



Interethnic bias in willingness to engage in casual sex versus committed relationships.

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Interethnic sex and marriage

Abstract

Interethnic romantic relationships are widely seen as a strong indicator of a well-integrated society. However, racial bias may still be evidenced in the tendency to engage in casual sex versus committed relationships. Using a large, age-diverse sample of 3,453 White British participants, this study found a general preference for White partners over racial minority partners. Furthermore, in line with social structural theory, participants reported a relative preference for marriage (versus casual sex) with White partners, but a relative preference for casual sex (versus marriage) with racial minorities. This pattern was further modified by sex: men reported a general preference for casual sex (versus marriage) with all racial groups except White partners. Women, however, reported a general preference for marriage (versus casual sex) with all groups, but this preference was strongest for White partners. The pattern was not further modified by sexual orientation. Implications for contemporary interethnic romantic relationships are discussed.

1 Interethnic sex and marriage

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3 Despite the widespread overt support for egalitarian values in predominantly White,
4 Western societies such as the US and the UK (Butz & Plant, 2009; Legault, Green-Demers,
5 Grant, & Chung, 2007; K. West & Hewstone, 2012), racism remains a serious contemporary
6 problem. Many psychological experiments, in a variety of contexts, continue to reveal that White
7 people receive preferential treatment compared to that of racial minorities (i.e., people of non-
8 White ethnicity including but not limited to Black, East Asian, and South Asian people). For
9 example, even when differences in behaviour, qualifications and other relevant information are
10 controlled or eliminated, racial minorities are less likely to receive offers of employment
11 (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Booth, Leigh, & Varganova, 2012; Pager, 2003), treated with
12 more suspicion in shopping areas (Schreer, Smith, & Thomas, 2009), interpreted as more
13 threatening (Mendes, Blascovich, Lickel, & Hunter, 2002), judged more harshly for crimes they
14 commit (Sommers & Ellsworth, 2000; K. West & Lloyd, 2017), and more likely to be shot by
15 police officers (Correll, Park, Judd, & Wittenbrink, 2007; Plant & Peruche, 2005). Such
16 differences in treatment are detectable even in very young children (Rutland, Cameron, Bennett,
17 & Ferrell, 2005) and self-described egalitarian people (Balsam, Molina, Beadnell, Simoni, &
18 Walters, 2011; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Sue et al., 2007).

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20 Given this ubiquity, it is unsurprising that racism is also an important consideration for
21 romantic relationships. Interethnic romantic relationships encounter more disapproval and less
22 support than *intraethnic* relationships (Paterson, Turner, & Conner, 2015; Wang, Kao, & Joyner,
23 2006; K. West, Lowe, & Marsden, 2017). Similar to other forms of racism, explicit endorsement
24 of egalitarianism in romantic relationships does not necessarily imply egalitarian behaviour
25 (Herman & Campbell, 2012). Preference for one's own race occurs in both majority and minority
26 racial groups, though this preference varies by group and location (Muttarak & Heath, 2010;
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2 Interethnic sex and marriage

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3 Uskul, Lalonde, & Cheng, 2007), can occur for different reasons (Reich, Ramos, & Jaipal, 2000;
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5 Tatum, 2004) and is generally stronger in White people than in racial minorities (Mendelsohn,
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7 Shaw Taylor, Fiore, & Cheshire, 2014).
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10 Indeed, because of the uniquely intimate nature of sexual and romantic relationships
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12 (Berscheid, 1988), they sometimes appear to be the final frontier of interethnic interaction. It is
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14 still common for individuals to explicitly state racial preferences in romantic partner selection
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16 (Herman & Campbell, 2012; Mendelsohn et al., 2014). This occurs for sexual minorities as well
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18 as heterosexuals, and sometimes adopts openly discriminatory racial tones, for example “no
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20 Asians, no Blacks” (Paul, Ayala, & Choi, 2010, p. 533) – language that would be considered
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22 openly racist, and thus socially unacceptable, if done in other contexts such as friendships or
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24 work places (Apfelbaum, Pauker, Ambady, Sommers, & Norton, 2008; Thai, Hornsey, &
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26 Barlow, 2016). A US-based study of over a million users of an internet dating website found
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28 (based on explicit, public dating criteria) that 50% of White women and 21% of White men
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30 would only date members of their own race (Mendelsohn et al., 2014). In comparison, only 36%
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32 of Black women and 10% of Black men stated the same.
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38 It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that an increase in interethnic romantic relationships in
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40 predominantly White countries is sometimes seen as the ultimate indicator of a low-prejudice
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42 society. Childs (2008, p. 2771) noted that, “In contemporary American society, Black-White
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44 couples are often heralded as a sign that racial barriers have disappeared.” Also in the US, Alba
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46 and Nee (2009, p. 90) claimed that “[interethnic marriage] is generally regarded, with
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48 justification, as the litmus test of assimilation. A high rate of intermarriage signals that the social
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50 distance between the groups involved is small.” News outlets in the USA echo this somewhat
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52 optimistic belief, claiming that a combination of “interethnic marriages and multiracial children
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3 Interethnic sex and marriage

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3 is producing a 21st century America more diverse than ever, with the potential to become less
4 stratified by race” (Press, 2007). Similar sentiments are expressed in the UK, where Muttarak
5 and Heath (2010, p. 276) note that, “intermarriage has commonly been used as an indicator of
6 the strength of racial group boundaries and of the social distance between groups.” This
7 perspective is also endorsed in empirical, academic literature. For example, Ford (2008) used
8 both rates of interethnic marriage and attitudes toward interethnic couples and evidence of
9 declining racial prejudice in the Britain. This view is widespread, though there is some notable
10 debate about the extent to which it is justified (see, e.g., Ford, 2008; Song, 2009).

