

Is Love Colorblind? Political Orientation and Interracial Romantic Desire

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Abstract

The present research examined the association between political orientation and ingroup favoritism in two live romantic contexts. In Study 1, White participants had sequential interactions with both a White and Black confederate and reported their romantic desire for each. In Study 2, both White and Black participants speed-dated multiple potential romantic partners and reported whether they would be interested in meeting each speed-dating partner again. In both studies, White participants' political conservatism positively predicted the strength of the ingroup-favoring bias: White conservatives were less likely than White liberals to desire Black (interracial) relative to White potential romantic partners. In contrast, Black participants' political conservatism negatively predicted the strength of the ingroup-favoring bias: Consistent with system-justification theory, Black conservatives were more likely than Black liberals to desire White (interracial) relative to Black potential romantic partners. Political orientation may be a key factor that influences the initiation of interracial romantic relationships.

(149 words)

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Is Love Colorblind? Political Orientation and Interracial Romantic Desire

Although it has been over 40 years since the Supreme Court ruling in *Loving v. Virginia* struck down anti-miscegenation laws in the United States, interracial marriages still account for less than 3% of all U.S. marriages (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003). Research suggests, furthermore, that initiating interracial relationships remains to some extent a social and cultural taboo (Joyner & Kao, 2005; Miller, Olson, & Fazio, 2004). Perhaps because of the difficulty in studying such rare events, psychological factors that facilitate (or hinder) the development of actual interracial relationships have received little empirical attention (for exceptions, see Fujino, 1997; Gaines, Gurung, Lin, & Pouli, 2006). The present study explored one potential moderator of interracial dating preferences: individual differences in political orientation.

Political Orientation and Interracial Romantic Relationships

Abundant research has found that political conservatism is reliably correlated with attitudes toward interracial dating and marriage. For example, self-identified Democrats were 1.7 times more likely than self-identified Republicans to approve of interracial marriage in a recent national survey (Johnson & Jacobson, 2005). Social dominance orientation, a construct that is closely related to political conservatism, also correlates negatively with approval of interracial marriage (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994; see also Lalonde, Giguere, Fontaine, & Smith, 2007). Just as it is associated with approval of interracial relationships, political orientation also predicts participants' willingness to become personally involved in an interracial romantic relationship: Across several different measures of political orientation, McClelland and Auster (1990) found that liberals were more likely than conservatives to consider dating, becoming "seriously involved" with, or marrying someone of another race. A recent study of online personal ads found that White conservatives were less likely than liberals to report a

willingness to date Black individuals specifically (Yancey, 2007). Finally, at least one study has asked participants to provide retrospective accounts of their actual dating experiences and found that conservatism negatively predicted having dated interracially in the past (Yancey, 2002).

Although provocative, previous work on political orientation and interracial dating has left two critical questions unanswered. The present research was designed in part to answer these questions.

Question #1: How do People Behave in Live Interracial Romantic Encounters?

The existing research on interracial dating and marriage has generally examined attitudes toward interracial relationships and hypothetical reports of whether one would date interracially (but see Yancey, 2002). However, surprisingly little research has considered the extent to which political orientation shapes behavior during or outcomes arising from actual interracial interactions (but see Carney, Jost, Gosling, Niederhoffer, & Potter, 2007; Gaertner, 1973; Nail, Harton, & Decker, 2003), and none to our knowledge has examined initial romantic encounters. This is an omission worth addressing, as it so happens that the race-relations domain and the romantic domain are two areas within social psychology in which people's actual behavior may differ substantially from their survey responses. With regard to race and racism, several studies have demonstrated such a dissociation. For example, one study found that employers were far less likely to hire a Black than a White ex-offender, which stands in contrast to their stated beliefs that their decision to hire an ex-offender would be independent of race (Pager & Quillian, 2005). In addition, research on the affective forecasting error has demonstrated that White college students' expectations about interracial interactions were worse than the actual experience of interacting with a Black individual (Mallett, Wilson, & Gilbert, 2008). Yet another study found that White participants believed that they would be outraged upon hearing another

White individuals make a racist comment toward a Black individual, but in reality they were not particularly distressed when this racist act actually occurred (Kawakami, Dunn, Karmali, & Dovidio, 2008). Some scholars have recently argued that the study of live interracial interactions should be a vital component of research on race-related topics (Shelton & Richeson, 2006); the important and somewhat counterintuitive discoveries highlighted above underscore the value of heeding this suggestion.

