

# **The Colors of Love: Attitudes toward Inter-ethnic Romantic Relationships among College Students**

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## **Abstract**

Our study focused on inter-ethnic romantic relationships at a private Midwestern liberal arts college. We surveyed randomly selected undergraduate students using a confidential questionnaire. We predicted that students would have a more open attitude towards inter-ethnic romantic relationships (IERRs) if they have more experience dating inter-ethnically and if they have more inter-ethnic social contact. We evaluated various aspects of respondents' attitudes towards and experiences with inter-ethnic romantic relationships in addition to the ethnic diversity of the respondents' social networks. We found a positive correlation between both social network diversity and IERR experience and attitudes.

In a nation whose history is littered with horror stories of slavery, land-grabbing, internment camps, and race riots, the term "multiculturalism" has somehow slipped into the daily vocabulary. A 2007 New York Times article stated that more than one in five children in the U.S. are either foreign-born or first generation Americans and that nearly one half of children under 5 years old are Asian, Black, or Hispanic (Roberts 2007). This is a result of both increasing immigration and higher birthrates among ethnic minorities.

As the United States becomes more diverse, more Americans are crossing ethnic boundaries in their social networks. As inter-ethnic relationships become more common, many people are forced to re-evaluate their attitudes toward nontraditional relationships. It was not long ago that inter-ethnic dating was considered completely unacceptable. Consequently, intolerance of inter-ethnic romance is still a prevalent force. This is reflected by recent laws: "It was not until 1967 that the U.S. Supreme Court ruled as unconstitutional the last of the state antimiscegenation laws, which banned marriage across various types of racial and ethnic groups" (Clark-Ibanez and Felmlee 2004). Even with the end of these laws, it was not until 2000 that Bob Jones University repealed its policy banning inter-ethnic dating (Collins 2008).

### **Review of Literature**

Past studies of societal attitudes towards inter-ethnic dating or marriage have tended to focus on three contributing factors: race, gender, and age, which we will now examine.

#### **Inter-ethnic relationship attitudes among various racial groups**

Prior research has explored the correlations between ethnicity and inter-ethnic relationship behaviors/attitudes. The percentage of Whites who approve of interracial marriages has greatly increased since the 1950s, which is likely due in part to a general increase in racial tolerance in the last century (Joyner and Kao 2005). Although approval of inter-ethnic relationships in general has likely also increased in recent decades, the prevalence of inter-ethnic relationships still varies between different racial groups.

Joyner and Kao (2005) have reported that persons belonging to minority racial groups within a certain geographical context tend to exhibit higher levels of interracial marriage than members of majority racial groups in the same area. A possible explanation for this phenomenon is the lack of intra-ethnic contact for members of minority groups, leading these individuals to have more contact with members of other ethnic groups.

A separate study of college students reported disparities between White students' and Black students' openness to inter-ethnic relationships. 83% of Black respondents expressed

openness to becoming involved in an interracial relationship, compared to only 43% of Whites (Knox, Zusman, Buffington, and Hemphill 2000). The study's authors suggest that these differences might be due to a greater advantage in joining the majority group than in joining the minority group, a greater overall number of available Whites than Blacks, and the greater exposure to 'White' culture in America.

Similarly, Clark-Ibañez and Felmler (2004) have examined correlations between a person's race and number of inter-ethnic relationships and noted that an "ethnically diverse and supportive social network" is an important variable positively affecting inter-ethnic relationship activities. They also note that persons of color are four times more likely than Whites to frequently engage in interracial relationships. Furthermore, Dixon, Durrheim, and Tredoux (2007) found that "interracial contact improves Whites' attitudes toward practices aimed at achieving racial justice." However, Sigelman and Welch (1993) warn researchers to be cautious with regard to inter-ethnic contact and positive racial attitudes, as their study found that "Having friends of the other race or living in environments where interracial social contact is commonplace does not guarantee that blacks and whites will perceive race relations as more amicable or that they will feel more committed to engaging in social intercourse." Our research examines this correlation in the context of a liberal arts college.

#### **Inter-ethnic relationship attitudes among different age groups**

As a result of the historically dynamic quality of ethnic relations in the United States, social attitudes towards this subject differ considerably across age groups. At the time of the 1992 Rodney King race riots in Los Angeles, our study participants were between two and six years old. One would think that a college student who was six when the riots occurred would have stronger memories of the events than a student who was two. However, one study suggests that this has little bearing on attitude differences. Reiter found no significant differences in interethnic dating behaviors/attitudes based on age among participants at a southeastern United States college (Reiter, Krause, and Stirlen 2005).

