefer to hint in the same-race context and to wait for the target to initiate in the interracial context. The remaining 5 participants, however, are Strategic Assertive/Strategic Contextuals and resort to hinting with a person from a different race instead of being direct as they were in the same-race dating scenario. The shift in date initiation strategy is moderate yet may imply that the race of the target does influence verbal tactics used to initiate a date.

Of the remaining 22 participants, 16 subgroup members changed from using hinting to direct strategies across dating contexts. Strategic Active/Strategic Flexible, may presumably have fewer apprehensions about and more comfort in approaching a different-race target. Similarly, Strategic Active/Strategic Intervention ($N = 5$) and Strategic Passive/Strategic Intervention ($N = 1$) combinations, respectively, went from hinting and waiting to third-party intervention. Involvement of a third party is a strategy that allows the participants to communicate attraction through an external "participant." This approach may be interpreted as an attempt to avoid appearing too forward or aggressive.

The behavioral patterns present suggest that the interracial manipulation for some participants is an unrealistic expectation, which causes them to resort to unconventional behavior that is less direct. The other participants, however, may perceive the interracial condition as a possibility or a realistic expectation. The preference for using somewhat direct strategies via a third party to initiate a date may be reflective of an increased desire to communicate interest without deviating from their reported conventional dating strategies.

Dramatic influence of race on date initiation strategy

The final category describing the behavioral changes occurring among participants is extreme change, or any behavior that significantly deviates in directness or hesitancy across same-race and interracial contexts. Within this category, there are

17 other participants (14% of the sample) whose behaviors seem to be influenced by the race of the target, which has resulted in a dramatic change in date initiation strategy.

These participants are 9 African American males, 1 African American female, 3 European American males, and 4 European American females. There are 4 combinations of strategies that are drastically different from each other. Same-Race Strategic Assertives are negatively correlated with Interracial Strategic Passives at $r = -.237$; Strategic Assertives from the same-race sort are correlated with Strategic Intervention from the interracial sort at $-.117$; Strategic Passives from the same-race sort are correlated with Strategic Contextuals from the interracial sort at $r = -.282$; and Strategic Passives from the same-race sort are correlated with Strategic Flexibles from the interracial sort at $r = -.300$.

Participants in the Strategic Assertive/Strategic Passive combination and Strategic Assertive/Strategic Intervention ($N = 11$) engage in less-direct behaviors by either waiting for the target to initiate or having a third-party intervene. The inactive strategies of Strategic Assertive/Strategic Passive are possibly reflective of the participants' desire to avoid involvement in an interracial romantic relationship. According to their brief responses to an open-ended question about the likelihood of becoming involved in a real-life interracial relationship, the participants who prefer to use passive strategies in the interracial sort ($N = 7$) report opposition to interracial dating, thus potentially influencing the use of passive verbal strategies.

Conversely, participants in the behavioral patterns of Strategic Passive/Strategic Contextual and Strategic Passive/Strategic Flexible ($N = 50$) chose more direct approaches in the interracial sort. This increased directness may be the result of the participants' expectations that their target would be direct; therefore, they adapt their own behaviors to mirror the targets' behaviors. While participants in both combinations prefer to wait with a person from the same-race, there is a change to hint (Strategic Passive/Strategic Contextual) and use a third-party (Strategic Passive/Strategic Flexible) in the interracial dating context.

Synopsis of Results for Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 predicted that both African American and European American men and women would experience a change in their date initiation strategies when initiating a date with a person from a different race. As their behavioral patterns indicate, 65% of the participants (45 African Americans and 33 European Americans) experienced either moderate or dramatic change in date initiation strategies between dating contexts. For these participants, dating strategy changed when target race was changed, thereby providing support for Hypothesis 1.

Although some of the same strategies were offered in both contexts, most participants engaged in more direct verbal strategies to initiate a date with a person from a different race. Such behavioral change may be attributed to apprehensions about dating interracially for those participants using ($N = 11$) less direct strategies within the interracial dating context. Conversely, participants using more direct strategies ($N = 50$) may have greater attraction toward or fewer inhibitions about dating a person from a different race.

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 predicted that men and women will experience a change in their date initiation strategies when initiating a date with a person from a different race. Findings reveal that 65% of the men ($N = 39$) and 65% of the women ($N = 39$) did change their verbal strategies when they were expected to demonstrate interest in an interracial dating relationship. The behavioral changes were moderate or dramatic in comparison with the verbal strategies utilized in the same-race context. Further, it was found that the males ($m = 2.137$) have slightly more reservations about interracial dating than do females ($m = 2.221$). This difference may be attributed to women generally being socialized to be relationship-focused, thus minimizing their apprehension of or disapproval of interracial romantic relationships.