The same suggestion could also prove useful for research within the romantic domain, another topic area in which people's hypothetical responses may not map onto actual dynamics in live encounters. One recent set of findings highlighting this point examined the predictive validity of ideal romantic partner preferences in an initial attraction context (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008a). Data in this speed-dating study revealed that if a participant stated that he or she ideally preferred a characteristic such as physical attractiveness in a hypothetical romantic partner, that participant was no more or less likely to pursue a romantic relationship with actual physically attractive (relative to unattractive) potential romantic partners. That is, individual differences in the extent to which people claim to prefer particular characteristics in an ideal romantic partner were unrelated to the qualities that actually appealed to participants once they had experienced a live interaction with potential partners. This finding has been demonstrated by other researchers who also employed speed-dating procedures (e.g., Iyengar, Simonson, Fisman, & Mogilner, 2005; Kurzban & Weeden, 2007; Todd, Penke, Fasolo, & Lenton, 2007). Speed-dating is an excellent tool for researchers who study initial romantic attraction and relationship initiation, in part because its design requires live interactions and promotes the formation of real-life relationships (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008b; Finkel & Eastwick, 2008).

Question #2: Do Both Conservatives and Liberals Prefer Same-race Romantic Partners?

An association between political orientation and interest in interracial dating does not address whether liberals' dating decisions are truly colorblind. According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and other group justification perspectives (e.g., Sidanius & Pratto, 1993), people attempt to rationalize the interests of and maintain positive feelings about their social groups. These motives cause people to exhibit more positive reactions to members of their ingroup relative to members of outgroups. Such a pattern of behavior is frequently observed on both behavioral measures, such as the amount of resources allocated to an ingroup versus an outgroup (e.g., Turner, Brown, & Tajfel, 1979), and affective measures, such as positive feelings for ingroups compared with outgroups (for a meta-analysis, see Mullen, Brown, and Smith, 1992). Some scholars have argued that Whites, as members of a majority group in the United States, are especially likely to show such ingroup-favoring patterns on both implicit and explicit measures, as their desire to feel positively about their ingroup is congruent with their desire to justify the legitimacy of the broader social system which affords them their high status (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). Therefore, it is possible that liberals would still rather date a member of their own race than a member of another race; the correlational evidence suggests only that this ingroup-favoring pattern is less pronounced for liberals than for conservatives.

Are there any existing data that compare the size of the ingroup-favoring bias across the political spectrum? Although not relevant to romantic relationships per se, Jost et al. (2004) reported data on ingroup favoritism for liberals, moderates, and conservatives on a variety of measures. Compared with liberals, conservatives did indeed demonstrate a stronger preference for Whites compared with Blacks on both explicit and implicit measures. However, Jost et al. (2004) also found that even the liberal White participants demonstrated an ingroup-favoring pattern; that is, liberals held more positive explicit and implicit attitudes about Whites than they

held about Blacks. The only White participants who exhibited essentially no ingroup favoritism in Jost et al.'s work scored at the extreme liberal end of the political spectrum, and even this colorblind effect emerged only for the explicit racial attitudes measure.

The present report examines ingroup favoritism across the political spectrum, much like the data presented by Jost et al. (2004), but it also builds upon earlier work by assessing the ingroup-favoring bias in the romantic domain specifically, a domain which entails a greater degree of intimacy compared with many (but not all, e.g., Towles-Schwen & Fazio, 2006) of the contexts examined by social psychologists. Indeed, on the classic Bogardus (1928) social distance scale, approval of interracial romantic relationships is the most extreme response that a participant can provide. Some researchers have suggested that romantic relationships may be one of the few domains where discrimination by race remains socially acceptable to this day; consider, for example, how commonly individuals specifically profess to seek a Single White Male/Female in personal ads (Kennedy, 2003). Given the level of physical and emotional closeness that a romantic relationship entails, how comfortable is the average White liberal with a same-race relative to an interracial relationship?

Overview of the Present Research

The present work sought to examine the relation between political orientation and interracial, compared with same-race, romantic interest in a live dating context. Specifically, we conducted two studies in which participants had live, face-to-face interactions with both White and Black opposite-sex individuals in a romantic context. We focused exclusively on the interracial pairing of White and Black participants (rather than striving for a relatively comprehensive analysis with participants of diverse races), as this pairing is most relevant to the previous literature and is in many ways the archetypal taboo interracial couple (Kalmijn, 1993).

The first study took place in the laboratory and entailed White participants “dating” one White and one Black confederate. The second study investigated the romantic experiences of both White and Black participants in an adult, community sample and used speed-dating procedures, a dating context that is particularly ecologically valid and self-relevant.

STUDY 1

Study 1 examined the extent to which political orientation predicts interracial romantic desire in an experimental, laboratory context. Our central hypothesis was that Whites’ political orientation would interact with the race of their interaction partner to predict romantic interest. Specifically, conservatives are likely to reveal more ingroup favoritism relative to liberals. In addition, we were relatively confident that the simple effect for conservatives would reveal a significant ingroup-favoring bias (i.e., greater liking for the White relative to the Black partner). However, we were unsure whether liberals would show (a) significant but reduced ingroup favoritism or (b) no preference for the White relative to the Black interaction partner.

