Patterns of Racial-Ethnic Exclusion by Internet Daters

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Using data from 6070 U.S. heterosexual internet dating profiles, this study examines how racial and gender exclusions are revealed in the preferences of black, Latino, Asian and white online daters. Consistent with social exchange and group positions theories, the study finds that whites are least open to out-dating and that, unlike blacks, Asians and Latinos have patterns of racial exclusion similar to those of whites. Like blacks, higher earning groups including Asian Indians, Middle Easterners and Asian men are highly excluded, suggesting that economic incorporation may not mirror acceptance in intimate settings. Finally, racial exclusion in dating is gendered; Asian males and black females are more highly excluded than their opposite-sex counterparts, suggesting that existing theories of race relations need to be expanded to account for gendered racial acceptance.

Scholars argue that recent U.S. demographic changes are replacing our historically binary race relations system with a more complicated system of racial stratification, in which Latinos, Asian Americans, Middle Easterners and Asian Indians enjoy a status different from both whites and blacks (Bonilla-Silva 2004; Gans 1999; Lee and Bean 2007). Such racial boundaries and hierarchies are reflected not only in the economic and structural realm, but also in the domain of intimacy (Blumer 1958). However, limited research has explored the complexity of racial exclusion in multiethnic romantic settings. Using a sample of internet dating profiles, we examine racial exclusion by whites, blacks, Asians and Latinos within the realm of heterosexual romantic relationships. Our analyses shed light on the social distance that groups feel towards one another in the domain of intimacy, revealing how willing different groups are to cross racial boundaries, and which racial-gender groups are most included and excluded.

Our approach contributes to the understanding of interracial relations in several ways. First, examining stated acceptance of other racial-ethnic groups as dates may overcome some of the limitations in using actual pairings or abstract attitudes to measure social distance between racial groups. Marriage and dating outcomes are influenced by both preferences and opportunities, but cannot distinguish between the two. On the other hand, surveys of attitudes and social distance scales are limited to hypothetical scenarios (Bogardus 1968; Yancey 2003). In contrast, our data provide a rare opportunity to examine people's stated preferences in a real-life situation. Second, the literature on interracial dating and racial boundaries generally focuses on white-minority relationships, ignoring

We thank Golnaz Komaie, Rennie Lee and Edelina Burciaga for their research assistance, and the editor and anonymous reviewers of Social Forces *for their helpful comments. This project was funded by grants from the UCI Council on Research, Computing and Library Resources and the UCI Center for the Study of Latinos in a Global Society.* *Direct correspondence to Belinda Robnett, Department of Sociology, University of California, Irvine, 3151 Social Science Plaza , Irvine, CA 92697. E-mail: brobnett@uci.edu. Or, Cynthia Feliciano, Department of Sociology, University of California, Irvine, 3151 Social Science Plaza, Irvine, CA 92697. E-mail: felician@uci.edu.*

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inter-minority pairings. Our study systematically considers the exclusion and inclusion of Asians, Latinos[1] and blacks, beyond their relationships with whites, and is the first to examine the extent to which whites and minorities are willing to include Asian Indians and Middle Easterners as possible dates. Third, we move beyond existing theories of racial-ethnic relations by considering how racial preferences differ by gender.

Background

Theoretical Perspectives on Interracial Intimacy

Previous studies indicate racial homogamy in dating is strong among all racial groups (i.e., Blackwell and Lichter 2004; Joyner and Kao 2005). Assimilation theory posits that a shared racial identity is a powerful determinant of in-group marital preferences (Gordon 1964; Kalmijn 1998). Similarly, the evolutionary psychology perspective asserts that "similarity overwhelmingly is the rule in human mating."(Buss and Schmitt 1993:205) According to these perspectives, the majority of our online daters should prefer to date within their own racial-ethnic group.

Other theories suggest different preferences for racial homogamy among racial groups. Social exchange theories argue that lower status racial-ethnic groups trade wealth and education for a racially higher status mate (Davis 1941; Merton 1941). Minority group members who intermarry with whites exchange their higher socio-economic status for the higher racial status of a white spouse (Blackwell and Lichter 2000; Kalmijn 1993; Qian 1997). Nonwhite daters gain status by dating *any* white. Whites, on the other hand, have little to gain by dating minorities unless the latter can elevate their economic status. Similarly, Blumer (1958) posits that, as the historically dominant group, whites solidify and maintain their group position through prejudice towards others. According to social exchange and group position theories then, Asians, Latinos and blacks of similar socio-economic status should be more open than whites to outdating and more open to dating whites than whites are to dating them.

Existing theories also suggest differences in the degree of acceptance or exclusion different racial-ethnic groups may face in dating markets. According to the social exchange perspective and classic assimilation theory, those minority groups that enjoy greater secondary structural integration, as measured by income, educational attainment and residential integration, should enjoy greater primary structural incorporation or close, personal ties with out-group members (Aguirre et al. 1989). In terms of secondary structural assimilation, the education and income levels of Asians, Middle Easterners and East Indians exceed that of the U.S. population (Census 2004ad). In comparison to these groups, the education and income levels of blacks and Latinos are similarly low (Census 2004bc), with blacks having the lowest rates of residential integration with whites, followed by Latinos (Iceland et al. 2002). Based on the secondary structural assimilation of Middle Easterners, East Indians and Asians, one might expect whites to prefer dating those groups over Latinos, and to least prefer dating blacks.

Several scholars provide a more fluid conceptualization of assimilation processes than classic assimilation theorists, arguing that minority groups, not just the majority group,

influence racial boundary crossings (Alba and Nee 2003). Groups may develop segmented assimilation patterns, such as selective acculturation, accepting secondary structural incorporation, but resisting cultural or primary structural incorporation (Portes and Zhou 1993). Such groups may be less willing to out date. Similarly, whites may be more open to the secondary structural incorporation of some minority groups, but not accept them in the domain of intimacy. Assimilation processes are complex (Feagin and Feagin 1999), and unfortunately, we are unable to distinguish our daters by important factors such as national origin, wave of immigration or family background. Nevertheless, our analyses can reveal whether whites are more willing to date some minority groups, and whether, in the process of assimilating, minorities may contribute to racial boundary entrenchment for other minority groups by excluding them as possible dates.