Related studies indicate that attitudes towards inter-ethnic romantic relationships are more responsive to the age variable *within* discrete ethnic groups. Sixteen years ago, Judith Todd examined the impact of age, gender, and race on inter-ethnic dating outlooks among members of an integrated Californian community. Among Black respondents, she discovered that young women were the most hostile towards inter-ethnic dating with only 35% willing to consider it a possibility and 44% in complete opposition (Todd 1992). Other investigations have also examined the impact of age and socioeconomic status on ethnic group opinions concerning



inter-ethnic dating. A recent study by Wang and Kao (2007) concluded that there is almost no relationship between these variables for adolescents, except among Hispanics.

Furthermore, Joyner and Kao found evidence demonstrating a decline in inter-ethnic sexual relationships as Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics grow older (2005: 267). This finding is consistent with other studies that have remarked on a tendency for youth to be more receptive to inter-ethnic romantic relationships (Kao and Vaquera 2005; Todd 1992). Furthermore, some researchers comment that this trend is likely due to a generational variable (Joyner and Kao 2005; Kao and Vaquera 2005). To be more specific, there have been historical fluctuations in racial tolerance that have strongly influenced different birth cohorts' social attitudes (Joyner and Kao 2005:566).

### **Inter-ethnic relationship attitudes as influenced by gender**

A great deal of research has been conducted regarding the question of gender attitudes toward inter-ethnic dating and possible reasons for gender differences. Previous research in the realm of inter-ethnic relationships finds that males are generally more open to these types of relationships than women (Clark-Ibañez and Felmlee 2004; Todd 1992; Yancey 2002).

Clark-Ibañez and Felmlee (2004) offer social pressures as a possible explanation for men's more positive attitudes toward interracial relationships. Investigating the degree to which ethnic diversity in social networks relates to the frequency of inter-ethnic romantic relationships at a university in California, Clark-Ibañez and Felmlee suggest that men's higher tendency to date inter-ethnically than women is a reflection of the privileged position of freedom men enjoy in society (2004:302). Previous research has also found that potential social network pressure against interracial relationships tends to affect women more strongly than men (Clark-Ibañez and Felmlee 2004:302). Clark-Ibañez and Felmlee address the impact of gender roles and their respective social pressures on interracial relationships, suggesting that gender roles might be the underlying causes of these reported differences between genders.

Yancey posits that the more positive attitude of males than females toward interracial dating is due to social pressures and socially constructed gender roles. Men usually experience a "superior social position" in society, making it more acceptable for men to deviate from 'standard' dating habits (Yancey 2002:186). Women, on the other hand, still experience a sexual double standard in many societies and thus may desire to avoid the appearance of promiscuity (Yancey 2002:186). Strong sexual stereotypes still affect interracial relationships, such as the conflict between racial dominance roles and gender roles. For example, in an inter-ethnic relationship, a White female is seen as sexually dominant, breaking the standard gender role.

Due to these strong stereotypes females are subsequently more likely to avoid interracial dating (Yancey 2002:186). Similar findings suggest that social pressures are consistent across ethnicities, affecting individuals of all racial backgrounds.

Todd addresses a similar question, asking whether social pressures might cause Black women's negative attitudes toward interracial dating. Todd suggests that these women have a conservative value-system, express wariness towards White men, and fear the potential criticism that comes with interracial relationships (1992). This supports Yancey's research that women are influenced more by the potential social stigma of interracial relationships (2002).

Todd also questions whether certain personality traits might have influenced individual openness to interracial dating. Looking for common personality traits in those who are open to interracial dating, Todd finds that those who were willing to date people from a different ethnic group rated themselves as more "Independent, Powerful, Active, Able to Get Own Way, and Persuasive" than those who were not willing to date someone of a different ethnicity (1992). This research suggests that, regardless of race or gender, the individuals who were open to interracial dating exhibited characteristics that make them less susceptible to social pressures.