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12 It is also important to note that not all romantic relationships are equal. Social structural
13 theory (Eagly & Wood, 1999) proposes that human sexual behavior and mate selection strategies
14 are based on attempts to maximize resources within the boundaries of societal norms and
15 expectations. Consequently, individuals (a) tend to seek out partners who offer the most
16 desirable resources, whether physical or social and (b) tend to be more selective, or choosier,
17 when they invest more into a relationship (Miller, Olson, & Fazio, 2004).

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19 Alongside evolutionary theories, and sometimes in contrast with them, social structural
20 theory is widely used to explain sex differences in partner selection (Lippa, 2007; Petersen &
21 Hyde, 2011; Shoemake, 2007; Zentner & Mitura, 2012). In the majority of societies around the
22 world, men tend to hold more social power, and women tend to invest more into sexual
23 relationships both physically and socially (Connell, 2005). This is used to explain why men are
24 usually more open to casual sex than women are, and why women tend to be more concerned
25 about the resources of their potential partner. A wealth of research supports these sex-based
26 differences in partner selection (for a review see Petersen & Hyde, 2011). Furthermore, research
27 shows that sex differences in partner selection are related to sex-based differences in societal

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power; as a society becomes more egalitarian, men and women's sexual behaviors and selection criteria become more similar (Zentner & Mitura, 2012). This further bolsters the social-structural (as opposed to evolutionary) perspective.

Social structural theory can also be used to predict sexual behavior between members of different social groups. Specifically, individuals who belong to stigmatized social groups are seen as having fewer resources and thus less to offer the relationship (Miller et al., 2004; Murstein, Merighi, & Malloy, 1989). Members of privileged groups should thus be (a) less willing to be romantically involved with members of stigmatized groups than with members of their own group and (b) particularly disinterested in high-investment, committed relationships as opposed to merely casual sex. Such patterns of behavior have been observed for a number of social groups. Fat women, for example, are sometimes sexually desired but not acknowledged as committed partners by their (male) romantic partners because of shame or stigma associated with that body type (Farrell, 2011; L. West, 2015). Heterosexual men and women report a higher willingness to engage in casual sex with bisexuals, but a lower willingness to engage in committed relationships with them: a pattern *not* evident in bisexuals' responses to heterosexuals (Feinstein, Dyar, Bhatia, Latack, & Davila, 2014). Relevant for this current research, throughout the colonial era, powerful male (usually White) slave owners would sexually exploit their enslaved (usually Black or mixed) servants, but would almost never confer upon these women the normal social acknowledgements associated with romantic relationships (Barash, 1990; Hewitt, 1985; Jordan, 1962).

This current research investigates whether such patterns of racial bias continue to occur in a contemporary, predominantly White, Western country – the UK. In line with social structural theory, White British individuals should report an overall greater interest in White

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3 partners than in racial minority partners, because non-White race is widely used as a heuristic for
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5 lower status (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Mendoza-Denton, Downey, Purdie, Davis, &
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7 Pietrzak, 2002; Miller et al., 2004; Murstein et al., 1989). Furthermore, the type of relationship
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9 being considered should also affect White Britons' preferences. Specifically, they should report a
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11 relative preference for more committed relationships (e.g., marriage) with White partners, but a
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13 relative preference for less committed relationships (e.g., casual sex) with racial minorities.
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17 A further question of interest is whether this pattern is affected by sex or sexual
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19 orientation. Concerning sex, women are typically less open to casual sex than men are (Eagly &
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21 Wood, 1999; Lippa, 2007; Petersen & Hyde, 2011; Shoemaker, 2007; Zentner & Mitura, 2012).
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23 However, there is no reason to suspect that women would be less affected by race-based status
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25 concerns than men are. Indeed, the evidence suggests the reverse. White women typically show
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27 more racial prejudice in partner selection than White men do (King & Bratter, 2007; Mendelsohn
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29 et al., 2014; Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995). Furthermore, Miller et al. (2004) found that
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31 White women anticipated and experienced more disapproval for dating non-White partners than
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33 any other combinations of race and sex. According to Miller et al. (2004), this was due to a
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35 combination of women's greater sensitivity to partner resources and non-White race being used
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37 as a heuristic cue for lower status.
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43 Concerning sexual orientation, it is possible to argue that sexual minorities might be less
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45 concerned about societal markers of status. By merely having same-sex partners, gay men and
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47 lesbians already behave in ways that run counter to mainstream heteronormative culture and
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49 gender expectations (Falomir-Pichastor & Mugny, 2009; Habarth, 2014; Kim et al., 2007; K.
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51 West, 2018). Also, marriage equality was only achieved in the UK in 2014 and in the US in 2015
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53 (BBC News, 2014; de Vogue & Diamond, 2015). Thus, attitudes and expectations around such
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relationships may be different for sexual minorities compared for heterosexual couples. On the other hand, in a recent, very large study (218,195 participants across 53 nations; 119,733 men, 98,462 women), Lippa, (2007) found that sex was a better predictor of partner selection preferences than was sexual orientation; heterosexual men and homosexual men reported preferences more similar to each other than to those of heterosexual women and lesbians respectively. There is also clear evidence of race-based bias among sexual minorities (Balsam et al., 2011; Follins, Walker, & Lewis, 2014; Hunter, 2010; Paul et al., 2010). For these reasons, it seems likely that, in this context, sexual minorities would report the same pattern of preferences as heterosexuals.

Current Research and Hypotheses

Recent decades have witnessed an increase in interethnic sexual and romantic relationships in Europe and elsewhere in the world (Coleman, 2004; Feng, Boyle, van Ham, & Raab, 2013), which is often interpreted as a sign of reduced interethnic prejudice (Alba & Nee, 2009; Childs, 2008; Ford, 2008; Muttarak & Heath, 2010; Song, 2009). However, as well as considering the *frequency* of interethnic relationships as indicator of prejudice, it may be meaningful to consider the *type* of sexual or romantic relationships across races. This current research investigated interethnic romantic preferences in the UK focusing on whether target partner race predicted the likelihood of engaging in casual sex versus committed relationships.