Method

Participants

White, single, male undergraduates participated in this study for partial course credit. Four participants who indicated a preference for same-sex romantic partners at the end of the study were dropped from all analyses; 54 participants remained ($M_{age} = 19.2$ yrs).

Materials

Political conservatism was assessed in two ways. The Short-form measure included 2 items (“I endorse many aspects of conservative political ideology”, and “I endorse many aspects of liberal political ideology” [reversed], $\alpha = .70$) that were rated on 1-7 agreement scales ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.64$). The Long-form measure was Hennington’s (1996) 12-item version of the Wilson and Patterson (1968) C-scale (e.g., “Are you in favor of legalized abortion?”; -1 = yes, 0

= don't know, 1 = no; $\alpha = .83$, $M = -0.29$, $SD = 0.47$). These two scales correlated highly, $r = .77$, so we averaged z-scored versions of each measure to create our political conservatism index.¹ This index was subsequently standardized ($M = 0$, $SD = 1$).

Romantic desire, the primary dependent measure, was assessed with 5 items on 1–9 agreement scales: “I would be excited to get to know my interaction partner better”, “I really like my interaction partner”, “My interaction partner seemed sexually attractive”, “I would be interested in going on a date with my interaction partner”, and “I think my interaction partner is very much like my ideal romantic partner” (White condition $\alpha = .88$, Black condition $\alpha = .84$). Participants also completed a 4-item measure of *comparative romantic desire*, using the first four romantic desire items, but with the anchors -4 (*more true of partner #1*) and 4 (*more true of partner #2*). Higher scores indicate a preference for the Black confederate ($\alpha = .89$); a fifth “ideal partner” item was dropped because it reduced the reliability of the measure. Finally, participants completed a measure of *romantic choice*; they picked whom they would rather have as a romantic partner (coded 0=White confederate, 1=Black confederate).

In addition, all participants completed the short-form, continuously-scored (see Stober, Dette, & Musch, 2002) version of the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (BIDR; Paulhus, 1994), which contains both a self-deception ($\alpha = .77$) and impression management ($\alpha = .64$) subscale.

Procedure

At a group-testing session early in the academic quarter, participants reported their race and romantic status (“Are you currently involved in a romantic relationship?”), and they completed the short-form political conservatism measure. Only single White men were eligible to participate. At the lab, an experimenter greeted participants and explained that they (a) would

be participating in a study of romantic dynamics, (b) would have brief interactions with two female participants (one at a time), and (c) should treat each interaction as a short date. The experimenter also explained that the topic of conversation during the interaction would be constrained: Participants would take turns describing Thematic Apperception Test cards (TAT; Murray, 1971) for one another. Each participant would describe a card for 30 seconds, then switch, until each person had described 4 cards. This procedure allowed participants to have a live interaction with the two women while allowing for tight experimental control over the content of the conversations (see below).

After each interaction, the experimenter escorted the confederate out of the room and administered to the participant a Partner Impression Questionnaire, which included the romantic desire measure. After both interactions, participants completed the measures of comparative romantic desire and romantic choice, as well as the second measure of political conservatism (Long-form) and the BIDR.

Date racial composition was manipulated such that participants interacted with one White and one Black female confederate. The confederates, who were blind to participants' political orientation, dressed similarly for all sessions, and their TAT descriptions were scripted. The order that participants interacted with the Black compared with the White confederate and which set of 4 pictures each confederate described were determined randomly for each session; these two variables were entered as covariates for all analyses.

Results

Multilevel modeling was used to account for the nesting of interaction partner within participant, and the intercept was permitted to vary randomly across participants (Level 2). (Multilevel modeling was not required for analyses involving the dependent variables

comparative romantic desire and romantic choice because each participant completed these measures only once.) We first examined participants' *romantic desire* as a function of their political conservatism, confederate race (White = -.5, Black = .5), and the interaction between these two variables. Neither the political conservatism nor the race main effect was significant ($p > .47$), but their interaction was reliable, $B = -.39$, $t(52) = -2.72$, $p = .009$.² That is, the association between political conservatism and romantic desire differed depending on whether the confederate was White or Black. The relevant regression lines are plotted in Figure 1.

Employing procedures outlined by Aiken and West (1991), we examined the effect of partner race on romantic desire separately for conservatives and liberals. In support of previous research, there was a trend for conservative participants (+1 *SD*) to report less romantic desire for the Black compared with the White confederate—an ingroup-favoring bias— $B = -.30$, $t(52) = -1.47$, $p = .149$, and for participants who evidenced higher levels of conservatism (+2 *SD*), this ingroup-favoring bias was significant, $B = -.69$, $t(52) = -2.14$, $p = .037$. In stark contrast to these trends, however, liberal participants (-1 *SD*) reported significantly *more* romantic desire for the Black compared with the White confederate—an outgroup-favoring bias— $B = .48$, $t(52) = 2.38$, $p = .021$.