### **Relevance to our research**

Research on interethnic romantic relationships identifies three essential variables to take into account when conducting research: race, age, and gender. This research has suggested that young people, males, and members of smaller ethnic groups will be the most likely to have positive attitudes toward interethnic dating. Our study adds to this body of research by investigating attitudes and experience with interethnic relationships at a small, private, liberal arts college. At a college with a large Caucasian majority, exposure to 'White' culture is a given for minority students. Our research questions whether a rather heterogeneous social network positively affects attitudes toward interracial dating, or if it makes interracial relationships less appealing because of the potential exposure to other cultural backgrounds at this school. Our first hypothesis is that people with more diverse social networks will have more open attitudes toward interethnic dating. Our second hypothesis is that those with more experience with interethnic dating will have more open attitudes toward interethnic dating.

### **Research Methods**

Our research was conducted in the fall of 2008 using a survey questionnaire. Survey research is used in descriptive or explanatory research as a way by which data can be systematically collected from a large sample so that results can be generalized to an even larger

population (Neuman 2007:20). Since our research is descriptive and we would like to generalize our results to represent the college population, survey research is the most efficient means by which to collect data.

For our project, survey questionnaires were distributed using an online survey creator program (Form Creator). After selecting students for sampling, we sent each chosen student an email requesting their participation in the survey, including a link to the Form Creator webpage. Only selected students had access to the survey. Form Creator compiled the responses, saving time during data processing.

The independent variables we measured were respondents' past inter-ethnic romantic relationship (IERR) experience and the ethnic diversity of their social networks. Our dependent variable was students' attitudes towards inter-ethnic dating. For the purposes of our survey, we defined *ethnicity* as one's "self-identified heritage with a recognized group; your outward racial identity such as 'White' or 'Black' or your general cultural heritage such as 'Latino' or 'Pacific Islander.'"

In order to measure past experience with inter-ethnic dating, we used a fill-in-the-blank approach to ask how many romantic relationships each student had been in, how many were at the college, how many of the total romantic relationships were inter-ethnic, and how many of the inter-ethnic relationships were at the college. These questions came from an example in *Questionnaire Research: A Practical Guide* by Mildred L. Patten (Patten 2001:35). The ratio measures resulting from these questions allowed us to state relations in terms of proportion, whereby we were able to analyze the correlation between experience and attitudes.

To measure social network diversity, we asked how many of the participant's ten closest friends are of a different ethnicity than their own and how many times in the last week they ate a meal where a person of a different ethnicity than their own was sitting with them or their group. The former question also allowed us to analyze responses in percentage terms.

To examine attitudes toward inter-ethnic dating, we asked participants to indicate their levels of agreement or disagreement with the following statements: "If I were to enter a romantic relationship, I would be open to getting involved with someone of an ethnicity different than my own;" "I would feel comfortable going on a date with a person of an ethnicity different than my own;" "I feel more comfortable being romantically involved with people of my own ethnicity than with people of a different ethnicity;" "I approve of inter-ethnic dating by my relatives," and "I approve of inter-ethnic dating by my friends." Responses to these questions were from the Likert scale: strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, and strongly disagree (Neuman



2007:130). 'Neutral' and 'undecided' categories were left out because they are attractive choices to respondents that typically avoid expressing opinions on contentious issues (Patten 2001:35).

To achieve face validity (an agreement that an indicator makes sense as a measure of a construct in the judgment of the scientific community), we reviewed our survey with our professor/advisor, statistics fellows (advanced statistics students who consulted with us), and groups in the same class (Neuman 2007:118).

To achieve content validity (measurement validity that requires that a measure represent all the aspects of the conceptual definition of a construct), the questions regarding inter-ethnic relationship experience directly asked about the number of respondents' prior romantic relationships, the number which were inter-ethnic, and the number of these which occurred at the college. This gave a clear quantitative measure of romantic relationship experience.

Our survey used 4-item Likert questions to assess attitudes towards inter-ethnic romantic relationships. We conceptualized attitudes as having two primary facets: personal openness towards involvement in inter-ethnic romantic relationships and approval of other persons being involved in inter-ethnic romantic relationships. The Likert items measured both personal attitudes and attitudes towards others.

We assessed social network diversity using two measures: proportion of closest ten friends who are of a different ethnicity and meals eaten in the last week with a person of a different ethnicity present. Although this does not completely capture the diversity of respondents' social networks, which would be very difficult to accurately assess, it does measure two main aspects of social network diversity. Consequently, the measures should reflect respondents' overall inter-ethnic social contact.