While limited research has focused on the primary structural assimilation of Middle Easterners or East Indians, recent studies argue that similar to the inclusion of European immigrant groups, the boundaries of "whiteness" are extending to include Latinos and Asians, but remain closed to blacks (i.e., Feliciano 2001; Lee and Bean 2007). Evidence for this thesis is found in both the greater acceptance by whites of Latinos and Asians than blacks, and also the greater acceptance *of* whites than blacks by Latinos and Asians. For example, whites are more accepting of their children marrying Asians and Latinos than blacks (Gallagher 2003; Yancey 2003) and, in turn, intermarriage between whites and Latinos or Asians is much more common than black-white intermarriage (Qian and Lichter 2007). Moreover, Asians and Latinos rate whites and one another more favorably than blacks (Niemann et al. 1994), and both groups prefer to live with whites over blacks (Charles 2000).

Few studies have comparatively assessed the Latino, Asian and black acceptance rates of minority groups. While Latinos and Asians out-marry with whites, or inter-ethnically (i.e., Japanese Americans with Korean Americans), they are less likely to intermarry with other racial-ethnic groups (Qian and Lichter 2007). Attitudinal and social distance research shows that other than their own racial-ethnic group, blacks, Latinos, and Asians feel the least social distance from whites (Parrillo and Donoghue 2005), and are more open to living in neighborhoods with whites than with one another (Zubrinsky and Bobo 1996). Although assimilation processes may manifest in varying ways (Feagin and Feagin 1999), the classic assimilation perspective, consistent with the aforementioned studies, suggests that Asians, Latinos and blacks will prefer to date whites over one another, and that Latinos and Asians will be more open to dating one another than they will be to dating blacks. However, much of the research considered thus far does not consider the extent to which racial-ethnic exclusion may be gendered.

Theoretical Perspectives on Gender and Intimacy

Recent studies acknowledge different gender trends in out-marriage (e.g., Farley 1999; Qian 2002) that may be explained by gender differences in mate selection strategies and criteria. Buss and Schmitt (1993) show women favor long-term commitment, and are choosier about several mate characteristics, even for short-term relationships (Buss

2003); these results, they argue, are consistent with different sexual strategies stemming from evolution. Several studies confirm that women are less willing to out-marry than are men (Tucker and Kernan 1995; Yancey 2002), and place more emphasis on selecting a same-race partner than men (Fisman et al. 2006). Collectively, these studies predict that women will be choosier, that is, have more criteria for dates and be more likely to select a same-race date than men.

Social exchange (Stewart et al. 2000) and sexual strategies theories argue that women favor men with greater access to resources, including income and employment opportunities, status and power (Buss 2003). According to racial-economic exchange theory, males from minority groups with high average economic status such as East Indians, Middle Easterners and Asians, should have higher rates of intermarriage than men with less socio-economic status such as Latinos and blacks. It follows from both social exchange and sexual strategies theories that women should prefer dating white, Asian, Middle Eastern and East Indian men than black or Latino men.

Previous research suggests that gender may intersect with race in shaping racial dating preferences. Intermarriage studies show that Asian women and black men are more likely to marry whites than their counterparts of the other sex (e.g., Crowder and Tolnay 2000; Farley 1999; Jacobs and Labov 2002; Qian and Lichter 2007). However, existing theories cannot explain *why* these gender differences in marital outcomes exist or whether they are due to opportunity or preference.[2] If preferences are driving interracial marriage, then dating preferences should exhibit similar patterns with Asian women and black men more desired as dates than Asian men or black women. These patterns of exclusion would also be consistent with scholarship arguing that the racialized cultural portrayals of Asian masculinity and black femininity are often far from the ideal (Collins 2004; Espiritu 1997).

The current study is informed by existing scholarship on race relations, interracial intimacy and gender and intimacy, but takes a unique approach to understanding these issues by using data from real-life internet daters. We ask two main questions: (1. How do black, Latino and Asian online daters' racial preferences compare to those of each other and of whites? (2. How does gender shape racial exclusion in online dating?

Data and Methods

We collected data from internet dating profiles posted on Yahoo Personals, which was the most popular national on-line dating website (Madden and Lenhart 2006), from September 2004 through May 2005. At the time of data collection, posting dating profiles on Yahoo Personals was free. On their profiles, daters filled out a checklist of demographic information about themselves, such as age, sex, educational level and ethnicity. Daters selected 1 of 10 choices in response to the question, "my ethnicity is mostly…" The options included Black/African-American, Asian, Caucasian/White, East Indian, Hispanic/Latino, Middle Eastern, Native-American, Pacific Islander, Inter-racial or Other. Daters could only designate one ethnicity option, or they could refuse to answer (I"ll tell you later").

We selected 200 profiles each from men and women who self-identified as black, white, Latino or Asian[3] living within 50 miles of four major U.S. cities: New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and Atlanta, for a total sample size of 6,070.[4] These metropolitan areas allow for regional diversity (West, Northeast, Midwest and South), and include cities thought to be the most diverse and tolerant (Los Angeles and New York), as well as cities that are considered more conservative (Atlanta). Because we view racial preferences as inputs into eventual marriage and childbearing outcomes, we limited the sample to those ages 18-50, who were only seeking heterosexual dates. To extract our sample, we first used the search criteria on the website to display all the profiles for each gender and race combination in the age range within 50 miles of each city. Then, to get as representative a sample as possible *within* each race/gender combination in each city, we sorted profiles by how recently they were posted or edited; we then selected the first 200 profiles that appeared within each race/gender/city. We wanted to eliminate any potential for bias that might have resulted from selecting directly from the default order in which the profiles appeared on the site (it was unknown how the order was determined) or by sorting by other possible criteria, such as age or distance from the city center.

We coded all the demographic information about the person who posted the profile (age, sex, race, education, occupation, etc, and information about the characteristics they seek in a date (age, body type, education, race, etc.). Daters stated preferences for up to 19 particular characteristics, including ethnicity, or left the default as "any," to indicate that they had no preference. If they wished to state a racial/ethnic preference, daters selected one or more out of 10 groups they might prefer to date by checking the corresponding boxes. Those groups include Caucasian (white), African-American (black), Asian, Hispanic/Latino, Middle Eastern, Native American, Pacific Islander, East Indian, Inter-racial and Other. Choices could not be ranked.