Results also revealed that political conservatism was a reliable predictor of *comparative romantic desire*, $B = -.49$, $t(50) = -2.85$, $p = .006$. When participants were required to directly compare their desire for the two women, more conservative participants were less likely to desire the Black relative to the White partner. Simple effect tests revealed that liberal participants (-1 *SD*) reported a mean score of 0.56 (indicating a preference for the Black confederate that was significantly different from 0, $t[50] = 2.30$, $p = .026$), whereas conservative participants (+1 *SD*) reported a mean score of -0.42 (indicating a preference for the White confederate that was

marginally significantly different from 0, $t[50] = -1.77, p = .083$). Consistent with this finding, a logistic regression revealed that political conservatism significantly predicted *romantic choice*, $B = -.76, e^B = 0.47, p = .020$. The more conservative participants were, the less likely they were to choose the Black over the White confederate for a romantic partner. Simple effect tests revealed that liberal participants ($-1 SD$) were 2.0 times more likely to select the Black over the White confederate, whereas conservative participants ($+1 SD$) were 2.3 times more likely to select the White over the Black confederate.

In a set of auxiliary analyses, the association between the political orientation \times race interaction and romantic desire remained identical (as did all reported simple effects) controlling for both the self-deception \times race and the impression management \times race interactions (both of which were nonsignificant). For comparative romantic desire and romantic choice, results were identical controlling for both BIDR subscales (both of which failed to predict either dependent measure significantly).

Discussion

Results from Study 1 supported our central hypothesis that White participants' political orientation would be reliably associated with their romantic desire for a White versus a Black partner. Especially intriguing was the specific pattern of the political orientation \times race interaction. Consistent with prior research on political orientation (e.g., Henry & Sears, 2002; Jost et al., 2004), conservatives in this study were drawn more to the White confederate, a fellow member of their ingroup, compared with the Black confederate. Curiously, liberals actually revealed an outgroup-favoring bias in the present study: They were significantly *more* desirous of the Black relative to the White partner. Although it is conceivable that these results emerged because liberals were more likely to self-present or try to appear nonprejudiced on paper,

nuances of the present data do not lend much support to this contention. For one, our effects remained robust controlling for self deception and impression management tendencies; in fact, these two individual difference variables could not significantly explain any variance in participants' likelihood of desiring the Black relative to the White confederate. In addition, when participants were asked to describe what they believed we were studying in the experiment, only 13% of participants mentioned race (see footnote 2), and only two of these seven participants were at least .5 *SD* toward the liberal end of political orientation. Therefore, it seems unlikely that liberal participants were systematically more likely to notice the racial component of the study and to intentionally boost their ratings of the Black confederate so that they did not appear prejudiced. Rather, we presume that these ratings reflected participants' genuine experience of romantic desire for the two confederates.³

Although Study 1 is noteworthy in that it entailed live interactions, it has at least three limitations. First, we only examined White men's romantic desire within a population of college students. There are reasons to suspect that Black participants would not evidence the same political orientation \times target race interaction pattern (Jost et al., 2004), and it is important to test whether men and women differ in their association between political orientation and ingroup favoritism. It is also possible that the liberals' significant outgroup favoritism effect is due in part to the collegiate nature of the sample, and therefore it would be informative to investigate these effects within an older community sample. Second, this study only examined participants' interest in two romantic targets; even though confederate behavior and appearance were extremely well controlled, it is conceivable that some nonracial difference between these particular women was the source of the interaction with political orientation. Third, to enhance experimental control, we forced participants to have a somewhat artificial interaction in which

they described TAT pictures (with the confederate's responses scripted in advance). Although this procedure permits the inference that the emergent differences between liberals and conservatives are unrelated to the topic of conversation, it would be useful to test whether these findings generalize to a context in which participants were allowed to converse freely.

STUDY 2

To address these three limitations of Study 1, we again examined data from live interactions in a romantic context. Specifically, we studied *speed-dating*, an increasingly popular activity in which romantically available individuals meet one another for a series of brief dates and decide whether they would (“yes”) or would not (“no”) be interested in meeting each other again. Speed-dating offers many advantages for researchers interested in studying romantic attraction and relationship initiation (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008b; Finkel & Eastwick, 2008), and researchers have recently started to use speed-dating to explore a variety of topics. The present dataset was provided to the research team by a professional speed-dating company.⁴

Thankfully, these data contained a sufficient number of Black participants that we could also examine whether the association between political orientation and ingroup favoritism differed by participant race. System justification theory generates very specific predictions in this regard (Jost et al., 2004). Because right-wing conservatism is in part characterized by system-justifying beliefs, such as support for the status quo and the rationalization of inequality (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003), conservatives are likely to feel positively about members of majority or otherwise socially dominant groups. Therefore, among Black participants, increased conservatism may be associated with reduced ingroup favoritism; Black conservatives (compared with Black liberals) are likely to display greater liking for Whites relative to Blacks because Whites preserve and are supported by the status quo. Also, as in Study 1, we expect that

White participants will exhibit the same pattern whereby conservatism predicts greater ingroup favoritism. In combination, these hypotheses for Black and White participants predict the emergence of a significant political conservatism \times race of partner (same-race vs. interracial) \times race of participant (White vs. Black) 3-way interaction predicting romantic interest. In this study, romantic interest is indicated by the consequential decision to say “yes” to a speed-dating partner, a response that opens up the possibility of future contact.

