Interracial Dating: Understanding Differences in Date Initiation Strategies

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Abstract

The development of any romantic relationship begins with the date initiation. Research has shown that there are inconsistencies of strategies used to initiate dates. The current study examined date initiation strategies in the context of interracial dating, while assessing the participant’s level of social and intergroup anxiety. One hundred and eighteen male participants’ responses on dating strategy selection, social anxiety, and intergroup anxiety measures were analyzed using a between-subjects, 2 (Participant Race: Black, White) x 2 (Target Race: Black, White) multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA). It was predicted that males would choose different dating strategies when initiating a date with a same race target than with a different race target. Specifically, it was predicted that White males would employ more indirect strategies in the different race combination condition. Results revealed that there was a significant difference in dating strategy selection based on race combination condition.
Interracial Dating: Understanding Differences in Date Initiation Strategies

In the last few decades, the United States has experienced an increase in social interactions between people of different races. This increase in social interaction is due to the opportunities minorities now have in education, jobs, and housing. This frequent interaction has helped to create less social distance between racial groups and increase the likelihood for members of a different race to build friendships and intimate relationships (Qian, 2003; Qian & Lichter, 2011; Sporlein, Schlueter, & Tubergen, 2013). However, research has shown that while these opportunities are present, there are many factors that prevent individuals from developing an intimate relationship with someone of a different race (Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000; Schoepflin, 2009). A few major factors that have deterred these relationships include the perceptions and attitudes society has toward interracial dating, the success of interracial couples, family and friend approval and support, and perceptions of physical attractiveness.

Furthermore, when these relationships are pursued, there appears to be differences in the emotions and behaviors that occur between same race and different race social interactions (Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000; Trawalter & Richeson, 2008). For instance, researchers have found differences in the level of anxiety individuals feel when interacting with someone of a different race (Trawalter & Richeson, 2008). Therefore, the present study sought to examine the initial social interactions that occur in the context of interracial dating. Specifically, this research focused on the selection of date initiation strategies employed by Black and White male initiators based on the race of a target partner. Additionally, the current investigation examined the role of social and intergroup anxiety as potential factors accounting for differences in date initiation strategies.
Perceptions and Attitudes of Interracial Dating

Although social distance between racial groups has decreased and this in turn has helped to increase the interactions of racial groups, the percentage of interracial couples has increased at an extremely slow rate (McClintock, 2010; Qian & Lichter, 2011; Sporlein, Schlueter, & Tubergen, 2013). The relatively small increase in interracial couples may be due to negative attitudes that still remain between racial groups in spite of increased interactions. Individuals having prejudicial attitudes tend to use race as the foremost means of classifying of people, and may perceive interracial relationships as shameful relative to same race relationships (Bonam & Shih, 2009). Explicit and implicit prejudices about race have created social stigma toward interracial dating and interracial couples (McConnell & Leibold, 2001; Bonam & Shih, 2009).

Researchers found that the historical period in which an individual grew up could affect their view of interracial relationships. For example, Tsunokai and McGrath (2011) evaluated the social perceptions and attitudes of individuals classified as the baby boomer generation and compared these attitudes with those held by individuals born pre-baby boomer generation. Specifically, using Black and White participants over the age of forty-five, the researchers examined individuals’ willingness to cross over racial boundaries in search for love as they aged. The researchers used data from a dating website and found that majority group members (White individuals) were less likely than minority group members to date someone outside of their race. Other researchers have found younger generations to show more accepting attitudes and greater willingness to engage in intimate interracial relationships. In fact, about 90% of the younger millennial cohort (born between 1981-2000) self-report approval toward interracial dating (Poulin & Rutter, 2011).
However, perceptions of interracial dating may also differ by an individual’s race, gender, and level of education. For example, the “angry black woman” stereotype is associated with Black women regarding their attitudes of interracial relationships (Childs, 2005). This stereotype portrayed in the media stems from the perception that Black women have negative attitudes about interracial dating; this is especially true when the combination of the interracial couple consists of a Black man and a White woman (Childs, 2005). A strong example of this stereotype in the media can be seen in the popular movie Save the Last Dance in which the main characters are a Black man and a White woman who attempt to have an intimate relationship and face opposition to the relationship by other Black female characters in the movie (Charter, 2001).