We also collected information on the racial composition of the municipalities/towns that each date reported as their place of residence on their profiles, using data from the 2005 American Community Survey. The percentages of non-Hispanic whites, non-Hispanic blacks, Latinos and Asians in each daters' specific municipality were then merged to the final dataset.[5]

Data Considerations

There are some limitations to using internet data to examine racial/ethnic preferences in dating. The first concern is that the selection of people who choose to date on the internet are not a random sample of the whole population. Although internet use has expanded exponentially in recent years, internet users are still a select sample, and this is especially so among blacks and Latinos (see Mack 2001; Jayajit and Bosman 2005). For example, around the time of our data collection, 70 percent of whites used the internet, compared to only 57 percent of blacks (Fox 2005). Internet use among Latinos varies by language: internet use among English-dominant or bilingual Latinos is similar to whites, but only 33 percent of Spanish-dominant Latinos use the internet (Fox 2005). However, the most inequality in internet use is found by socio-economic

status; those with the lowest income and education levels are far less likely to go online across and within all racial/ethnic groups (Martin and Robinson 2007). Thus, our data cannot be generalized beyond the population of U.S. internet users, who have higher socio-economic status than the general U.S. population. The sample of blacks and Latinos is even more selective than the sample of whites and Asians in this regard, and the sample of Latinos also underrepresents recent immigrants.

In addition, although internet dating has become, by most accounts, a mainstream practice in recent years (Sautter et al. 2010), internet daters may still be a select group of single internet users. However, recent survey research suggests that internet daters do not differ in socio-economic or demographic characteristics (such as gender, race or education) from single internet users who do not use internet dating services (Sautter et al. 2010). The strongest determinants of internet dating among single internet users were whether respondents were actively looking for a partner and whether they knew someone who had tried online dating (Sautter et al. 2010). The same survey found that nearly three of four internet users who are single and looking for romantic partners have used the internet to find dates (Madden and Lenhart 2006).[6]

A further sample selection issue was the possibility of self-selecting minorities who are especially open to interracial dating. This might be the case if Yahoo Personals were dominated by whites; minority daters also have the option to use ethnic-specific websites. However, whites are actually underrepresented on the website compared to their representation among internet users in all the regions except for Los Angeles (where their representation approximates the percentage of internet users). In general, the racial distribution of internet daters on Yahoo Personals closely approximates the racial distribution of internet users in the four regions and does not vary substantially by gender (information available upon request). Thus, we have little reason to expect that the racial makeup of the Yahoo dating pool would affect racial preferences any more than racial preferences are shaped by the racial makeup of the communities in which the daters live, a factor we consider in our analysis.

A related selection issue is that internet daters might be especially choosy about who they date (and thus unable to find their preferred dates off-line). We account for this possibility by examining differences in racial exclusion *controlling* for how choosy the dater is in general.

A consideration of these sample selection issues suggests that, while our sample is not representative of the general population, it closely represents well-educated internet users interested in meeting a romantic partner.[7] Importantly, the sample selection also does not bias our results in any clear direction in terms of racial exclusion; in fact, we might expect *more* openness towards interracial dating in our study than among the general population since the website is multi-ethnic. Online daters are also found to be more socially liberal compared to others (Madden and Lenhart 2006), and more educated respondents have been shown to express more positive racial attitudes (Bobo and Massagli 2001).

A final consideration is that, given that people post these profiles to "sell themselves" to potential dates, there may be some misrepresentation in daters' self-de-

scriptions and stated preferences. Indeed, misrepresentation of age and physical characteristics is common among internet daters, although scholars find no gender or ethnic differences in the levels of mispresentation (Cornwell and Lundgren 2001).[8] Further, we are not concerned with the effects of respondents' characteristics (age, height, body type, education) per se, as much as we are with their stated preferences. A greater potential problem is that daters may not accurately state their preferences. Daters who want to appear politicially correct, for example, might state that they are open to dating all racial groups, even if that is not true. Indeed, a study of on-line contact among the users of an internet dating website shows that individuals who *state* preferences are more likely to behave in accordance with their stated preferences than those who choose the default option that they are open to all racial groups (Hitsch et al. 2010). If misrepresentation of preferences occurs, it is likely in the direction of *including* racial groups daters are *not* actually open to dating. Daters who express racial preferences have no reason to *exclude* groups that they are open to dating. Thus, we focus our analysis primarily on questions of exclusion – which groups do whites, blacks, Asians and Latinos *not* want to date?

Notwithstanding their limitations, the data hold a number of advantages. First, even if not representative of the general population, internet dating pools are not trivial: approximately 16 million Americans use such services, and Yahoo Personals had more than 6 million unique visitors each month (Madden and Lenhart 2006). Most importantly, our data provide a rare opportunity to examine how people behave in a real-life situation, unlike attitudinal surveys or social distance scales based on hypothetical scenarios. Further, in contrast to marriage and dating *outcomes* (Harris and Ono 2005), stated racial preferences are not necessarily limited by physical proximity. On the internet, individuals are free to state preferences for groups they might not normally come into contact with in their everyday lives. Therefore, stated racial preferences in an actual search for a date may be a better indicator of the social distance between groups than dating or marriage outcomes.

Measures, Control Variables and Analysis Plan

To assess racial preferences and exclusion, we examined several dichotomous outcomes. Because daters selected from 10 racial/ethnic groups for potential dates, our sample includes numerous possible responses to the question of which racial groups were preferred, ranging from 138 unique combinations among black males, to 84 unique combinations among white females (results available upon request). To simplify the analyses, we focused on nine dichotomous outcomes: whether the dater stated a racial preference at all, whether he/she preferred to date only others of the same race, and whether the dater excluded as possible dates persons of his/her own race, whites, blacks, Latinos, Asians, East Indians and Middle Easterners.

We controlled for several demographic factors and personal characteristics that could potentially be confounded with race or gender and racial preferences (see Appendix Table 1). Although by design the sample is nearly evenly divided between Los Angeles, New

York, Chicago and Atlanta, we controlled for metropolitan area. We also controlled for age, which ranged from an average of approximately 29 years old (Latinas) to 34 years old (white males). We controlled for educational attainment given pronounced racial differences in education. Personal characteristics, including body type, height, political views and religion, may be related to racial preferences and also vary by race and gender.