Reliability, the dependability of a measure of a variable in quantitative research, can be improved in four ways: clearly conceptualizing concepts, using precise levels of measurement, using multiple indicators, and using pilot tests (Neuman 2007:116). Our research process began with conceptualization of our key concepts. We used open-ended questions for our non-Likert items in order to increase the precision of our data. The survey included multiple questions measuring each variable. We also used various forms of pilot-testing including focus groups and having students take our survey to provide feedback for questionnaire refinement.

Research was conducted in the Midwestern United States at a small, private, liberal arts college. The target population was of average college age: between 18 and 23 years. Our study was limited to the 3,040 students of this institution. The student population has a 45 to 55 male-female ratio and an 8% ethnic minority representation. The college has a highly residential

campus with 96% of all students living in school housing all 4 years. This means that the majority of all student social events, including dating, occur on campus.

The participants in this study were chosen through simple random sampling (SRS), without any stratification for gender, ethnicity, or other characteristics. In order to conduct a SRS, we used a precise sampling frame: the email addresses of all currently enrolled students. Exclusions consisted of students under the age of 18, students currently studying abroad, and students involved in the research project. The Director of Institutional Research at the school selected elements from the sampling frame by using a mathematically random procedure (a computerized randomizer generated the separate elements). These elements corresponded to student addresses that were subsequently placed on an email alias used for survey distribution. The simple random sample provided each member of the target population an equal chance of being chosen for the study. Simple random sampling allows for generalization to the accessible population: college students at this specific institution. As researchers, we can say with a high level of confidence that the true population parameter lays within a certain range (Neuman 2007:148-151).

In choosing a sample size, we had to consider the limitations of the time and resources of a semester-long class. We decided upon correlational analysis as the primary means of analyzing our data. Additionally, accounting for the aforementioned characteristics of the target population, we used a commonly accepted proportion of the population, following the “rule of thumb” method, and distributed the survey to 20% of the student body after our exclusions, 540 students (Neuman 2007:161-162).

The response rate for our survey was 58%. Of the 540 distributed, 315 were returned. This is higher than previous response rates for similar surveys distributed in previous years at this institution. The large number of surveys that were not returned may be due to the use of email distribution, which allows for easy deletion, as opposed to paper surveys in post office boxes, which are not as easy to ignore. To counter this potential deterrence factor, we provided survey respondents with compensation in the form of a drawing for five gift certificates for \$20 to the campus bookstore. The effectiveness of this reward is apparent by our high response rate.

The sample characteristics were 61.7% female and 38.3% male. 24.7% of the sample were in their first year of college, while 26.3% were in the second, 23.1% in the third, 21.5% in the fourth, 0.6% in the fifth year of college, 0.3% were exchange students, and 3.5% answered “other.” 19.6% of respondents were 18, 25% were 19, 21.8% were 20, 26 % were 21, 6.1% were 22, 0.6% were 23, 0.3% were 24, and 0.3% were 33 years old. Of the sample population’s reported ethnicities, 3.9% were Asian, Asian American, or Indian; 1% were Black or African



American; 0.3% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander; 90.6% were Non-Hispanic White or European; 1% were Hispanic; 0.3% were non-categorizable “other;” and 2.9% were multi-ethnic, including respondents who reported being Native American or Alaskan Native in combination with other ethnicities.

In order to conduct our research in accordance with sociological research ethics, we considered the following issues, in accordance with the published policies of our college’s Institutional Review Board (IRB): informed consent, voluntary nature of responses, protection of special populations, and anonymity of respondents. We used a cover letter to inform participants of the nature of the research and the project objectives. We also informed the sample population that participation was completely voluntary. By returning the survey after having been presented with the cover letter, participants signified informed consent. In order to protect the special population present at this institution, we discouraged students of less than 18 years of age from answering the survey and discounted any replies from this group. Additionally, results and returned surveys were never connected with the names of respondents to guarantee anonymity and to ensure protection of privacy (Neuman 2007:47-67). Following the design of our research to include these ethical safeguards, our research was approved by the college’s IRB.