There were three specific hypotheses in line with social structural theory: (a) White participants would indicate a general preference for White partners relative to racial minority partners; (b) White participants would indicate a relative preference for marriage (versus casual sex) with White partners, but a relative preference for casual sex (versus marriage) with racial minority partners, and; (c) this pattern of results would persist regardless of sex or sexual

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orientation; i.e., it would occur for both men and women and for both heterosexuals and sexual minorities. This fills an important gap in the available research on interethnic romantic relationships. The majority of such research, particularly in the UK, has focused on *marriage* (e.g., Bagley, 1972a, 1972b; Coleman, 1985; Jones, 1982; Min & Kim, 2009; Muttarak & Heath, 2010), and has not considered more casual liaisons or how interethnic behaviours might vary as a function of the type of relationship.

Methods

Participants and recruitment. Data were obtained from a large sample of British adults, recruited by the professional polling company YouGov, using an opt-in panel system and internet-based collection. YouGov was specifically tasked with obtaining a diverse sample from several regions throughout the UK that was representative of the British population in terms of sex, race, sexual orientation and region. The data used in this study were drawn from a larger survey covering a number of topics related to contemporary relationships including participants' usage of online dating apps, their numbers of previous romantic partners (not broken down by race), their current relationship status, and the variables of interest in this study.

During recruitment, participants were only informed that the study investigated "their romantic preferences and behaviours". Participants were *not* informed that their interethnic romantic preferences would be investigated. Each survey was completed anonymously and online. Participants received financial reimbursement for participation that was handled by YouGov directly. The study was designed to be very brief, ideally taking between 15 to 20 minutes to complete. Participants were reimbursed commensurate with a rate of £5.00 per hour, or approximately £1.50 per participant.

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The total sample contained 4,751 participants of which 4,107 identified as White. Only White participants were retained for this study. Furthermore, though all participants were asked to respond to all questions, approximately 16% of these White participants (654) chose not to respond to the questions used as dependent measures in this study. This total omission of responses for the dependent variable occurred more often for female participants (17.5%, or 374 out of 1766) than for male participants (14.2%, or 280 out of 1687), $\chi^2(1, N = 4107) = 8.05, p = .005$. However, it did not occur at different rates for heterosexual participants and sexual minorities, $\chi^2(1, N = 4107) = .40, p = .53$, or for participants of different ages $t(4105) = .13, p = .89$.

Of the remaining 3,453 White participants with usable data 1687 (48.9%) identified as men and 1766 (51.1%) identified as women; 3101 (89.8%) identified as heterosexual, 153 (4.4%) as homosexual, 108 (3.1%) as bisexual, and 91 (2.4%) as “other”. The sample was (non-representatively) skewed towards older participants. The median age was between 45 and 54 (811 participants, 23.5%), and the modal age was 55 and older (1358 participants, 39.3%). Smaller proportions of the sample were between 18 and 24 (371, 10.7%), between 25 and 34 (362, 10.5%), and between 35 and 44 (551, 16.0%).

Measures. Using text-based multiple-choice questions, participants indicated their sex (*male* or *female*), age group (*18 – 24, 25 – 34, 35 – 44, 45 – 54, or 55 and older*), and sexual orientation (*Heterosexual, Gay / Lesbian, Bisexual, or “Other”*). To investigate their likelihood of engaging in specific types of romantic relationships with members of specific racial groups, each participant was asked to respond to 2 questions about each of the 4 chosen target racial groups (i.e., 8 separate questions in total).

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In line with prior research on different ethnic groups in the UK and the British Office for National Statistics (Bradford, 2006; Platt, Simpson, & Akinwale, 2005), this research focused on the 4 largest racial groups in the UK: White, Black, East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese) and South Asian (e.g., Indian, Pakistani). Participants responded to each of the questions on an 11-point scale (1 = *Very Unlikely*, 11 = *Very Likely*): “How likely is it that you would engage in a sexual relationship or encounter, with no commitment with a *White / Black / East Asian / South Asian* person?”, and “How likely is it that you would marry a *White / Black / East Asian / South Asian* person?”. The order in which the questions were presented was randomised for each participant. Participants were reminded of their anonymity and instructed to respond to all questions honestly. If they were currently in a relationship, they were asked to respond ‘as if they were single’.

Statistical Analyses. The race of the potential partner, the type of relationship, the participants’ sex, and their sexual orientation were all used to predict their self-reported likelihood of entering a relationship. For the sake of clarity and simplicity, the main analyses merely compared heterosexuals to sexual minorities when using sexual orientation as an independent variable. In the subsequent analyses section, analyses are repeated with sexual minorities separated into three different groups (homosexual, bisexual, or “other”). However, as analysing sexual minorities as three separate groups did not alter the pattern of results, the simpler and clearer analyses were reported in the main analysis section.

Of the 3,453 participants with usable data, some opted not to respond to particular questions, apparently without any particular pattern to these omissions. For example, some would complete questions about South Asians, but not respond to questions about Black people. Due to these omissions there are some fluctuations in participant numbers and degrees of

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3 freedom for some of the later analyses. No manipulations or imputations were done to manage
4 these missing data. Participants were merely excluded from an analysis if they did not complete
5 the necessary measures and included in the analysis if they did complete the necessary measures.
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7 Retaining all participants for the analyses for which they did have sufficient data was done to
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14 retain maximum power for each analysis.