Research using focus groups have found the belief of Black women being upset about interracial dating, stems from Black women feeling betrayed when a Black man is in a relationship with a White woman (Childs, 2005). Some Black women believe it sends the message that Black women are not equal to White women; in part, because when a Black man dates a White woman, the White woman has a higher social status (Childs, 2005). Black women then feel that they are at a disadvantage in terms of options for quality dating partners because educated Black men have chosen to date interracially. In contrast, Black men appear to share a more positive view of interracial dating. This is notably true for Black men at predominantly White universities where they are more likely to be involved in an interracial relationship due to increased dating opportunities (Schoepflin, 2009).

In addition, as Black Women gain greater years of education, they become less willing to date outside of their race (Tsunokai & McGrath, 2011). This may occur given that when there are few Blacks at a university; Black female students tend to search for each other to form supportive bonds resulting in fewer opportunities to interact with people of a different race.
Researchers Herman and Campbell (2011) offered a comparison of perceptions and attitudes by inquiring about individuals’ feelings on interracial dating both, globally (referring to others) and personally. Their findings revealed gender differences with regard to views of interracial dating. Their study showed that White men and women have accepting views of interracial dating globally, yet they do not express the same rate of acceptance for interracial dating personally. White women, for instance, report a personal hesitation to date or marry interracially, but have no problem with others who wish to date and marry outside of their own race. However, White men report being less personally hesitant and much more willing to date and marry interracially, as well as being accepting of others’ choice to do so.

Furthermore, researchers have also investigated the perceptions and attitudes that Latino individuals have toward interracial couples, researchers have demonstrated that both Latino men and Latino women share an openness to interracial dating (Garcia, Riggio, Palavinelu, & Culpepper, 2012). Although both sexes share this openness to interracial dating, it is contingent on the racial combination of the couple. For instance, when the description contained a Latino/White couple combination, there were more positive judgments made by Latino participants than when the description contained a Latino/Black couple combination. When a Latino individual was described in a relationship with a White individual, the Latino individual in the relationship was viewed as moving up in society and making a good life for themselves. When the Latino individual was described in a relationship with a Black individual, Latino participants made more negative judgments and evaluations of the couple because the Latino individual was viewed as moving down the social ladder and therefore limiting their opportunities to have a better life (Garcia et. al, 2012). This was especially true when Latino men
were evaluating a Latino woman and Black male couple because Latino men tend to feel threatened by this couple combination.

The most accepting perceptions and attitudes of interracial couples come from multiracial individuals. Bonam and Shih (2009), found that multiracial individuals, compared to monoracial individuals, expressed more comfort with intimate interracial relationships. This was evidenced by multiracial individuals’ understanding of race as a social construction as opposed to a biological component (Bonam & Shih, 2009). Viewing race as a social construction implies a clear understanding that how the concept of race is formed out of the beliefs and values of society. Unlike most monoracial individuals, multiracial individuals grow up in families that model people of different races living harmoniously. Consequently, they have acquired the ability to overlook race, which has led to more positive interactions with individuals from various races (Bonam & Shih, 2009).

**Influential Factors of Dating Intercially**

Apart from research focusing on social attitudes toward interracial couples, a large amount of research focuses on the multiple factors that contribute to whether or not an individual chooses to get involved intimately with someone of a different race. The success rate of previous interracial couples can influence an individual’s decision to date interracially (Bratter & King, 2008). Therefore, it is also important to consider the current views individuals have toward interracial marriages. For the majority of U.S. history, interracial marriage was deemed unacceptable by society. The majority of U.S. states banned marital or sexual relations between different racial groups in the late 1800s and early 1900s. It was not until Loving v. Virginia case in 1967 that the Supreme Court made it legal in all states for White individuals to marry someone of a different race (Wallenstein, 2002). Researchers have since distributed nationwide
surveys to measure the attitudes and acceptance rates of interracial marriage. These surveys revealed that in 1958, only 10% of White individuals approved of interracial marriage, whereas in 2004, that rate increased to 76% (Herman & Campbell, 2011). Although acceptance of interracial couples has substantially increased in recent times, a majority of the population does not partake in interracial dating (Qian & Lichter, 2011). In 1980, only 3% of all marriages included couples of different races (Pew Center Research, 2010), with the number increasing only to 10% in 2010 (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2012).