## **Results**

81.4% of respondents (253/311) reported having been in at least one previous romantic relationship. Of these respondents with prior relationship experience, 28.5% (72/253) reported having been in at least one interethnic romantic relationship (IERR). Of respondents with IERR experience, 34.7% (25/72) reported having been in at least one IERR while enrolled at our study’s college. Of respondents with IERR experience, the mean number of IERRs was 1.53 with a median of 1. Responses ranged from 0 to 6. Of these respondents with IERR experience, the mean ratio of IERRs to total romantic relationships was 0.49 with a median of 0.40.

75.4% of respondents (233/309) reported having at least one person of a different ethnicity amongst their 10 closest friends. Amongst all respondents, responses ranged from 0 to 10. The mean number of friends of a different ethnicity among the 10 closest friends was 1.89, with a median/mode of 1 and standard deviation of 2.23.

71.3% of respondents (219/307) reported having eaten at least one meal in the past week with a person of a different ethnicity.

Amongst all respondents, responses ranged from 0 to 21. The mean number of meals in the last week with a person of a different ethnicity was 3.49, with a median of 2 and mode of 0. Standard deviation was 4.48.

We created an "IERR Attitudes Index" (See Figure 1) compiling response values from the five Likert-scale attitude questions on the survey, rating attitudes from negative to positive (1 to 4). We combined the five questions into an index with a scale of 5-20. The index values resulted from adding together all unweighted values from Likert scale questions, with 20 representing the most open attitude towards IERRs. Responses ranged from 8 to 20, the mean value was 17.39 with a median of 18 and a mode of 19. Standard deviation was 2.25.

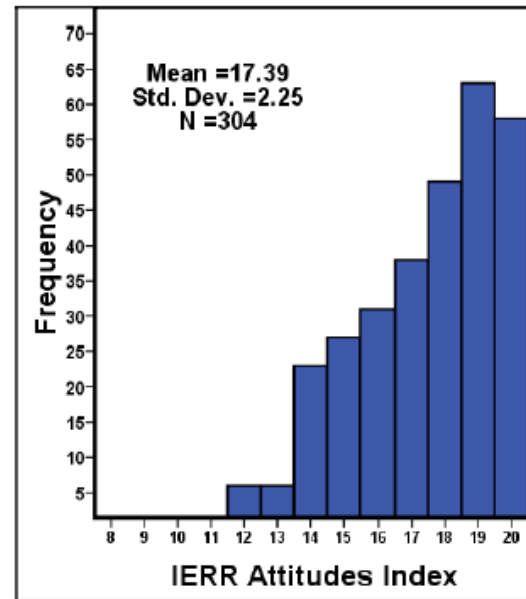


Figure 1

**Hypothesis 1:** *People with more ethnically diverse social networks have a more open attitude toward IERRs than persons with homogeneous social networks.*

We found small but statistically significant positive correlations between:

- a) The number of respondents' 10 closest friends who were of a different ethnicity and respondents' overall attitudes towards IERRs ( $r_s = .130$ ,  $p < .05$ ).
- b) The number of meals per week at which a person of a different ethnicity was present and respondents' overall attitudes towards IERRs ( $r_s = .143$ ,  $p < .01$ ) (See Figure 2).

Both measures of social network diversity showed statistically significant positive correlations between more inter-ethnic contact and openness towards IERRs, which allows us to reject the null hypothesis and therefore supports our alternative hypothesis that increased social network diversity correlates to more open attitudes towards IERRs.

			IERR Attitudes	Meals
Spearman's rho	IERR Attitudes	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.143**
		Sig. (1-tailed)	.	.007
		N	304	292
	Meals	Correlation Coefficient	.143**	1.000
		Sig. (1-tailed)	.007	.
		N	292	298

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

Figure 2

**Hypothesis 2:** *People with more personal experience with IERRs have a more open attitude toward IERRs than people with less experience.*

We found small but significant positive correlations between:

- The absolute number of respondents' romantic relationships which were interethnic and respondents' overall attitudes towards IERRs ( $r_s=.160$ ,  $p<.01$ ).
- The ratio of respondents' total romantic relationships which were interethnic and respondents' overall attitudes towards IERRs ( $r_s=.166$ ,  $p<.01$ ).

We also conducted an independent samples t-test between respondents with no IERR experience and respondents with IERR experience. The t-test showed a statistically significant difference in the mean attitude towards IERRs (95% confidence interval of mean difference=[.096-1.297],  $df=301$ ,  $p<.05$ ), where respondents with IERR experience reported more open attitudes towards IERRs than respondents with no IERR experience.