15 The data were analysed using a 4 (Target Race: White vs. Black vs. East Asian vs. South
16 Asian) x 2 (Relationship Type: Casual sex vs. Marriage) x 2 (Sex: Male vs. Female) x 2 (Sexual
17 Orientation: Heterosexual vs. Sexual Minority) mixed analysis of variance (ANOVA) with
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19 repeated-measures on the first 2 factors, likelihood of engaging in the relationship as the
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dependent variable, and Bonferroni-adjusted post-hoc tests if the independent variable had more
than 2 levels. Age was included as a covariate to account for the effects of that variable, but was
not central to the analyses and is not discussed further.

Using this method of analysis there were 24 main effects and interactions that could be
reported, many of which were irrelevant to the central hypotheses (e.g., the interaction between
relationship type and sexual orientation). Thus, this research focused exclusively on the main
effects of each of the predictors, the hypothesised interaction between *relationship target* and
relationship type, and any three-way or four-way interactions that further modified the
interaction between relationship target and relationship type. Bonferroni-adjusted post-hoc t-tests
were used to explore the interactions between relationship target and relationship type. Applying
the adjustment for multiple (i.e., 4) comparisons led to a significance cut-off value of .0125.

Following the main analyses, a series of subsequent analyses were performed to confirm
that the pattern of results persisted despite (a) analysing the data while treating different kinds of

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3 sexual minorities as three separate groups, rather than one group, (b) controlling for current
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5 relationship status, and (c) considering male and female participants separately.
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8 **Results**

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10 Full results for all relevant ANOVA analyses can be seen in Table 1. Table 2 shows the
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12 descriptive statistics relevant to the main effects and interactions identified below and described
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14 in Table 1. Only descriptive statistics that are not found in Table 2 are reported in the text below.
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17 **Main effects.** There was a significant main effect of relationship target (i.e., the race of
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19 the potential partner). As hypothesised, participants reported the highest likelihood of romantic
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21 involvement with White partners, who were rated higher than Black partners ($p < .001$), East
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23 Asian partners ($p < .001$), and South Asian partners ($p < .001$). Black partners were rated above
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25 East Asian partners ($p = .013$) and South Asian partners ($p < .001$), and East Asians were also
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27 rated above South Asians ($p = .001$).
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31 There was also a main effect of relationship type. Overall, participants reported that they
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33 were more likely to engage in casual sex than marriage. There was also a main effect of sex.
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35 Across all relationship targets and relationship types, men reported a higher likelihood of
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37 romantic involvement than did women. There was also a main effect of sexual orientation.
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39 Sexual minority participants reported a higher likelihood of romantic involvement ($M = 6.00$,
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41 $S.E. = .161$) than did heterosexual participants ($M = 5.59$, $S.E. = .052$). However, these main
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43 effects were not central to the hypotheses and are thus not discussed further.
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47 **Interaction between relationship target and relationship type.** As hypothesised, there
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49 was an interaction between relationship target and relationship type. This was in the
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51 hypothesised directions. Participants indicated a higher likelihood of marrying White partners
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53 than having casual sex with them; $t(3127) = 13.33$, $p < .001$. However, also as predicted, this
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3 pattern was reversed for racial minority partners; participants were more likely to have casual sex
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5 with them than marry them. This was the case for South Asian partners, $t(3002) = 2.95$, $p =$
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7 $.003$, East Asian partners, $t(3022) = 4.36$, $p < .001$, and Black partners, $t(2982) = 2.201$, $p =$
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9 $.028$ though the last difference was not significant at the Bonferonni-adjusted significance level
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12 (see Figure 1).
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15 There was also a significant three-way interaction between relationship target,
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17 relationship type and sex. However, this did not undermine the hypothesized two-way interaction
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19 between relationship target and type, but merely reflected the finding that the two-way
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21 interaction was expressed differently by male and female participants (see Figures 2a and 2b).
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23 Men reported a greater likelihood of having casual sex with (versus marrying) Black partners, t
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25 $(1498) = 9.74$, $p < .001$, East Asian partners, $t(1494) = 9.83$, $p < .001$ and South Asian partners,
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27 $t(1509) = 10.42$, $p < .001$. However, they reported no difference in their likelihood of having
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29 casual sex with White partners versus marrying White partners, $t(1542) = -.20$, $p = .84$.
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32 Contrastingly, women reported a preference for marriage (versus casual sex) with all racial
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34 groups: White; $t(1584) = -17.60$, $p < .001$; Black, $t(1483) = -7.20$, $p < .001$; East Asian, $t(1507)$
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36 $= -7.14$, $p < .001$ and South Asian, $t(1512) = -5.71$, $p < .001$. However this difference was
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38 largest for White partners (*mean difference* = 1.83) and smaller for Black, East Asian, and South
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40 Asian partners (*mean differences* = .56, .48, and .38 respectively).
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45 No other variable further modified the interaction of relationship target and relationship
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47 type. That is, there was no significant three-way interaction between relationship target,
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49 relationship type, and sexual orientation. Nor was there a significant four-way interaction
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51 between relationship target, relationship type, sex, and sexual orientation (see Table 1).
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3 **Supplementary analyses.** Further analyses were conducted to confirm that the pattern of
4 results was not altered by variables not considered in the main analyses. First, further analyses
5 confirmed that the pattern of results persisted when participants who identified as “homosexual”,
6 “bisexual” or “other” were treated as three separate groups, rather than a single group (i.e.,
7 “sexual minorities”). As predicted, the two-way interaction between relationship target and
8 relationship type remained significant; $F(3, 8298) = 2.63, p = .048$. The three-way interaction
9 between relationship target, relationship type and sexual orientation remained non-significant; F
10 $(9, 8298) = .93, p = .50$, as did the four-way interaction between relationship target, relationship
11 type, sex and sexual orientation $F(9, 8298) = 1.34, p = .21$.