Method

Participants

Between February of 2005 and April of 2006, 2781 White individuals (1499 women, 1282 men) and 97 Black individuals (30 men, 67 women) signed up to participate in a speed-dating event with a national speed-dating company.⁵ These participants all completed the race component of their speed-dating profile and completed a voluntary online questionnaire (containing the measure of political conservatism) after signing up for the speed-dating event. White participants were 39.9 years old on average and Black participants were 35.2 years old on average; we control for age in all analyses reported below.

Materials

Participants reported their date of birth and sex when creating an account on the speed-dating company’s website. After creating this account, participants were encouraged to complete a profile that could be viewed by other website users. This profile asked participants to select their race from the following choices: Caucasian, African American, Asian, Multi-racial, Hispanic, East Indian, American Indian, Other, and No preference/Prefer not to answer. The present analyses examined the yes vs. no decisions made by participants who identified as either

Caucasian or African-American on their speed-dates with individuals who identified as either Caucasian or African-American.

After signing up for a speed-dating event, all individuals were offered the opportunity to complete a voluntary online questionnaire designed by the research team. This questionnaire asked participants to indicate on a scale from -4 (highly uncharacteristic of me) to 4 (highly characteristic of me) to what extent the item “politically liberal” described them (White Ps: $M=0.15$, $SD=2.44$, Black Ps: $M=1.31$, $SD=2.03$). This item was reverse scored to create a measure of *political conservatism*.

Procedure

Participants attended at least one speed-dating event hosted by a national speed-dating company. At the speed-dating event, participants had 6-minute speed-dates with the ~12 opposite-sex individuals in attendance. Immediately after each date, they indicated on a questionnaire whether they would (“yes”) or would not (“no”) be interested in meeting their speed-dating partner again. Participants who both replied “yes” to one another were given the ability to contact each another through the speed-dating company’s website.

In total, we possessed complete data for (a) Whites’ yes/no decisions on 23,537 speed-dates with White individuals and 587 speed-dates with Black individuals and (b) Blacks’ yes/no decisions on 543 speed-dates with White individuals and 75 speed-dates with Black individuals. Multilevel logistic regression analyses were used to account for the nesting of speed-dates within participant. The intercept was permitted to vary randomly across participants (Level 2).

Results

First, participants’ yes/no decisions (yes = 1, no = 0) were regressed onto political conservatism (standardized across all participants), speed-dating partner race (same race = -.5,

interracial = .5), participant race (White = -.5, Black = .5), all 2-way interactions, and the 3-way interaction. As predicted, the 3-way political conservatism \times speed-dating partner race \times participant race interaction was significant, $B = .91$, $e^B = 2.48$, $t(2877) = 2.21$, $p = .027$. This indicates that the political conservatism \times speed-dating partner race interaction (i.e., the association between political conservatism and the strength of the ingroup-favoring bias) differed between White and Black participants.

Second, we examined data from White participants alone. Unlike Study 1, both the main effect of political conservatism (standardized across White participants), $B = -.14$, $e^B = 0.87$, $t(2780) = -2.36$, $p = .018$, and the main effect of partner race, $B = -.88$, $e^B = 0.41$, $t(2780) = -7.97$, $p < .001$, were statistically significant: Conservative Whites were less likely than liberal Whites to say “yes” to their speed-dating partners on average, and White participants were less likely to say “yes” to interracial (Black) relative to same-race (White) speed-dates on average (an ingroup favoritism effect). As for our central hypothesis, the political conservatism \times partner race interaction was indeed significant, as in Study 1, $B = -.26$, $e^B = 0.77$, $t(2780) = -2.28$, $p = .023$; this interaction was not moderated by participant sex ($p > .688$). The likelihood that White participants said “yes” to White (same-race) and Black (interracial) speed-dating partners is plotted in Figure 2 as a function of political conservatism. Tests of the simple effects revealed that conservative participants (+1 *SD*) were significantly less likely to say “yes” to Black relative to White speed-dating partners, $B = -1.15$, $e^B = 0.32$, $t(2780) = -6.86$, $p < .001$. Liberal participants (-1 *SD*) were also significantly less likely to say “yes” to Black relative to White speed-dating partners, $B = -.62$, $e^B = 0.54$, $t(2780) = -4.03$, $p < .001$; even participants at the far liberal end of the political spectrum (-1.5 *SD*) demonstrated a negative association between partner race and “yessing” likelihood, $B = -.49$, $e^B = 0.62$, $t(2780) = -2.45$, $p = .014$. In short,

although White participants in Study 2 did not evidence the same crossover interaction found in Study 1, the ingroup-favoring bias was still more substantial for conservatives: As shown in Figure 2, the probability that a White liberal ($-1 SD$) would say “yes” to a Black speed-dater was approximately 26%, whereas the probability that a White conservative ($+1 SD$) would say “yes” to a Black speed-dater was approximately 16%.