The racial composition of the city and community in which daters live may also affect their racial preferences. From a mate availability perspective, minorities who live in areas with few co-ethnics may increase their dating options by selecting other groups. To assess racial and gender differences free from this confounding factor, we controlled for the percentage of one's own racial group in models predicting exclusion and preference for one's own group, and we controlled for the percentage of whites, blacks, Asians or Latinos in models predicting the exclusion of these groups.

We also considered racial differences in preferences for characteristics other than race, including religion, education, body type and height. Women are more likely than men to state preferences for all characteristics except body type. Finally, we include two important control variables to capture how choosy the daters are. The first measure is the percentage of 19 possible characteristics, other than race, that daters can express a preference for, such as age, height or education. Women tended to state preferences for many more characteristics than males (50% vs. 34%).[9] Daters can express preferences for up to 10 different racial groups. Because one goal in this research is to examine the exclusion of *particular* racial groups, we disentangle that specific exclusion from a general openness to dating multiple racial groups by using the number of preferred groups as an indicator of this general tendency.[10] We examined descriptive patterns of racial and gender differences in racial preferences and exclusion, then estimated logistic regression models with controls for demographic and physical characteristics, racial composition of daters' municipalities of residence, choosiness and preferences for other characteristics. These models allowed us to obtain predicted probabilities not confounded by other factors, thus showing unique differences by race and gender in racial preferences and exclusion.

Results

We found that descriptive patterns of racial preferences did not vary considerably from the results of multivariate analyses. Thus, we focus primarily on the descriptive results, and make reference to how they differ from the multivariate analyses (presented in Appendix Table 2), where applicable.

Openness to Interracial Dating

Table 1 shows the percentages of men and women within each racial group who state particular racial preferences and exclude particular groups. We see few racial differences in the percentages stating racial preferences. For those who state a preference, both white males and females are the least open to interracial dating within their genders – 29 percent of white males and 65 percent of white females prefer to date only whites, a

finding that is consistent with social exchange and group position perspectives asserting that whites have far less to gain than minorities in interracial relationships. In contrast, Latinos are fairly open to out-dating; only 15 percent of males and 16 percent of females prefer to date only Latinos. Similarly, we find that white women (4%) are less likely than black women (8%), Latinas (16%), and especially, Asian women (40%) to prefer to date *only outside* of their respective racial group. These findings are even more pronounced after statistical controls are introduced (see Appendix Table 2), demonstrating that dating preferences are highly gendered and racialized in intersecting ways.

Table 1: Racial Exclusion and Preferences by Race and Gender (Percentages)

	Men				Women			
	White	Blacks	Latinos	Asians	Whites	Blacks	Latinas	Asians
States a Racial Preference	59.68^{l*}	55.46^{a*}	53.84^{wa*}	63.90^{bl*}	71.91^{b*}	77.04^{w*}	74.23*	73.13*
N	744	723	743	662	680	736	679	640
Among Those With a Racial Preference								
Prefers same race only	29.23^{bla*}	22.94^{wl*}	15.50^{wba}	20.80^{wl*}	65.44^{bla*}	44.97^{wla*}	16.47^{wba}	5.98^{wbl*}
Excludes own race	6.31^{b}	11.47^{wl*}	5.74^{ba*}	9.69^{l*}	4.29^{bla}	7.76^{wla*}	16.47^{wba*}	39.96^{wbl*}
Excludes whites	—	71.32^{la}	30.75^{b}	35.70^{b*}	—	76.19^{la}	32.94^{ba}	11.11^{bl*}
Excludes blacks	96.69^{l}	—	81.50^{wa}	94.56^{l}	91.62^{l}	—	76.39^{wa}	94.44^{l}
Excludes Latinos	48.20^{b*}	39.15^{wa*}	—	51.54^{b*}	77.10^{b*}	63.14^{wa*}	—	72.65^{b*}
Excludes Asians	52.93^{b*}	70.82^{wl*}	55.00^{b*}	—	92.84*	92.24*	90.28*	—
Excludes East Indians	81.76*	82.29*	85.75*	81.09*	96.11*	94.00*	96.43*	94.66*
Excludes Middle Easterners	77.70^{b*}	87.28^{wla*}	82.00^{b*}	78.25^{b*}	94.89*	95.24^{a*}	93.45*	92.09^{b*}
N	444	401	400	423	489	567	504	468

Source: Yahoo Personals - Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York

Notes: chi^2 test results shown, ^{w} = significantly different from whites at p < .05; ^{b}significantly different from blacks at p < .05; l = significantly different from Latinos at p < .05; ^{a}significantly different from Asians at p < .05. * = gender difference within racial group significant at p < .05.

Gender is a key determinant of openness to interracial dating. Consistent with sexual strategies theory, we find women are much more likely to state a racial preference than men (74% vs. 58%, pr = .001, not shown). However, we see that only some groups of women prefer to be more racially homogamous than men. Among those who state a racial preference, more white women (65%) and black women (45%) prefer to date *only* within their race than their male counterparts (29% vs. 23%). However, Latino males and females do not differ in preferring racial homogamy, and Asian women are much *less* likely than their male counterparts to prefer to only in-date (6% vs. 21%).

Racial Exclusion in Dating Preferences

That the majority of all race/gender groups (with the exception of white females) are willing to date outside their own race does not mean they are willing to date *all* other racial groups equally. Openness to dating particular racial groups varies substantially by gender and race,

regardless of demographic or physical characteristics, choosiness or preferences for other characteristics (see Appendix Table 2).

Consistent with social exchange and group position theories, Asians, Latinos and blacks are more open to dating whites than whites are to dating them. Of those who state a racial preference, 97 percent of white men exclude black women, 48 percent exclude Latinas, and 53 percent exclude Asian women. In contrast, white men are excluded by 76 percent of black women, 33 percent of Latinas, and only 11 percent of Asian women. Similarly, 92 percent of white women exclude black men, 77 percent exclude Latinos, and 93 percent exclude Asian men. White women are excluded by 71 percent of black men, 31 percent of Latinos, and 36 percent of Asian men.