Additionally, researchers have found that interracial marriages, compared to same race marriages, have a much higher divorce rate (Bratter & King, 2008). Fu (2006) found that interracial relationships are less stable than same race couples are and differ in socioeconomic status. One reason for higher divorce rates is that most interracial couples get little to no help from outside support systems such as family members, community members, or friends (Fu, 2008). The lack of support from individuals outside of the intimate interracial relationship is a burden not shared by most same race couples (Leslie & Letiecq, 2004). A weakened social support system can affect the interracial couple’s decision to marry or to have children (Fu, 2008).

Another factor that influences an individual’s decision to date someone of a different race is the fear of a negative response from their family, and this fear is especially prevalent for White females (Garcia et. al, 2012). Most parents do not approve of their children dating someone of a different race (Tsunokai & McGrath, 2011). Because of the fear of parental disapproval, individuals involved in interracial dating may not reveal the relationship to their family members (Wang, Kao, & Joyner, 2006). It has been suggested that this fear is also why individuals are
often not as committed to the interracial relationship as they would be if they were in a relationship with someone of the same race (Wang et. al, 2006).

Furthermore, how interracial relationships are perceived from individuals outside of the relationship can influence dating decisions. Some individuals do not see the legitimacy of interracial relationships and perceive the relationships as less serious commitment-wise than same race relationships. One misconception held about interracial couples is that the individuals are seen as being incompatible with each other (Garcia et. al, 2012). Others also think interracial couples may be together for reasons other than love. For instance, individuals who do not understand interracial dating assume that these pairings happen because of sexual curiosity and lust (Chapman, 2008). A concept usually attached to this sexual curiosity is the social myth called “Jungle Fever.” This myth implies that individuals get together with someone of a different race because they believe it will result in a different sexual experience (Yancey, 2003).

Another reason why individuals are hesitant about engaging in a relationship outside of their own race is that they may know little about the culture or values of someone of a different race (McClintock, 2010; Sporlein, Schluet, & Tubergen, 2013). This could be a reason why individuals with a higher education are more willing to date interracially, as they may have more knowledge about cultural differences. In addition, past encounters with someone of a different race can influence an individual’s decision whether or not to pursue an interracial relationships. Often, previous interactions may have left a negative impression and, therefore, continuing interaction in such relationships is not desirable. Possibly, because of the small amount of people who are willing to date interracially, there may be an increased fear of rejection, simply as a function of limited potential dating partners. Because relationships require two people, some will have difficulties finding someone else willing to date interracially (Herman & Campbell, 2011).
A major component that can influence an individual to pursue any type of intimate relationship is physical attractiveness. Physical attractiveness is an important factor when choosing a mate for dating (Allen, 1976; Murstein et. al, 2001). One study investigating the importance of physical attractiveness found that for both men and women, physical attractiveness and race are important determinants of dating choices (Allen, 1976). In this study participants were asked to rate the attractiveness of Black men/women and White men/women and their willingness to go on an actual date with those individuals in a follow up experiment. The researcher found gender differences in participants’ willingness to go on a date. Men viewed attractiveness slightly more important than race, while women tended to view race as the most important factor (Allen, 1976). For instance, men indicated a willingness to go on a date with the people they rated as attractive, but women, even finding the target person attractive, did not indicate interest in a date.

Previous research looking at exchange theory with physical attractiveness suggests that in a society in which endogamy is practiced, persons willing to date outside of their status do so when the potential mate is of a higher attractiveness (Murstein et. al, 2001). Researchers have found in a study investigating the attractiveness of Black and White couples, a couple combination that included a Black man with a White woman typically had a more attractive Black man than White woman (Murstein et. al, 2001). These results are consistent with the exchange theory in that the White woman is an upper caste person whom made an exception to date outside her class because the Black man was viewed as more attractive than her. Overall, the decision to date someone of a different race can be based on several different factors including the perceptions and attitudes of others, family and friend support, knowledge about a different
group, previous contact or success rates of such relationships, and the physical attractiveness of an individual.