Finally, we examined data from Black participants alone. Neither the political conservatism (standardized across Black participants) nor the partner race main effect was significant ($ps > .36$). However, their interaction was marginally significant, $B = .61$, $e^B = 1.83$, $t(96) = 1.66$, $p = .100$; this interaction was not moderated by participant sex ($p > .244$). This political conservatism \times partner race interaction for Blacks is in the opposite direction from the one exhibited by Whites, indicating that conservatism was associated with a *weaker* ingroup-favoring bias among Blacks. The likelihood that Black participants said “yes” to Black (same-race) and White (interracial) speed-dating partners is plotted in Figure 3 as a function of political conservatism. Tests of the simple effects revealed that neither conservative participants ($+1 SD$) nor extremely conservative participants ($+2 SD$) were significantly more likely to say “yes” to White compared to Black speed-dating partners, $ps > .30$. In other words, these conservative participants tended to reveal no racial bias in their dating preferences. However, liberal Black participants ($-1 SD$) revealed a marginally significant ingroup-favoring pattern; they were less likely to say “yes” to White (interracial) compared to Black (same-race) dating partners, $B = -.94$, $e^B = 0.39$, $t(96) = -1.93$, $p = .056$.

Discussion

Study 2 revealed that the association between political orientation and ingroup favoritism differed for White and Black participants, as predicted by system-justification theory (Jost et al.,

2004). Among White participants, data replicated the interaction found in Study 1: The ingroup-favoring bias was stronger among conservative compared to liberal participants. In fact, both conservative and liberal White participants in this sample evidenced significant ingroup favoritism. Black participants, on the other hand, revealed a different interaction pattern such that conservatism was associated with a *weaker* ingroup-favoring bias. Liberal Blacks did evidence significant ingroup favoritism in their romantic preferences, whereas conservative participants showed no bias. Thus, the two groups that seemed to be the most open to an interracial romantic relationship in the present study were liberal Whites and conservative Blacks—a curious and provocative combination.

Like Study 1, Study 2 involved a live romantic context; in fact, the speed-dating environment was probably particularly involving for participants, as the events are designed to encourage the development of actual relationships. This feature of Study 2 also argues against the alternative explanation of the Study 1 findings that White liberals exhibit less ingroup favoritism relative to conservatives because they are merely boosting their ratings of Blacks so that they do not appear prejudiced; after all, these dates and yes/no decisions had very real consequences for participants. Furthermore, Study 2 generalized the results of Study 1 in several key ways: Study 2 (a) revealed no evidence of sex differences in the political orientation \times partner race interaction, (b) required participants to report on not just two (possibly atypical) confederates but on multiple interaction partners, (c) allowed participants to converse freely on any topic of their choosing, and (d) examined a noncollegiate adult population.

General Discussion

Despite the wealth of social psychological research on stereotyping and prejudice (Fiske, 1998) and on romantic relationships (Berscheid & Reis, 1998), the crosstalk between these

literatures has historically been meager. It remains largely a mystery how interracial romantic relationships initially coalesce, and we know little about the unique challenges and benefits that may arise as such relationships develop. In an attempt to partially address this void, the present work examined the extent to which political conservatism predicts romantic interest across racial lines. In two studies we found that Whites' political conservatism was associated with experiencing less romantic desire for Black relative to White dating partners. This finding is consistent with survey research on interracial dating and marriage preferences (Johnson & Jacobson, 2005; McClelland & Auster, 1990; Yancey, 2002, 2007) as well as research on the association between contemporary forms of racism and conservatism (Henry & Sears, 2002). This ingroup favoritism was more or less evident for conservative Whites in both studies. White liberals, on the other hand, revealed an ingroup-favoring bias in Study 2 but an outgroup-favoring bias in Study 1. Perhaps there is a unique element of liberalism within a college population (Study 1) not present in a broader adult population (Study 2) that would cause liberals to strongly resist the status quo and subsequently prefer racial minority individuals as dating partners.

Results provided by the Black participants in Study 2 yielded findings consistent with system-justification theory. According to system justification theory, conservatism should predict reduced liking for Black relative to White potential romantic partners (i.e., reduced ingroup favoritism) among Black participants, and this is precisely what the data revealed. It is important to note, however, that the simple effects analyses did not reveal that conservative (or even extremely conservative) Black participants significantly preferred White to Black dating partners. Indeed, these participants revealed no significant bias in their dating preferences; it was the liberal Black participants who expressed an ingroup-favoring pattern of romantic desire.