Latinos and Asians most prefer to outdate whites, supporting the view that they are assimilating minorities; fewer Latinos and Asians exclude whites as dates than exclude all other minority groups. This is most true for Asian women, only 11 percent of whom exclude white men as dates, far less than the 40 percent excluding Asian men. The *rates* of exclusion of non-black minorities by Latinos and Asians are also similar to whites. For example, among men, 55 percent of Latinos and 53 percent of white men exclude Asian women; among women, 73 percent of Asian women and 76 percent of white women exclude Latinos. Latinas and Asian men also exclude non-black minorities at rates similar to whites. Net of controls, Asian men and women are *more* likely than whites to exclude Latinos (Appendix Table 2).

In general, however, Asians and Latinos (with the exception of Latinas) are far more inclusive of one another than of blacks. Similar to whites, more than 94 percent of Asians exclude blacks. However, Latinos do not fully fit this pattern because they are *less* exclusionary of blacks than whites are: 76 percent of Latinas and 81 percent of Latinos exclude blacks compared to more than 91 percent of white men and women. Although Latinos are far less exclusionary of black women, the latter remain significantly more excluded than white women or Asian women. Latinas' dating preferences are inconsistent with racial-economic exchange theory as they exclude Asian men (90%) at higher rates than black men (76%).

The fact that Asians' and Latinos' exclusion patterns are similar to whites is consistent with the idea that Asians and Latinos distance themselves from blacks in the process of assimilating. Asians and Latino men also distance themselves from non-black minorities. However, this pattern does not hold for Latinas as they exclude Asian men more than black men.

Our finding that blacks are far more likely than Asians and Latinos to exclude whites as possible dates provides further support for the unique racial position of blacks. The similarities in the racial preferences of Asians and Latinos and whites are especially striking in contrast to these findings. For example, 76 percent of black females exclude white men as possible dates, compared to only 33 percent of Latinas and 11 percent of Asian women. Latinos, not whites, are the most commonly preferred out-date among blacks. For example, only 39 percent of black men exclude Latinas as dates, but 72 percent exclude whites. Taken together with the finding that Latinos are more inclusive

of blacks than whites or Asians are, these results suggest there is less social distance between blacks and Latinos than between blacks and whites or blacks and Asians.

Our findings are not fully consistent with social exchange and classic assimilation theories' prediction that greater secondary structural integration through socio-economic mobility will be reflected in the domain of intimacy. Latinos are less excluded by whites than are Middle Easterners, East Indians and Asians. Only 77 percent of white women and 48 percent of white men who state a racial preference exclude Latinos. In contrast, 82 percent of white men exclude East Indians, 78 percent exclude Middle Easterners and 53 percent exclude Asians. While blacks are highly excluded, Middle Easterners, East Indians and Asian men are excluded at similarly high, or even higher, levels. For example, among white women who express a racial preference, 92 percent exclude black men, while 96 percent exclude East Indian men, 95 percent exclude Middle Eastern men, and 93 percent exclude Asian men. Among Latinas with a stated preference, the exclusion of Middle Eastern (96%) and East Indian (93%) men is much higher than that of black men (76%).[11] However, the patterns differ for men and women, which leads us to consider the gendered nature of exclusion.

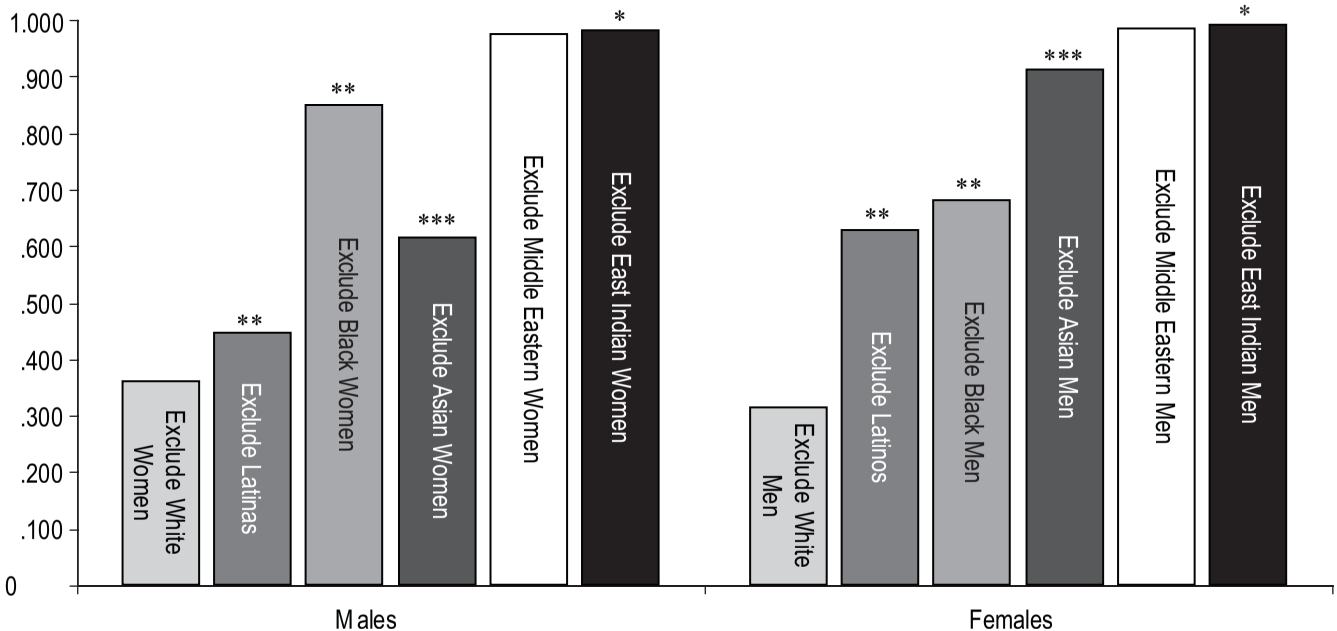
Gendered Racial Exclusion in Internet Dating

The degree to which a particular racial group is excluded or preferred varies significantly, in some cases, by gender. Although white women and Latinas are more exclusionary of Middle Easterners, Asians and East Indians than of blacks, white men and Asian men are far more exclusionary of black women than other groups of women. The greater exclusion of black women by white and Asian men supports the secondary structural integration thesis, but the pattern of exclusion among women does not. This is particularly surprising because both social exchange and sexual strategies theories posit that women seek economic and financial security in a mate. Thus, women's rejection of higher earning men fails to support these theories.