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24 Further analyses also confirmed that the pattern of results persisted when marital status
25 (*unmarried versus married or in a civil partnership*) was included as a covariate. Again, the two-
26 way interaction between relationship target and relationship type remained significant; $F(3,$
27 $8307) = 4.08, p = .007$. The three-way interaction between relationship target, relationship type
28 and sexual orientation remained non-significant, $F(3, 8307) = .71, p = .55$, as did the four-way
29 interaction between relationship target, relationship type, sex and sexual orientation $F(3, 8307)$
30 $= .43, p = .74$. Finally, further analyses confirmed that the two-way interaction between
31 relationship target and relationship type remained significant for both men, $F(2.49, 3489.86) =$
32 $21.61, p < .001$, and women $F(1.83, 2478.47) = 19.09, p < .001$, when the two groups were
33 considered separately.

47 Discussion

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49 Using a large, diverse (in age, region and sexual orientation) sample of White British
50 people, this study investigated whether racial bias was detectable in White participants' self-
51 reported likelihood of engaging in casual sex versus committed relationships with other White
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3 partners versus racial minority partners. Specifically, it found that White participants reported a
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5 general preference for other White partners across both relationship types, a relative preference
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7 for marriage (versus casual sex) with White partners, and a reversed preference for casual sex
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9 (versus marriage) with racial minority partners. This pattern occurred regardless of sex or sexual
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11 orientation. These findings are discussed below with reference to implications, study design and
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13 limitations, and possible future research.
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17 **Implications**

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19 Much research has investigated intergroup interactions that may seem positive at first
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21 glance, but that reveal prejudice when more deeply examined. A well-known example is the
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23 endorsement of positive racial stereotypes, such as the idea that Asians are good at maths, or that
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25 Black people are good at sports (Kay, Day, Zanna, & Nussbaum, 2013; Shih, Pittinsky, &
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27 Ambady, 1999). Another example is benevolent sexism: the idea that women need to be
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29 specially cherished and protected (Becker & Wright, 2011; Glick & Fiske, 1996).
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33 This study highlighted another possible example of intergroup prejudice presented in
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35 ostensibly positive tones. As this current research shows, an increase in a certain kind of
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37 interethnic relationship - one characterised by sexual attraction but little or no commitment –
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39 might in fact be indicative of *more* racial prejudice, not less. Prior research has investigated the
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41 experiences of racial minorities in interethnic relationships, and uncovered evidence of reported
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43 sexualisation, exotification, and lack of commitment (Balsam et al., 2011; Follins et al., 2014).
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45 This occurs for both heterosexuals (Herman & Campbell, 2012) and sexual minorities (Paul et
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47 al., 2010) and includes experiences like “being seen as a sex object by other LGBT people
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49 because of your race/ethnicity” and, “feeling like White LGBT people are only interested in you
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51 for your appearance” (Balsam et al., 2011, p. 169). This current research adds to that body of
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15 Interethnic sex and marriage

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3 evidence with quantitative indications from White British people about their relatively lower
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5 interest in racial minorities as committed partners, as well as a useful theoretical framework for
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7 understanding these responses.
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10 Concerning this theoretical framework, these findings were understood in line with social
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12 structural theory: the concern for maximising resources within the boundaries of social norms
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14 and expectations, and taking into account the relative value placed on different social identities
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16 (Eagly & Wood, 1999; Miller et al., 2004). That said, this discussion would be incomplete
17
18 without acknowledging other potential factors, such as a perception that interethnic relationships
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20 are more difficult (Feng, Boyle, Ham, & Raab, 2012), an acknowledgement of the social
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22 negativity interethnic relationships face (Wang et al., 2006), or the perceptions that racial
23
24 minorities may be less inclined to have committed relationships with White people (Muttarak &
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26 Heath, 2010).
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30 A particularly relevant concern is the possible role of sexual stereotypes. For example,
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32 Black people (both men and women) are stereotyped as being aggressive, hypersexual, and
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34 masculine (Childs, 2005; Slatton & Spates, 2016): stereotypes that can make White women find
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36 Black men more attractive, and White men find Black women less attractive. Conversely, East
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38 Asians are stereotyped as being very submissive and feminine (Cho, 1998; Wilkins, Chan, &
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40 Kaiser, 2011), which can make White women find East Asian men less attractive, and White
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42 men find East Asian women more attractive. Thus, stereotypes of Black men as possessing larger
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44 penises and stronger sexual drives can lead to racial objectification, while stereotypes of East
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46 Asian men as passive and unsuitable for casual sex can leave them excluded from consideration
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48 for casual hook ups (Paul et al., 2010; Spell, 2017). Stereotypes of both Black and East Asian
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50 women can lead to (albeit different kinds of) exclusion, exotification, or expectations of sexual
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16 Interethnic sex and marriage

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3 promiscuity or subservience (Childs, 2005; Cho, 1998). These stereotypes affect sexual
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5 encounters among both heterosexuals and sexual minorities (Cho, 1998; Paul et al., 2010; Spell,
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7 2017).
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10 There is some evidence of these sexual stereotypes at play in these current data. As would
11
12 be expected from these stereotypes, White male participants reported a preference for East Asian
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14 partners over Black partners, while White female participants reported a preference for Black
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16 partners over East Asian partners. Nonetheless, sexual stereotypes do not appear to be the
17
18 dominant explanatory mechanism in this case. Though there were differences in overall
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20 preferences for particular racial groups, it is noteworthy that the White participants responded
21
22 similarly to all sexual minorities concerning the relative preference for casual sex over marriage.
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24 There was no indication, in these data, that participants were basing their responses on
25
26 stereotypes about casual sex. Rather, the pattern of results more strongly aligned with a social-
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28 structural perspective: racial minorities, because of their non-White status, were seen as less
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30 socially advantageous and particularly less suitable for committed relationships.
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34 **Study Design, Limitations and Future Research**