**Interracial Interaction: Anxiety**

Beyond investigating the perceptions, attitudes, and influential factors for interracial dating, it is important to look at the feelings that occur during interracial interactions. For most people, the initial interaction with someone of a different race may create anxiety. This is particularly true when the individual is White and is interacting with a minority member. For example, Trawalter and Riceson found that an individual’s stress and anxiety during interracial interaction differed from same race interactions (2008). The interactions differed in that interracial interactions produced higher levels of stress and anxiety. The more complex the interaction, the more anxiety it provoked, and researchers have shown that such anxiety can reveal itself through unintentional behavior, such as unnecessary fidgeting (McConnell & Leibold, 2001). This phenomena, labeled intergroup anxiety, is a specific type of anxiety that is experienced when an individual is engaging in an interaction or anticipating to interact with an out group member (Stephan, 2014).

Intergroup anxiety involves an emotional state of distress and tension. It can occur for several reasons and is quite common (Blair, Park, & Bachelor, 2003). Researchers have found that individuals believe that the interaction with an out-group member will actually be more difficult than interacting with an in-group member (Stephan, 2014). Additionally, the fear of being rejected by an out-group member is correlated with intergroup anxiety. Overall, intergroup anxiety may surface as a result of concerning oneself with the thought that an out-group member may judge, ridicule, reject, and exclude them (Barlow, Louis, & Hewstone, 2009).
Looking at other factors that extend beyond race with intergroup anxiety, researchers using sexual orientation as a measure for intergroup anxiety found that heterosexuals felt a higher level of anxiety when interacting with a homosexual, especially if that homosexual was of the same gender as the participant (Blair et. al, 2003). The results revealed that individuals who support more authoritarian values state higher levels of intergroup anxiety toward homosexuals. This study showed that previous contact and attitudes are related to intergroup anxiety across many different out groups and not just with regard to race. Most importantly, this research showed that anxiety might be the outcome of an individual imagining a negative stereotypic group member, such as an aggressive Black Man.

Comparable to intergroup anxiety is the concept of social anxiety. Social anxiety stems from the fear of being negatively evaluated in certain or all social situations (Plant & Devine, 2003). Individuals are motivated to behave in a manner with certain outcome expectancies in mind. When it appears that people will not be able to make the impression they hoped for, to real or imagined audiences, it elicits social anxiety (Schlenker & Leary, 1982). Individuals who find themselves in situations they do not believe they have the skills to elicit a positive outcome, but find themselves in such situation, may lack social control. This lack of control leads to the individual making nervous responses resulting in a negative interaction. Social anxiety can hinder the initial interaction with others and this can be intensified during interracial interactions. (Plant & Devine, 2003).

To investigate the role of social anxiety in the romantic context, researchers had adult couples use different conversation scenarios: positive, negative, and neutral (Wenzel, et. al, 2005). The couples’s behaviors during those conversations were then observed. The study revealed that the anxious participants elicited negative behaviors more frequently during positive
and neutral conversations than non-anxious participants and the most frequently during the negative conversation. Thus, the researchers suggest that social situations have different demands in which social anxiety is affected (Wenzel et. al, 2005; Daniels, 2007). Since anxiety has been shown to lead to behavioral changes during interactions (McConnell & Leibold, 2001; Plant & Devine, 2003; Wenzel et. al, 2005; Daniels, 2007), it is important consider the role of anxiety when investigating date initiation.

**Date Initiation**

The majority of the relationship research concerning same race or different race couples focuses on the maintenance, preservation, and termination of such relationships (Clark et.al, 1999). However, in order to understand the development and maintenance of any romantic relationship, it is important to first understand the initial development. Date initiation strategy refers to the methods used when trying to convey the message to a potential intimate partner that there is romantic interest. Research has shown that depending on the person and the situation, individuals may change the type of date initiation strategies they use in order to communicate interest (Hirsch & Paul, 1996; McClintock, 2010; Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000).