Similarly, we find significant gender differences in the exclusion and inclusion of Asians and blacks. White females, black females and Latinas are all much more likely to exclude Asian men as dates than their male counterparts are to exclude Asian women. In contrast, the gendered pattern to the exclusion of blacks is unique in that it is the only case where women from a particular minority group are *more* excluded than their male counterparts. That is, white men, black men, Latinos and Asian males are all more likely to exclude black women than their female counterparts are to exclude black men. Thus, within racial groups, men and women face different levels of exclusion as preferred dates.

To illustrate which groups face the most exclusion, Figure 1 graphs the predicted probabilities of excluding particular race/gender groups across the entire sample by gender (weighted by the representation of each racial group on the website).[12] We focus on predicted probabilities here primarily because men and women differ substantially in their overall choosiness. Women exclude more racial groups, and they exclude based on most of the other characteristics more than men do (see Appendix Table 1). The figure controls for these and other possible confounding factors to highlight overall

Figure 1. Predicted Probabilities of Racial Exclusion among White, Black, Latino and Asian Internet Daters Who State Racial Preferences, By Gender



Note: Based on full models with significant interactions of race and gender (see Appendix Table 2), controlling for age, region, education, body type, height, political views, religion, choosiness, racial composition of municipality, and preferences for religion, education, body type and height; results weighted based on representation of racial groups on Yahoo Personals website.
N = 3,697
Significance Tests for Gender Differences: *p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001

patterns of racial exclusion by gender, and clearly shows how the degree of racial exclusion varies, not only by which racial group is considered, but often by gender as well. For example, black women are the only female minority group who are more excluded than their male counterparts (.68 vs. .85). They are also far more excluded than white women (.36), Latinas (.45) or Asian women (.61).

In contrast to black women, Latinas and Asian females are *less* excluded than their male counterparts. However, the gender difference in the exclusion of Asians is the most striking in its magnitude. The probability that an Asian man is excluded is .91, compared to only .61 among Asian women. Asian men are also much more excluded than white men (.31), Latinos (.63) or black men (.68). In particular, we noted that Asian females are much *less* likely to exclude white men (11%) than Asian men as possible dates (40%). This finding suggests a level of preference for a racial group different from one's own (white men) among Asian women that is unique among all the racial/gender groups in this study. These patterns of gendered racial exclusion do not fit neatly into social exchange or group position theories, assimilation theories, or previous findings about racial attitudes and social distance, but instead suggest the need for a better understanding of the ways in which racialized masculinities and femininities are constructed.

Within an internet dating pool of whites, blacks, Asians and Latinos, Middle Eastern and East Indian men and women are the most highly excluded groups, and are even more highly excluded than blacks, regardless of gender. The figure also highlights the relative *inclusion* of Latinos, especially women. Latinos are accepted as preferred outdates more than any other minority group by whites, blacks and Asians. These results are inconsistent with theories of social exchange in dating choices, given the lower average socio-economic status of Latinos relative to Middle Easterners, East Indians and Asians. However, the findings are consistent with the notion that at least some Latinos are accepted by whites and Asians, while others may be less socially distant from blacks.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our study clearly shows that race and gender significantly influence dating choices on the internet. Consistent with the predictions of social exchange and group position theories, among those who state a racial-ethnic preference, whites are far more likely than minorities to prefer to date only within their race. Our analyses of minorities' racial preferences show that Asians, blacks and Latinos are more likely to include whites as possible dates than whites are to include them. Acceptance by the dominant group is necessary for boundaries and social distance between minority groups and whites to be weakened, yet this study shows that whites exclude minority groups at high rates.

The results support the predictions of classic assimilation theory and social distance research, as Asians, and to a lesser extent Latinos, have racial dating preferences similar to those of whites with both groups more exclusive of blacks than of whites and one another. This may be because Latinos and Asians are less segregated from whites, feel less social distance towards whites (Charles 2003; Frey and Farley 1996; Massey and Denton 1993), and distance themselves from blacks in the classic assimilation pattern

(See Calavita 2007). However, we also find that, to a lesser extent, Asians and Latinos distance themselves from nonblack minorities, including one another. Asians are even more exclusionary of Latinos than are whites. From social exchange or group position perspectives, they have far more to gain through interracial relationships with whites than with others. Social distancing, then, is not only directed towards blacks, but operates between nonblack minority groups as well.

Existing theories may not adequately capture the complexity of Latinos' racial position between blacks and whites (see Feliciano et al. Forthcoming). Our finding that Latinos are the most included minority group by Asians, whites and blacks suggests that they may benefit from racial ambiguity (that is, they may be seen as black or white) (Yancey 2003). Moreover, our results show that Latinos are significantly more inclusive of blacks than are whites or Asians. While some Latinos are gaining greater acceptance among whites, others may experience racial-ethnic exclusion that is more similar to that of blacks. Future research is required that is better able to distinguish among Latinos on characteristics such as skin tone, socio-economic status and immigrant generation.

Blacks are far more exclusionary of whites than Latinos and Asians are, suggesting that they are less open to primary structural integration. While this finding may be somewhat contrary to social exchange, group position and classic assimilation theories, it is consistent with a pattern of black exceptionalism, a product of the unique historical construction of blacks as the supreme "other."(Feliciano 2001; Lee and Bean 2007) Given the long and pervasive legacy of white racism, blacks may have more negative perceptions of whites, and may perceive Latinos as more willing to date them than whites. Our data support this contention.

We also argue that gender is central to the acceptance of some racial groups within the domain of intimacy. Our results show that black women, Asian men, and to a lesser extent, Latino males, are more highly excluded than their opposite-sex counterparts. These findings may, in part, be explained by sexual strategies theory because men are more open than women to a variety of partners. However, this explanation does not shed light on why all men, except for black men, are the most exclusionary of black women, or why all groups are more accepting of Asian women and Latinas over their male counterparts. Especially perplexing is that women prefer to date black men over Asian men. This is completely contrary to the claims of social exchange and sexual strategies theories that women should prefer to date men with higher socio-economic standing.