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37 This study has a number of important strengths that should be acknowledged. It is widely
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39 accepted that too much social-psychological research takes place in laboratory settings with non-
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41 representative student samples as participants (Dixon, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2005; Henrich,
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43 Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010; Sears, 1986). This research benefitted from a large, diverse sample
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45 of non-student participants, making these findings more reliable and generalizable than many
46
47 others. Participant age was skewed, with an over-representation of older adults, but this was
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49 statistically controlled by including age as a covariate in the analyses.
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17 Interethnic sex and marriage

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3 This study only looked at two types of romantic/sexual interaction: (a) casual sex with no
4 commitment, and (b) marriage, arguably the strongest commitment possible. Clearly, these are
5 extremes of human sexual and romantic interactions along the continuum of commitment. It
6 seems reasonable to assume that these findings continue to apply at points along that continuum,
7 however future research would benefit from investigating that hypothesis directly. Similarly, this
8 study used only single-item measures to investigate responses to different target groups and
9 different types of relationships. This raises some concerns about the reliability of the measures,
10 and how they would relate to other measures of intergroup romantic responses. However,
11 contrary to many expectations, some research in a variety of social-psychological domains has
12 found single-item measures to have a predictive validity similar to (even, at times, equal to) that
13 of multi-item measures (Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2007; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Wanous,
14 Reichers, & Hudy, 1997). Nonetheless, future research with multi-item measures would be
15 useful for replicating and extending these findings.
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33 This research investigated participants' self-reported likelihood of engaging in different
34 kinds of relationships with people of various races. However, it did not investigate actual
35 *behaviour* between members of different racial groups. It must be acknowledged, as previous
36 research has found, that statements of intention or predictions of one's behaviour may not match
37 one's *actual* behaviour (see, e.g., Eastwick & Finkel, 2008). It is thus important for future
38 research to investigate behaviour directly. The potential limitation of self-presentation biases
39 should also be acknowledged. Strong social norms encourage women to state a preference for
40 committed relationships over casual sex, avoid casual sex due to the associated stigma, and
41 refuse to admit to casual sex even when they do have it (Baranowski & Hecht, 2015; Clark &
42 Hatfield, 1989; Conley, Ziegler, & Moors, 2013; Garcia, Seibold-Simpson, Massey, &
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18 Interethnic sex and marriage

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3 Merriwether, 2015; Hald & Høgh-Olsen, 2015). That said, in this research, male and female
4 participants both rated themselves reasonably likely to engage in casual sex. Women also rated
5 themselves as more likely to have casual sex with White partners than to marry partners of any
6 other race, suggesting that attitudes to casual sex did not hinder the expression of racial bias,
7 which was the central variable of interest.
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15 Also related to self-presentation biases, one must note the widespread and powerful
16 social norm of egalitarianism in predominantly White, Western countries (Butz & Plant, 2009;
17 Legault et al., 2007). However, this norm should encourage participants to mask their interethnic
18 biases, not exaggerate them. This research was explicit in nature and used a within-participants
19 design in which participants could observe the comparisons being made. Thus, it is likely that
20 participants' genuine levels of interethnic bias were higher, not lower than revealed here. Related
21 to this concern, a non-negligible portion of the participants opted not to respond to questions
22 about racial preference in partner selection, which raises questions about the possible differences
23 between the participants who completed those questions and those who did not. Again, however,
24 given overt and widespread egalitarian norms, it seems likely that those who opted not to
25 respond were *more* ethnically biased, rather than less. This likelihood is bolstered by the fact that
26 women were more likely to omit their responses than men were; prior research has consistently
27 found that women show more racial bias in intimate partner selection than men do (King &
28 Bratter, 2007; Mendelsohn et al., 2014). Still, future research could explore similar themes using
29 more deception or implicit measures of bias that would circumvent attempts at self-presentation.
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49 This research exclusively used White participants. Racial minorities' responses were not
50 investigated. This was done for practical reasons. Subgroups of racial and sexual minorities (e.g.,
51 Black gay men) drawn from the larger, national data set would have been too small to reliably
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19 Interethnic sex and marriage

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2
3 conduct the analyses relevant here. Furthermore, even if similar analyses were conducted, it is
4
5 important to note that preferences for one's own racial group may have very different
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7 implications in White participants versus racial minority participants. Intragroup preferences for
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9 White people are largely grounded conservative values, racial bias and a belief in White
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11 superiority (Eastwick, Richeson, Son, & Finkel, 2009; Miller et al., 2004; Murstein et al., 1989).
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13 Conversely, intragroup preferences in racial minorities can be based on liberal values, deliberate
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15 rejection of dominant narratives, or attempts to foster a positive racial identity in a broader
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17 context of negativity (Eastwick et al., 2009; Reich et al., 2000; Tatum, 2004).
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22 Still, the question of racial minority preferences remains an important and interesting one,
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24 particularly from the social-structural perspective. Prior research shows that racial minorities are
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26 more likely than White people to be romantically involved with members of *their own race*, but
27
28 show biases toward *other racial minorities* that follow patterns similar to the biases of White
29
30 people. For example, Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan (1995) found that White and Latino men were
31
32 most likely to exclude Black women when considering interethnic marriage, but White and
33
34 Latina women were most likely to exclude East Asian men. Furthermore, even within racial
35
36 minority groups there are biases that align with social structural theory. For example, in many
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38 Black, East Asian and Latino communities, there is not only a prevalent preference for lighter
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40 skin (particularly light-skinned women), there is also a perception that lighter-skinned partners
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42 are more suitable for marriage or committed relationships, as opposed to casual sex (Faulkner,
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44 2003; Glascock & Ruggiero, 2004; Hill, 2017; Li, Min, & Belk, 2008; Stephens & Few-Demo,
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46 2007). Future research on these intra-ethnic preferences could provide important information
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51 about racial minority perspectives, as well as further support for social structural theory.
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20 Interethnic sex and marriage

Conclusion

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Rightly or wrongly, interethnic romantic relationships are often perceived as a powerful indicator of positive relationships between different racial groups (Alba & Nee, 2009; Ford, 2008; Muttarak & Heath, 2010; Song, 2009). This study, however, suggests that caution is warranted before such unilaterally positive conclusions are drawn. Across a large, diverse sample of White British participants there was clear evidence of a general pro-White bias in romantic partner selection and, in line with social structural theory, a more specific bias in favour of White partners for committed relationships and racial minority partners for casual sex. These results, evident across participants of different sexes and sexual orientations, offer new insights into partner selection, sexual behaviour, and the sometimes complex manifestations of contemporary interethnic bias.