Researchers have documented gender differences in individual’s choice of date initiation strategies. For instance, males tend to be the initiators of relationships using more direct/overt date initiation strategies, such as asking the person out directly (Clark et. al, 1999). Females tend to use more indirect and passive strategies in the context of date initiation, such as behaving flirtatiously and waiting for male to ask them out. Furthermore, a study investigating the differences between extroverts and introverts found that extroverted individuals prefer to use direct strategies when initiating a date (Shumaker, 2010). Extroverts try to reduce the uncertainty of a social situation and using a direct date initiation strategy quickly eludes uncertainty.
Date initiation strategies can also change based on whether a potential partner is seen as a short-term partner or a long-term partner. This change in strategy is quite common for males. Researchers that examined courtship tactics, in regards to perceptions of short-term versus long-term goals, found that males did, in fact, use different strategies (Hirsch & Paul, 1996). For example, when a potential partner is perceived to be long-term then males tend to engage in tactics that are of more costly, such as time, energy, and money (Hirsch & Paul, 1996). If the potential partner is viewed as just a short-term relationship then tactics may include lots of flattery or flirtatious talk about sex (Hirsch & Paul, 1996). McClintock (2010) also found that many individuals at an elite university are more willing to engage in intimate interracial interactions if level of commitment is low. For example, when wanting a casual sex partner, the chances of an individual choosing a person of a different race is a lot higher than if choosing to romantically date that partner and even more so if that person wanted a long-term partner similar to marriage (McClintock, 2010).

Yet, research on specifically investigating date initiation strategies in the context of interracial dating is limited. Harris and Kalbfleisch (2000) focused on the date initiation strategies that Black and White college students would hypothetically use if they were to initiate a date with someone of the same race and with someone of a different race. In this study, the researchers used the Q-sort methodology to identify individuals’ personal impressions and feelings, which allowed the researchers to understand how their personal judgments and beliefs may influence the individuals’ behavior. Using this particular methodology, participants were given 36 different tactics that would fall under one of four categories of date initiation strategies: waiting, hinting, direct, and third party intervention. Strategies within the waiting category included: waiting for the target to indicate interest, strategically placing yourself where the target
is to indicate interest, and talking about mutual interests. The hinting category included strategies such as asking if the target is interested in dating someone or flirting with the target. Direct strategies include asking the target out on a specific night or calling the target on the phone to ask her out. Having a friend arrange a double date or having a friend mention the respondent’s interest to the target are examples of the strategies used in the third party intervention category. Choosing from these 36 tactics, participants had to indicate which ones they would most likely use when initiating a date with someone of the same race and again, indicating which tactics they would use to initiate a date with someone of a different race.

The researchers found that when individuals were planning to initiate a date with someone of the same race, their tactics fell into three different categories: strategic active, strategic assertive and strategic passive. When choosing tactics for different race partners, the tactics fell into four different categories: strategic passive, strategic contextual, strategic flexible and strategic intervention. The results revealed that 65% of the participants changed their strategy when considering date initiation with someone of a different race (Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000). Furthermore, males showed a greater hesitation when initiating tactics for a potential different race partner. This hesitation is evidenced by males choosing strategies that are more direct in the same race condition and most changing their tactics to indirect methods, such as subtle hinting and third party intervention in the different race condition. The researchers suggest that this difference in strategies can be attributed to fear of external factors, such as family members, and uncertainty about whether the potential partner is even interested, creating a fear of rejection (Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000).

Research regarding interracial dating has consistently shed light on the perceptions, attitudes, and other factors that influence an individual’s decision to date someone of a different
race. Research has also focused on the maintenance and success rates of such relationships. However, the literature pertaining to interracial dating is still limited. To fully understand interracial relationships, researchers must also investigate the initial romantic interactions that occur between two different race individuals. Harris & Kalbfleisch illustrated that there is a difference in the initial interactions among college aged men and women when trying to initiate a date with someone of the same race and someone of a different race (2000). While the results of that study were promising, there were some limitations. For example, participants in the study were only asked to imagine a hypothetical interaction; participants were also told to imagine themselves initiating a date with a target of the same or different race. Results of this study may have differed if participants were having actual interactions with potential romantic targets. Additionally, participants had no actual stimulus to look at in these hypothetical situations. It is possible that what the participants were thinking, such as the attractiveness of a potential target, while imagining such interaction could have influenced the results of the study.