Surely, a variety of competing motives shape the romantic preferences of Black participants: System-justification beliefs among conservatives may have increased the perceived value of White dating partners, but independently operating group-enhancement motives may have bolstered their interest in Black dating partners. Given that Black conservatives did not reveal any significant bias in their dating preferences, it appears that any system justification motives that they held were not sufficient to override their group-enhancement motives (e.g., Sidanius & Pratto, 1993; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).⁶ Nevertheless, the finding that conservatism is associated with a weaker ingroup-favoring bias in romantic preferences among Blacks is a novel and notable contribution made possible by our broad speed-dating sample.

Limitations, Strengths and Conclusions

A few methodological limitations of the present work also provide direction for future research. First, we only examined the romantic interest of White and Black participants in response to same-race, compared with interracial, dating interactions. Because different interracial romantic arrangements are differentially taboo, other combinations of interracial dates (e.g., White-Asian, Black-Latino) may moderate the findings reported herein. Second, by focusing specifically on the initial moments of potential romantic relationships, it remains unclear how interracial attractions grow into full fledged relationships. Based on the results of Study 2, it would seem likely that liberal Whites and conservative Blacks would be interested in dating one another, but would the political mismatch inherent to such a pairing cause problems later in the courtship process? This is a reasonable possibility that could be explored with data on established interracial romantic relationships. Third, although the conservatism \times race interaction and the conservative simple effect for Whites was consistent across both studies, liberals evidenced an outgroup-favoring bias in Study 1 but an ingroup-favoring bias in Study 2. Future

research could determine whether this difference is due to the nature of the sample (college students versus adults), the dependent variable (romantic desire versus “yessing”), or some other factor.

This work also has several strengths. For one, both studies investigated face-to-face interactions between opposite-sex individuals in a live romantic context; thus, it is unlikely that these results only apply to liberals’ and conservatives’ *theories* about what might appeal to them in a hypothetical romantic partner (see Eastwick & Finkel, 2008a). Second, the laboratory (Study 1) and speed-dating (Study 2) contexts have some nice complementary features. For example, given that participants in Study 1 only conversed about a set of standardized TAT pictures, we can conclude that the source of the political orientation \times race interaction among Whites was not due to differences in conversational topics raised by liberals and conservatives. Yet given that participants were permitted to discuss any topic they desired in Study 2, we can conclude that the political orientation \times race interaction generalizes to a more externally valid arena in which people are conversing freely. Third, we replicated the central political orientation \times race interaction among Whites within two very different populations: one a sample of young college students, the other a broader (and very large) sample of adults. Fourth, the speed-dating data enabled us to explore the romantic experiences of Black individuals, a population which has historically been understudied (Shelton, 2000). Given that this research was intended to advance scholars’ understanding of interracial romantic relationship initiation, it was important to address the experience of both majority and racial minority individuals.

The present report contributes to two stimulating and rapidly growing psychological literatures: one that lies at the intersection of race and romantic attraction (e.g., Fisman, Iyengar, Kamenica, & Simonson, 2008; Gaines et al., 2006; Miller et al., 2004) and another that has

argued for an increased appreciation of the psychological potency of political ideology (e.g., Jost, 2006). This study is the first to provide evidence in a live dating context that participants' attitudes are associated with their interest in initiating interracial romantic relationships. Specifically, political orientation seems to be one factor that predicts who is willing to venture across racial lines to form romantic relationships, both among Whites and Blacks. Some individuals, such as Black liberals and White conservatives, may prefer to date members of their own racial ingroup. On the other hand, White liberals and Black conservatives may be open to interracial dating possibilities, despite the social and cultural barriers that have kept the romantic lives of members of different racial groups largely separate since the aptly-named *Loving* decision.

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Footnotes

¹ All hypothesis tests reveal identical conclusions if we used either of the two scales alone.

² This interaction remained significant if (a) participants who suspected that the experiment involved race ($N=7$) or (b) reported at the experimental session that they had entered a romantic relationship since the group-testing session ($N=6$) were removed from the analysis. Given that all participants followed instructions and none suspected that the study involved political orientation, we included these 13 participants in the remaining analyses.

³ In addition, we conducted a successful replication of Study 1 with 43 White participants who completed the identical TAT interaction with different White and Black confederates (Son, 2008). Because this experiment had several additional features and the participants were intentionally selected to exhibit a restricted range of political orientation (only liberals), we do not report the full results of this study in the present report. However, even with this liberal sample, the same political orientation \times race of target interaction emerged: “Conservatives” (i.e., centrists) were more likely than strong liberals to exhibit ingroup favoritism in their romantic desire reports.