In evaluating their open-ended questions regarding the likelihood of an interracial relationship, 56% of the African American females ($N = 17$) were open to dating a European American male and 44% of the European American females ($N = 13$) would not consider such a relationship. An overwhelming 87% of the African American males would not consider dating a European American female ($N = 26$) and only 13% would consider such a relationship ($N = 4$). Thus, approximately half of the African American female college students participating would consider an interracial relationship, while fewer than one-seventh of the African American males students would do so.

Conclusions and Discussion

As the findings indicate, the race of a potential romantic relational partner directly affects the verbal strategies a person uses to initiate a date. Whether it is due to stereotypes, attitudes about interracial relationships, or personality characteristics, the verbal strategies used within the context of dating were purposely chosen by participants for a variety of reason. By focusing on the centrality of race within interracial romantic relationships, the findings serve as an appropriate framework for understanding the degree to which the communicative process is affected by race.

While participants were forced to imagine themselves being attracted to and initiating a date with a person from a different race, they definitely adjusted their communicative behaviors when they were expected to initiate a date with a racial outgroup member. Q-sort items did not allow participants the opportunity to choose whether they would initiate such a date in reality; however, Mongeau et al. (1993), Mongeau, Yeazell, and Hale (1994), and Mongeau and Carey (1996) have found that the general content of an item is appropriate for same-race date initiation in a hypothetical context.

Open-ended questions allowing participants to explain whether or not they would actually date a person from a different race reveal that forced strategy selection did not influence their attitudes toward the topic of interracial dating. Participants did provide several reasons for why they would either avoid or be open to involvement in an interracial romantic relationship. Although a few participants attributed this to lack of attraction to members of the other race, others cited external factors as being primary deterrents to the initiation of such relationships. Exam-

ples include fear of upsetting or being disowned by parents or both, losing their job and limiting career advancement opportunities, fear of what friends will think, and the negative reactions they will receive in public from strangers, to name a few.

Participants did not articulate their reservations specifically through strategy choice. Open-ended answers, however, indicate that socialization on the issues of race, race relations, and interracial communication influences whether or not an interracial romantic relationship is even an option. According to some participants, family and society as external factors have communicated that romantic relationships between African Americans and European Americans remain socially "taboo," despite the antimiscegenation laws of 1964.

The current study is exploratory in nature. Although consistent with previous research conducted on date initiation strategies (Mongeau & Carey, 1996; Mongeau et al., 1993; Mongeau et al., 1994), the methodology used in this study is unique in its investigation of the verbal date initiation strategies used within same-race and interracial contexts. Instead of using traditional quantitative scales to measure date initiation behaviors, Q-sort provides an alternative methodology that does not conform to interpersonal research methods. Participants are grouped together by the verbal strategies they individually feel are most appropriate for achieving the goal of initiating a date or communicating romantic interest in another person. The Q-sort tasks challenged participants to intensely use critical thinking skills by reading 36 index cards twice as they imagine a hypothetical interpersonal interaction in two distinctly different contexts. By engaging in two sorts, the researchers reduce participant sensitivity to the overall intent of the study.

Orbe (1998) suggests that co-cultural communication research be extended by using qualitative instead of quantitative research methods, thus deviating from traditional approaches to social science inquiry. The use of Q-sort contributes to this reform by marrying both methodologies. Providing 36 verbal communication strategies (quantifying) allows for Q-sort analysis of the item groupings (qualitative) and descriptions of participants without making generalizations to similar populations of study. Instead, individual choice and content facilitate understanding of date initiation strategies and participant perceptions of what strategies are individually appropriate for initiating same-race and interracial dates. In either context, participants' choices reflect some change in strategy across dating scenarios.

As has been previously noted, limited research exists beyond the current study that explores communication strategies used to initiate interracial romantic relationships. Although not conclusive, findings are revealing as they reflect racial attitudes of a small sample of young adults in Western society. Strategy choices of participants reveal that the desire to maintain social distance between racial groups may become accentuated when the relationship has romantic connotations. The centrality of racial issues within the context of interracial romantic relationships demonstrates the intensity of race relations as they are today. Despite the end of slavery, the inception of civil rights, and the eradication of antimiscegenation laws, the findings further demonstrate society's resistance to challenging and deconstructing the existing racial and social order in the United States.

As an extension of previous research conducted by Mongeau et al. (1993, 1994) and Mongeau and Carey (1996), the current study was designed to explore and extend date initiation strategies that may be used within same-race and interracial

contexts. While Mongeau et al. (1993) found a direct correlation between premarital interaction norms and perception, this study illustrates that when race is introduced in the dating context, norms and perceptions (i.e., stereotype, attitudes) remain critical factors in influencing strategy choice in the date initiation process.

Note

¹ Researchers used snowball sampling techniques to increase the number of African American participants in the study.

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