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Table 1: *Main effects and relevant interactions of potential partner race (White vs. Black vs. East Asian vs. South Asian), relationship type (marriage vs. casual sex), sex, and sexual orientation on self-reported likelihood of entering a relationship (with repeated measures on the first two predictors).*

Predictor	<i>F</i>	df ₁	df ₂	<i>p</i>	η_p^2
Race of potential partner	164.88	2.01	5568.87	< .001	.056
Relationship type	23.25	1	2770	< .001	.008
Participant sex	36.68	1	2770	< .001	.013
Participant sexual orientation	6.05	1	2770	.014	.002
Race of potential partner x Relationship type	3.21	2.16	5980.19	.036	.001
Race of potential partner x Relationship type x Participant sex	3.97	2.16	5980.19	.016	.001
Race of potential partner x Relationship type x Participant sexual orientation	2.20	2.16	5980.19	.12	.001
Race of potential partner x Relationship type x Participant sex x Participant sexual orientation	.42	2.16	5980.19	.68	< .001

Notes: For degrees of freedom, df₁ = numerator and df₂ = denominator. Partial eta squared (η_p^2) is a measure of effect size widely used in *F* tests. As a rule of thumb .01, .06, and .14 are small, medium, and large effect sizes respectively. The sphericity assumption was

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3 not met in the ANOVA, thus Greenhous-Geisser adjusted results are reported. For sex, 1 = *male* and 2 = *female*. Sexual orientation
4 was assessed by self-identification: 1 = *heterosexual*, 0 = *sexual minority* (i.e., lesbian/gay, bisexual or “other”). Age was included as
5 a covariate: 1 = 18 – 24, 2 = 25 – 34, 3 = 35 – 44, 4 = 45 – 54, 5 = 55 and older.
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Table 2: *Likelihood of entering into a relationship according to the race of the potential relationship partner (White, Black, East Asian or South Asian), the type of relationship (marriage or casual sex), and the sex of the participant.*

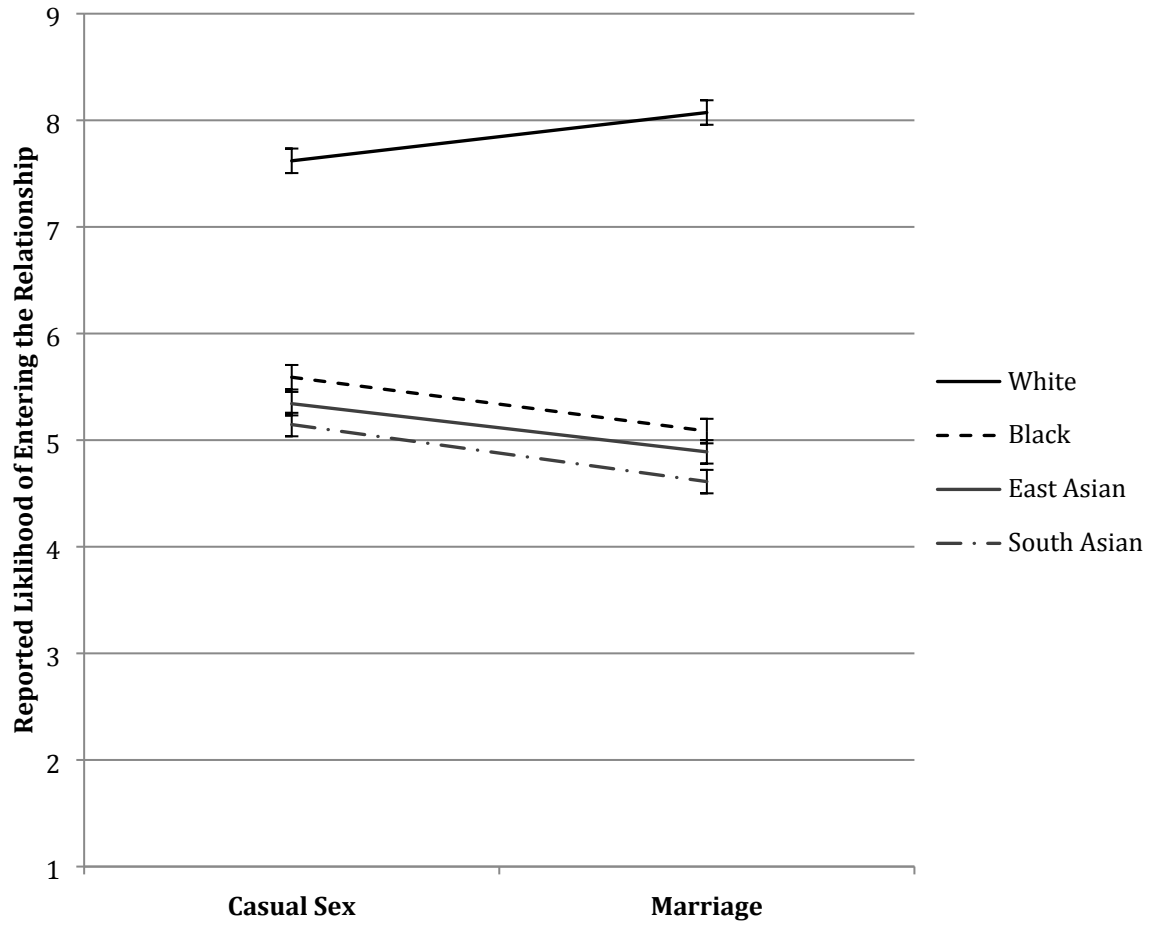
	Separated by Sex		Total Sample
	Men (<i>n</i> = 1412) M (S.E.)	Women (<i>n</i> = 1363) M (S.E.)	(<i>n</i> = 2775) M (S.E.)
Relationships with White partners (Averaged across both types of relationship)	8.33 (.12)	7.36 (.15)	7.85 (.10)
Marriage to White partners	8.50 (.10)	8.48 (.09)	8.07 (.12)
Casual sex with White partners	8.32 (.11)	6.62 (.10)	7.62 (.12)
Relationships with Black partners (Averaged across both types of relationship)	5.74 (.13)	4.93 (.17)	5.34 (.11)
Marriage to Black partners	5.43 (.11)	4.72 (.10)	5.09 (.12)
Casual sex with Black partners	6.09 (.10)	4.14 (.10)	5.90 (.12)
Relationships with East Asian partners (Averaged across both types of relationship)	5.78 (.13)	4.46 (.17)	5.12 (.10)
Marriage to East Asian partners	5.75 (.10)	3.82 (.10)	4.89 (.11)
Casual sex with East Asians	6.44 (.10)	3.31 (.10)	5.34 (.11)
Relationships with South Asian partners (Averaged across both types of relationship)	5.36 (.13)	4.40 (.17)	4.88 (.10)
Marriage to South Asian partners	5.07 (.10)	3.67 (.10)	4.61 (.11)
Casual sex with South Asian partners	5.78 (.10)	3.25 (.10)	5.15 (.12)
All relationships (Averaged across relationship types and ethnicities)	6.30 (.10)	5.29 (.13)	5.80 (.12)
Marriage (Averaged across all target ethnicities)	5.76 (.11)	5.57 (.15)	5.67 (.09)