⁴ Elsewhere, we have reported data from a speed-dating study that we ourselves hosted for undergraduate students (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008b). In this previous study, White conservatives significantly desired White compared to racial minority speed-dating partners, whereas White liberals significantly preferred racial minority partners to White partners. However, we did not have a sufficient number of Black participants in that dataset ($N=3$) to allow us to confidently draw conclusions about White/Black romantic relationships—the focus of the present report.

⁵ Although Black individuals make up a relatively small proportion of the participants in this study (3.4%), it is worth noting that the absolute number of black participants (97) is quite large for a social psychology study.

⁶ In addition, if conservatism among Black participants was associated with a preference for colorblindness, a tendency to inhabit a more racially integrated social environment, or a generally open-minded approach to dating, then these alternative motives could be responsible for conservative Black participants' reduced ingroup favoritism in lieu of system justification tendencies.

Figure Captions

Figure 1. Study 1: White male participants' romantic desire for White and Black female confederates as a function of participant political conservatism.

Figure 2. Study 2: The probability that White participants would say "yes" to an opposite-sex speed-dating partner as a function of partner race and participant political conservatism.

Figure 3. Study 2: The probability that Black participants would say "yes" to an opposite-sex speed-dating partner as a function of partner race and participant political conservatism.

Figure 1

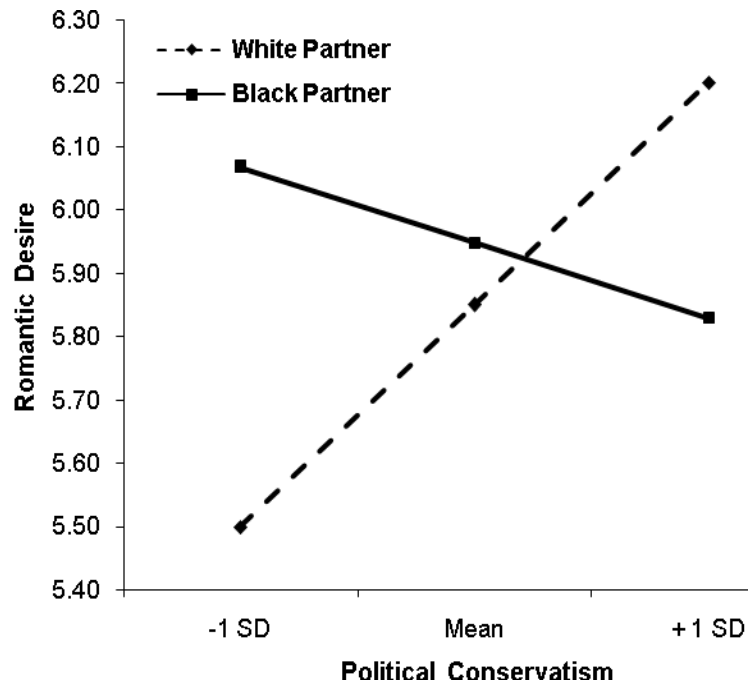


Figure 2

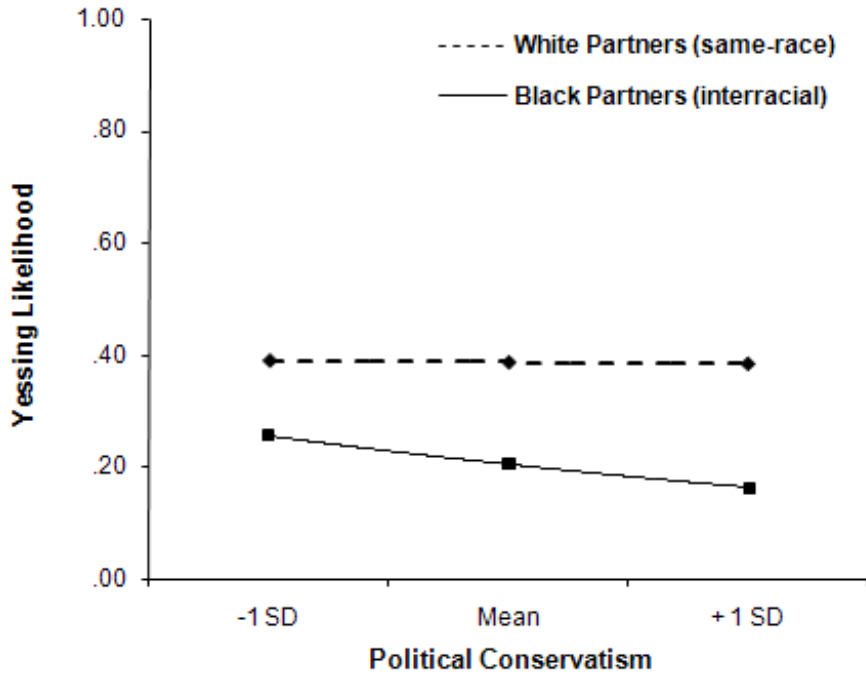


Figure 3