It is necessary to examine the initial interactions of interracial dating to fully understand how current perceptions and attitudes, influential factors, anxiety, and interactions can affect an individual’s behavior and thoughts when deciding to pursue an interracial relationship. Similar to the study by Harris & Kalbfleisch (2000), the current study asked participants to select date initiation strategies while trying to initiate a date with a same race partner and a different race partner. In this 2 (Participant Race: Black, White) x 2 (Target Race: Black, White) 2 factor design, participants were in a situation in which they believed that they were going to have a video conversation with a potential romantic partner, and would be shown a picture stimulus of the person they would be interacting with before the video begins. Finally, because research has shown that anxiety plays a role in behaviors during interactions (McConnell & Leibold, 2001;
Plant & Devine, 2003; Wenzel et. al, 2005; Daniels, 2007), this study also assessed participants level of anxiety.

The first prediction, based on previous research investigating date initiation strategies (Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000; McClintock, 2010; Clark et. al, 1999; Shumaker, 2010), asserted that male participants in an online speed dating paradigm would choose different date initiation strategies when communicating romantic interest to a same race target than to a different race target. Specifically, males in the different race conditions were expected to select more indirect than direct dating strategies.

The second prediction, based on previous research illuminating the effects of anxiety on social interactions (McConnell & Leibold, 2001; Plant & Devine, 2003; Wenzel et. al, 2005; Daniels, 2007), asserted that males in the different race target condition would experience a higher level of social and intergroup anxiety. It was hypothesized that a higher level of anxiety would lead these males to choose more indirect dating strategies.

The third prediction states that Black and White participants would show different levels of intergroup anxiety. It was hypothesized that White males would report a higher level of intergroup anxiety in the different race condition. This prediction was based on research showing that members of the majority racial group experience more anxiety interacting with a minority group member (Trawalter and Riceson, 2008).

**Method**

**Participants**

One hundred and twenty male participants were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Due to the nature of the study focusing on heterosexual interactions, one participant was removed for selecting homosexual as their identified sexual orientation. Due to participant
error on the dating strategy questionnaire and anxiety scales, one participant was removed. Therefore, total sample for analyses included 118 participants. Researchers have found that data collected from MTurk meets the standards of published psychological research and offers a more diverse, representative population (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). To participate in the current study, participants had to be at least 18 years of age, own a webcam, and be currently enrolled at a college/university. Participants received payment of $0.50, which was added to their Amazon Mechanical Turk account.

**Materials and Procedure**

Participants read the informed consent and clicked “continue” as an agreement to participate. Participants were told that the purpose of the study was to help a team of researchers working for an online dating site pilot their new online speed-dating site for college students. This online speed-dating site would allow college students in the area to meet online and video chat. Once the participant began the program, the participant was asked a set of demographic questions assessing their sex, relationship status, sexual orientation, race, age, year in school, political affiliation, and major (Table 1).

Instructions then appeared on the screen indicating that shortly participants would be interacting with a woman who had agreed to participate in a speed dating session. Participants were then shown a picture stimulus.

**Picture Stimuli.** Depending on the target race condition (same or different), participants viewed either one stimulus picture of a White woman or one stimulus picture of a Black woman. The stimulus pictures were previously rated in a separate study (n = 66), as being equal in attractiveness. Pictures were both rated as an eight on a scale from one to ten, a rating of one meaning not attractive at all, and ten meaning extremely attractive. Participants in the same race
target condition saw a head shot (236x236 pixels) picture appear on the screen of an attractive woman of the same race as the participant. In the different race condition, participants saw a head shot picture (236x236 pixels) of an attractive woman who was not the same race as the participant.

Next, the participants were told that before their online speed dating video session began they would need to answer a series of questions that would indicate to the researchers what kinds of behaviors college age students elicit in the context of online speed dating. Participants then filled out the dating strategy questionnaire (Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000).