All three methods of testing the correlation between IERR experience and attitudes towards IERRs yielded statistically significant positive correlations, which allow us to reject the null hypothesis and to support our alternative hypothesis that more personal experience with IERRs correlates to more open attitudes towards IERRs.

Additionally, we tested the hypothesis that non-white students would be more open to IERRs than "white" students. An independent samples t-test showed *no significant difference* in the mean attitude toward IERRs between "non-white" and "white" respondents (observed difference in means =.374,  $p=.404$ ), not allowing us to reject the null hypothesis that there is no difference in means.



## Discussion

Our data demonstrates that an increased level of inter-ethnic social experience, both general social contact and romantic experience, can be a predictor of more open attitudes towards inter-ethnic romantic relationships.

Our first hypothesis, that social network diversity correlates positively with openness towards IERRs, was supported by both measures collected in our survey. The correlations were small but statistically significant. This means that there was a general tendency for respondents with more diverse social networks to also have more open attitudes towards IERRs, but that there was a good deal of variability between individual cases.

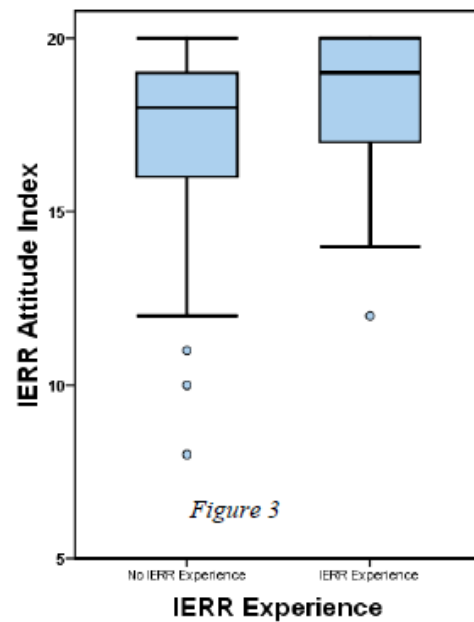
Most respondents scored fairly high on our IERR attitudes index, likely reflecting the general openness towards (and often support of) inter-ethnic and inter-racial social contact present at our Midwestern liberal-arts college. Therefore, many students, regardless of whether they have a diverse social network or not, scored high on the attitude index, perhaps due to the campus social climate and not their individual inter-racial experiences. This also could be a result of age. After analyzing the results of several surveys with questions pertaining to interethnic dating, Joyner and Kao wrote, "The results suggest that among current sexual relationships in two different historical periods (roughly 1990 and 2000), interracial involvement declined with age for whites, blacks, and Hispanics" (578). This finding is consistent with other studies that have remarked on a tendency for youth to be more receptive to interracial romantic relationships (Kao and Vaquera, 2005; Todd 1992).

Nevertheless, our data analysis did show a statistically significant correlation between social network diversity and openness towards IERRs. This is consistent with Clark-Ibañez and Felmlee's (2004) findings that an "ethnically diverse and supportive social network" is an important variable affecting interethnic relationship behaviors. One possible explanation for this result is that students who have more contact with persons of different ethnicities on a day-to-day basis tend to normalize inter-ethnic social contact, and so they no longer view inter-ethnic interaction as a deviation from social norms. Also, a diverse social network might demonstrate that cultural assumptions regarding the differences between persons of different ethnicities are either false or overstated, leading to an increased sense of interpersonal connection with persons of other ethnicities and thereby to greater acceptance of inter-ethnic relationships.

Our second hypothesis, that IERR experience correlates positively with openness towards IERRs, was also supported by all methods of measurement which we employed in our analysis. Our analysis yielded small but statistically significant correlations. This means that we found a tendency for respondents who had prior experience with IERRs to be more open to IERRs than respondents who had never been in an IERR.

Possible explanations for this correlation follow from the discussion of our first hypothesis. Respondents who had already experienced an IERR had already made the ‘first step’ to enter into a socially intimate inter-ethnic relationship, which represents a probable hurdle in creating acceptance of IERRs. Once a person has moved from “no IERR experience” to “IERR experience”, they have already demonstrated a personal openness to IERRs, which they possibly carry over into their attitudes. However, since our study was cross-sectional, we cannot infer causality due to a lack of time-ordered data. Therefore an alternative explanation is that people with more open attitudes towards IERRs to begin with will later tend to enter into more IERRs. Also, as reflected by the low level of correlation, there were many cases in which respondents scored very high on the IERR attitudes index, even though they reported no IERR experience. This was also likely a result of the relatively open social climate at our target college, but does not negate the correlations found in the overall sample data.