However, our findings are consistent with gendered patterns of black-white and Asian-white intermarriage, which existing studies have not explained (e.g., Jacobs and Labov 2002). Our results suggest that intermarriage patterns result from gendered racial preferences, but we can only speculate about the factors driving such preferences.[13] One possible explanation for the greater exclusion of Asian men and black women is that they are less open to interracial dating than their opposite-sex counterparts. However, we find both are more open to dating other groups than these groups are to dating them, suggesting that the preferences of others drive the relatively low intermarriage rates of Asian men and black women. One study confirms that few

black college women are willing to date whites because they believe whites perceive them as unattractive or as stereotypically hypersexual and promiscuous (Childs 2005). The reasons for these gendered preferences are still unclear, but previous scholarship suggests that negative portrayals of Asian men's masculinity (Espiritu 1997) and black women's femininity (Collins 2004) may shape the exclusion of these groups.

Finally, our results challenge social exchange and sexual strategies theories in that the relatively high income enjoyed by Middle Eastern, East Indian and Asian men do not correspond to increased acceptance in the domain of intimacy. Like whites, Asians and Latinos are highly exclusive of blacks, but also of higher earning groups, such as Middle Easterners and East Indians. White women and Latinas exclude Asian, East Indian and Middle Eastern men more than black men, and East Indian and Middle Eastern men are among the most excluded by black women and Asian women. These results suggest that race-ethnicity dynamics shape racial exclusion more than structural integration does.

Given that many Asians, East Indians and Middle Easterners are recent U.S. immigrants, it may be that daters view these groups exclusively as more foreign (Tuan 1998) or less culturally similar. As classic assimilation theory predicts, recent immigrants are less accepted than other minority groups. Although we do not find their exclusion to be driven by religious preferences per se, the exclusion of Middle Easterners and East Indians may be precipitated by ideas about religious affiliations, particularly after 9/11. As a recent study suggests, conversion to Christianity may promote inclusion (Ajrouch and Jamal 2007). According to a 2006 poll, almost 40 percent of Americans hold prejudices against Muslims and 22 percent said they would not want Muslims as neighbors (Elias 2006). East Indian Hindus in the United States are often perceived negatively by Americans (Kurien 2005). Although assimilation and social distance theories may partly explain the greater exclusion of East Indians and Middle Easterners than blacks, it cannot fully explain the gendered exclusion of Asian men.

Our findings have strong implications for the eventual acceptance and incorporation of racial-ethnic groups into the dominant society. Dating is a precursor to marriage and a marker of diminishing group boundaries. In the past, the acceptance of immigrant groups, including Italians, Poles and Irish, as romantic partners led to their general acceptance as white. Our study suggests that similar processes may be underway today. Latinos are the most accepted outdate among whites, followed by Asian women, but for East Indians, Asian men, Middle Easterners and blacks, boundaries remain in the domain of intimacy.

Notes

1. Although we recognize that Latinos are often considered to be an ethnicity comprised of those who may be considered black, white or racially mixed, we are limited by the dataset. Yahoo Personals did not distinguish between race and ethnicity, nor did they distinguish Latinos by skin color or national origin.

2. Jacobs and Labov (2002) argue that the higher rates of Asian-female/white-male pairings can partly be accounted for by white servicemen having opportunities to meet Asian women abroad (war brides).

3. We collected a separate sample of 100 men and 100 women in each region (800 total) in order to estimate the racial/ethnic composition of the users of the website. Approximately 93% of all Yahoo daters in the four regions self-identified as African American/black, Caucasian/white, Hispanic/Latino, or Asian. We did not include the smaller self-identified ethnicities that were far less represented on the website: 2% identified as interracial, 1.6% as other, and .6% or less identified as Middle Eastern, East Indian, Native American or Pacific Islander. Approximately 1.5% of all Yahoo daters did not provide an answer to the ethnicity question.

4. We aimed for a targeted sample size of 6,400 in order to allow for robust statistical tests of differences across three strata: gender, race, and metropolitan area. This enabled us to have a large enough sample of smaller subgroups of interest to draw inferences. The sample size is smaller than our targeted sample size because there were fewer than 200 Latina and Asian male profiles posted in Atlanta, and we eliminated several duplicate profiles.

5. Racial composition data for each municipality/town was obtained from the 2005 American Community Survey in several ways. First, we used a name search for each municipality/town and obtained the racial composition data based on the municipality/town name. If this did not yield any search results, we used an address in that particular municipality/town and obtained the racial composition data based on that address. When using an address search, the American Community Survey provides demographic characteristics based on several geographic areas: PUMA, School District, Congressional District, etc. We gave preference to results returned by PUMA, followed by School District, because they represented smaller geographic areas.

6. To further address the selection issue, we examined the characteristics of our daters in comparison to the population of internet users in the four regions, using the October 2003 Computer and Internet Use Supplement. Even compared to a sample of internet users, the daters in our sample tend to be more educated (but see endnote 8), slightly more likely to be divorced, and more likely to be employed (table available upon request). These disparities partly, but not entirely, stem from the slightly older age structure of our sample.

7. Unfortunately, the Yahoo website at the time of data collection did not ask daters what type of relationship they were seeking, so we cannot distinguish between those seeking a long-term relationship, casual dating or marriage. Prior research shows that interracial relationships are less likely than same-race relationships to lead to marriage (Joyner and Kao 2005), so our results do not necessarily represent willingness to engage in serious interracial relationships. However, willingness or unwillingness to date someone of another racial group, even casually, is an indication of a certain level of social acceptance and is a necessary condition for a more serious relationship to develop.

8. We suspect some inflation in terms of educational attainment in our data, particularly among white males (see Appendix Table 1). We, therefore, only use stated education as a control variable.

9. That women are choosier may reflect gendered dating dynamics. Since women are more likely than men to be approached on the internet (Hitsch et al. 2010), stating their preferences may be more important, while men may have less incentive to change the default option, "any" for preferences.

10. Because this variable would be endogenous if included in analyses of the exclusion of any particular racial group, we include modified versions of this variable that leave out the particular racial group of interest for each model in the multivariate analyses (descriptive statistics available upon request).