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Casual sex (Averaged across all target ethnicities)	6.85 (.12)	5.00 (.16)	5.93 (.10)
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Notes: Responses range from 1 (very unlikely) to 11 (very likely) Standard errors are shown in parentheses.

Figure 1: Likelihood of entering a relationship according to the type of relationship and race of the potential partner (responses ranged from 1 = very unlikely to 11 = very likely).



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Figure 2a: Men’s likelihood of entering a relationship according to the type of relationship and race of the potential partner (responses ranged from 1 = very unlikely to 11 = very likely).

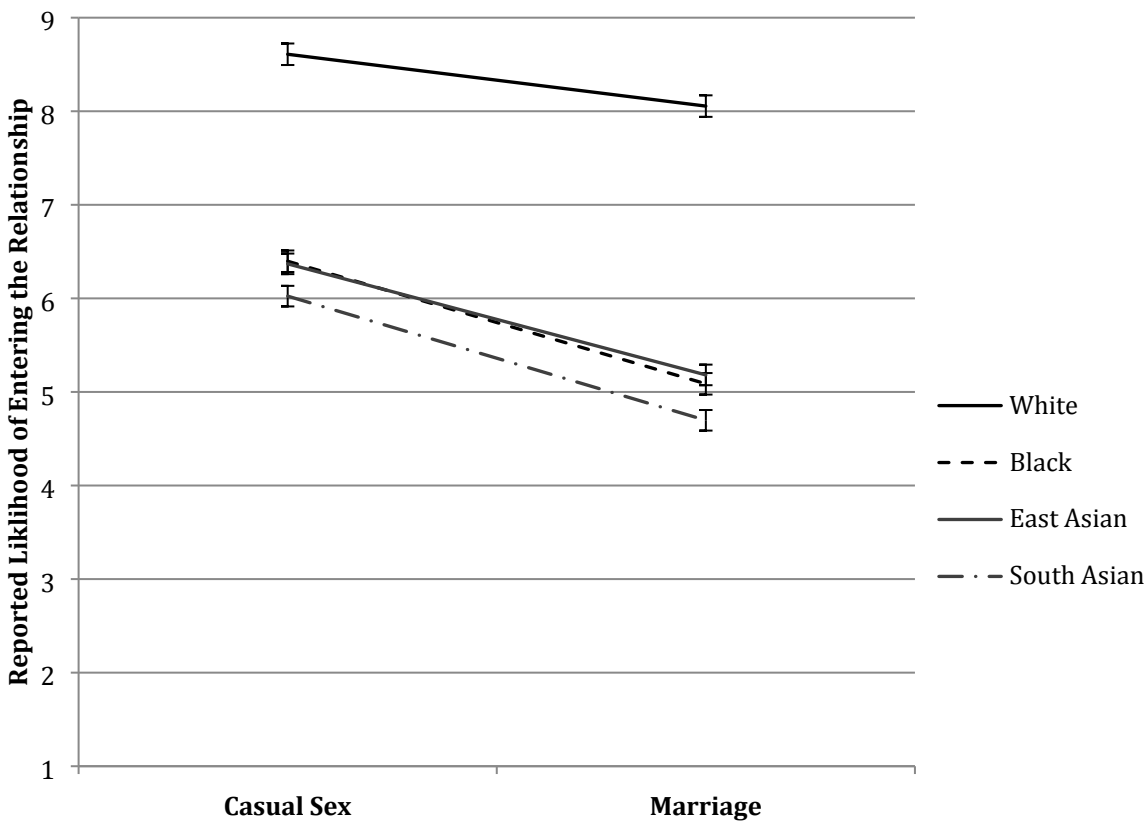


Figure 2b: Women's likelihood of entering a relationship according to the type of relationship and race of the potential partner (responses ranged from 1 = very unlikely to 11 = very likely).