An additional finding was the lack of a statistically significant relationship between respondents’ race/ethnicity and IERR attitudes. This failed to repeat results reported in prior research that African American students were nearly three times as open to IERRs as White students (Knox, et al. 2000). This prior research however was conducted at a large public university in the Southeast with a larger proportion of non-Whites in the student body than at our target college. A probable explanation for these conflicting results is the difference in cultural attitudes towards inter-racial contact in different areas of the country. Another possible explanation is that students at our private liberal-arts target college tend to be of a higher socio-economic status than students at a large public university, and as a consequence they tend to have different cultural norms.



## **Conclusion**

Our research questions were whether previous personal experience and social network diversity affect attitudes toward interethnic romantic relationships. Our research supports the hypotheses that having a diverse social network and more IERR experience positively correlates with more open attitudes toward IERRs. Prior research on interethnic romantic relationships identifies three essential variables to take into account when conducting research: race, age, and gender. This prior research has suggested that young people, males, and members of smaller ethnic groups will be the most likely to have positive attitudes toward interethnic romantic relationships. We added to this body of research by investigating attitudes and experience with interethnic relationships at St. Olaf College. Our results are useful to college administrators, as they suggest that a more diverse student body may increase students' openness to IERRs and perhaps inter-ethnic relationships in general.

The strengths of our study include a large response rate and the steps taken to ensure anonymity. A limitation of our study was the small regional population of undergraduate students at a liberal arts college in the upper Midwest with a primarily Caucasian student body. Another weakness of our study was the limited number of survey questions due to space limitations.

In the future, a larger study that includes students from many different types of schools and many regions would be constructive. More indicators measuring social network diversity would result in higher validity and a more complete profile of the sample population. Future research could also measure the attitudes of populations of different age groups and ethnicities, as previous research suggests that age and ethnicity also affect attitudes toward interethnic romantic relationships.



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**Appendix: Additional Data Analysis for**  
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Elizabeth Zahn, Consulting Statistics Fellow

In the current study, we examined the impact that previous personal experience and social network diversity has on attitudes towards inter-ethnic romantic relationships (IERR). However, there were still some unanswered questions about what factors affected IERR attitudes. First, we were interested in determining whether or not sexual orientation was associated with attitudes towards IERR. We hypothesized that individuals with non-heterosexual orientations would score higher on the Inter-ethnic Romantic Relationship index because they would tend to be more open to alternative types of relationships in general. A Chi-squared test found that the relationship between an individual's openness to IERR and whether an individual was heterosexual or non-heterosexual was statistically significant ( $p\text{-value} = 0.000$ ). It is important to note the vast differences in sample sizes between the two groups. In total, there were 285 heterosexual respondents in the study, and only 30 non-heterosexual respondents.

Having already determined that network diversity and previous experience with IERRs were associated with more openness to IERRs, we were interested in whether either the relationship between network diversity and openness or the relationship between previous experience and openness were different for males and females. Through multiple linear regression on the dependent variable IERR scale score, it was found that there was not a difference for either relationship by gender ( $p\text{-value} > 0.05$ ). Interestingly, after accounting for gender, network diversity and previous experience were no longer significantly associated with IERR scale score. This might indicate a possible confounding variable that should be explored further.

We also wondered whether or not some of the previously explored explanatory variables could predict a person's level of experience with IERRs. No significant association between ethnicity and IERR experience was found using an ANOVA analysis of variance ( $p\text{-value} < 0.05$ ). A linear regression showed that sexual orientation was not significantly associated with IERR experience ( $t = -0.829$ ,  $p\text{-value} = .408$ ). However, class year and gender were found to be significantly associated with IERR experience. An ANOVA test found that an individual's gender was significantly associated with the number of previous inter-ethnic relationships they had been involved in ( $F(1,313)=36.15$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.000$ ). Females had engaged in more IERR than males.



Similarly, class year was also significantly associated with IERR experience ( $F(1,313) = 25.9$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.000$ ). As class year increased, so did the number of IERR that an individual had. This may be due to more relationship experience in general or more time spent at a liberal institution like the target college.