11. These percentages are conditional on stating a racial preference. Previous research shows

that those who state they are open to "any" racial group do not act accordingly, and we suspect they are misrepresenting their true preferences (Hitsch et al. 2010). Nevertheless, the patterns identified here do not generally differ when we include those stating "any." For example, among white women, the corresponding figures would be: 66% exclude blacks, 67% exclude Asians, 45% exclude Latinos, 71% exclude East Asians, and 68% exclude Middle Easterners.

12. The patterns described do not differ, regardless of whether the data is weighted or not.

13. Arguably, men may be more open to *dating* than *marrying* Latinas and Asians. However, that interracial dating patterns mirror interracial marital patterns suggests that the exclusion of Asian men and black women begins during the dating selection process.

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Appendix Table 1: Sample Characteristics by Race and Gender

	Men				Women			
	White	Blacks	Latinos	Asians	Whites	Blacks	Latinas	Asians
Metropolitan Area								
Los Angeles	22.85	25.86	26.11	26.44	20.44	23.91	27.10	28.75
New York	27.82	26.83	24.90	25.53	25.15	24.05	27.98	28.59
Chicago	24.33	26.14	24.23	21.90	26.62	26.36	25.63	28.13
Atlanta	25.00	21.16	24.76	26.13	27.79	25.68	19.29	14.53
Age	33.71	32.31	30.13	30.11	32.61	32.32	29.49	30.82
Education								
High school grad or less	4.57	6.36	11.71	3.93	8.38	3.13	16.94	4.69
Some college	21.37	43.29	45.36	18.28	30.00	44.02	43.59	20.78
College graduate	47.98	39.42	32.97	48.34	43.38	36.68	30.19	50.00
Post graduate	26.03	10.93	9.96	29.46	18.24	16.17	9.28	24.53
Body Type								
Slim, slender, average	94.76	85.34	86.68	94.41	88.53	57.61	67.30	95.47
Thick, a few extra pounds	5.24	14.66	13.32	5.59	11.57	42.39	32.70	4.53
Height (inches)	71.27	71.50	69.40	68.58	65.52	65.79	64.36	63.43
Political Views								
Conservate, middle of the road, not political	78.23	80.91	81.43	80.82	79.26	76.09	83.65	84.53
Liberal or very liberal	21.77	19.09	18.57	19.18	20.74	23.91	16.35	15.47
Religion								
Not religious	25.81	11.20	11.71	25.23	18.53	12.23	12.96	24.22
Judeo-Christian	51.48	53.67	54.64	33.53	60.29	68.07	67.30	44.06
Other religion	3.76	11.48	11.04	15.11	4.12	5.43	6.33	12.81
No answer	18.95	23.65	22.61	26.13	17.06	14.27	13.40	18.91
% Own race in municipality	36.27	31.65	24.00	10.92	41.15	32.10	25.88	11.57
% Non-Hispanic whites in municipality	36.27	31.44	37.96	38.11	41.15	33.24	36.31	42.22
% Non-Hispanic blacks in municipality	28.69	31.65	23.09	23.90	25.92	32.10	21.81	18.11
% Latinos in municipality	21.22	23.33	24.00	21.43	19.13	23.05	25.88	21.06
% Asians in municipality	7.75	7.16	7.94	10.92	7.44	6.60	8.10	11.57

Date Preferences								
Religion	22.98	20.75	19.65	16.31	40.59	48.51	42.71	35.31
Educational attainment	43.28	46.47	41.05	43.96	68.82	73.78	72.02	71.72
Body type	86.42	77.32	76.45	77.79	75.74	76.49	75.11	79.53
Height	54.03	44.95	44.15	53.02	77.50	89.81	85.86	80.47
Percentage of preferences	35.12	33.30	32.22	34.82	46.28	52.79	50.73	50.29
Number of ethnic groups preferred	2.05	1.88	1.88	2.36	1.31	1.85	1.88	1.94
N	744	723	743	662	680	736	679	640

Source: Yahoo Personals, Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York

Appendix Table 2: Predicted Probabilities: Racial Differences in Racial Dating Preferences by Gender

	Men				Women					Race x Gender
	White	Blacks	Latinos	Asians	Whites	Blacks	Latinas	Asians	N	Interaction
Dependent Variables										
States a Racial Preference	.60*[a]	.59*[a]	.62*[a]	.74[bwl]	.71*[a]	.72*	.74*	.77[w]	5,607	*
Among Those With a Racial Preference										
Prefers same race only	.30*[bl]	.22*[wl]	.15[wba]	.24*[l]	.64*[bla]	.44*[wla]	.15[wba]	.07*[wbl]	3,697	***
Excludes own race	.09*[b]	.17*[wla]	.07*[b]	.10*[b]	.05*[bla]	.08*[wla]	.17*[wba]	.34*[wbl]	3,697	***
Excludes whites	.07[bla]	.81[wla]	.36[wba]	.46*[wbl]	.04[bla]	.82[wla]	.35[wba]	.14*[wbl]	3,697	***
Excludes blacks	.95*[bl]	.13*[wla]	.86*[wba]	.95*[bl]	.92*[bl]	.09*[wla]	.78*[wba]	.93*[bl]	3,697	ns
Excludes latinos	.65*[bla]	.54*[wla]	.07*[wba]	.74*[wbl]	.80*[bla]	.72*[wla]	.15*[wba]	.86*[wbl]	3,697	ns
Excludes Asians	.69*[ba]	.86*[wla]	.72*[ba]	.12*[wbl]	.95*[a]	.95*[a]	.94*[a]	.46*[wbl]	3,697	*
Excludes East Indians	.97*[la]	.96*[la]	.98*[wb]	.98*[wb]	.99*[la]	.98*[la]	.99*[wb]	.99*[wb]	3,697	ns
Excludes Middle Easterners	.96[ab]	.98[wla]	.97[b]	.97[wb]	.97[ab]	.99[wla]	.98[b]	.98[wb]	3,697	ns

Notes: [w]Significantly different from whites at $p < .05$; [b]significantly different from blacks at $p < .05$; [l]Significantly different from Latinos at $p < .05$; [a]Significantly different from Asians at $p < .05$; *Gender differences within racial group significantly different at $p < .05$.
Predicted probabilities based on logistic regression models with interactions of race and gender (main effects only if interactions not significant). Models include controls for age, region, education, body type, height, political views, religion, choosiness, racial composition of municipality, and preferences for religion, education, body type and height.