**Date initiation Strategy Questionnaire.** Participants read through 20 different date initiation strategies similar to the strategies used in Harris and Kalbfleisch (2000). Strategies were divided into two separate categories; direct and indirect strategies. The strategies appeared on a 5 point Likert type scale ranging from “Very Unlikely” to “Very Likely”. Examples of direct strategies included; asking the attractive person out on a specific night or flirting with the attractive person by letting them know you find them attractive. Indirect strategies include waiting for the attractive person to indicate interest or discussing mutual interests and related events. Upon the completion of selecting strategies, participants then completed the Interaction Anxiousness scale (Leary, 1983) to measure the participant’s level of social anxiety.

**Interaction Anxiousness Scale.** Participants’ level of social anxiety was assessed using the Interaction Anxiousness Scale (Leary, 1983). Participants answered fifteen questions on a 5 point Likert type scale ranging from “Not at All” to “Extremely”. Items included: “I often feel nervous even in casual get-togethers” and “I usually feel comfortable when I'm in a group of people I don't know.” Previous studies have used this scale to assess individuals’ social anxiety and have shown that the Interaction Anxiousness scale displays high reliability with a
Cronbach’s alpha of .80 (Leary & Kowalski, 1993). Participants were then directed to fill out a modified version of the Intergroup Anxiety Scale (Stephan & Stephan, 1985).

**Intergroup Anxiety Scale.** Participants reported on their level of intergroup anxiety using a ten item 5 point Likert type scale ranging from “Not at All” to “Extremely” intergroup anxiety scale by Stephan & Stephan (1985). Participants were told to think about the woman they were going to be interacting with and to indicate how they currently felt about the upcoming video conversation as compared to other occasions when they were interacting with someone from their own racial group. Sample items include: “I feel awkward” or “I feel self-conscious.” Previous studies have used this scale to assess intercultural and intergroup anxiety in participants’ willingness to communicate with out-group members. Researchers have found this measure to be reliable, showing a Cronbach’s alpha of .87 (Tegelaar, 2012).

Upon completion of the three measures, participants were then debriefed and told the true nature of the study. Participants were asked several follow-up questions including whether they found the cover story believable, if they found the target attractive, if they would consider going on a date with the target, and if they would consider dating someone of a different race (Table 2). Finally, participants were thanked for their time and receive $0.50 to their Amazon Mechanical Turk Account.

**Results**

**Analysis of Dating Strategies**

In this 2 (Participant Race: Black, White) X 2 (Target Race: Black, White) factorial study between-groups differences in dating strategy selection were analyzed using a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). The four experimental conditions in this study included the race combinations of White male/White female (WW), White male/Black female (WB), Black
male/White female (BW), and Black male/Black female (BB). The same race conditions included WW and BB. The different race conditions included WB and BW. The alpha level for analyses was set at .05. Measures of effect size were reported as partial $\eta^2$, in which partial $\eta^2 = .14$ indicates a large effect size, partial $\eta^2 = .06$ indicates a medium effect sizes and partial $\eta^2 = .01$ indicates a small effect size.

A MANOVA was used to analyze the hypothesis that participants would choose different date initiation strategies when communicating romantic interest to a same race target than to a different race target. Indicated by the Wilks’ Lambda statistic, the model showed there was a significant effect of race combination condition on dating strategy selection, $\lambda = .83, F(6, 226) = 3.66, p = .002, \eta^2 = .09$. This confirmed support for the Hypothesis.

**Analysis of Direct Strategies**

A follow up univariate analysis revealed a significant effect of race combination on the amount of direct strategies used by participants, $F(3,114) = 7.22, p < .001, \eta^2 = .16$. Follow up Post Hoc analyses using the Sidak correction revealed significant mean differences between race combination and direct dating strategy average. There was a significant difference between males in the WW race combination condition ($M = 3.56, SD = .14$) and males in the WB race combination condition ($M = 3.03, SD = .13$) on direct dating strategies ($p = .04$). Direct dating strategy was significantly different between males in the WB race combination condition ($M = 3.03, SD = .13$) and males in the BW race combination condition ($M = 3.74, SD = .14$) ($p = .002$) and males in the BB race combination condition ($M = 3.82, SD = .13$) ($p < .001$) (Table 3).

**Analysis of Indirect Strategies**

A follow up univariate analysis revealed a significant effect of race combination on indirect strategies used by participants, $F(3,114) = 3.12, p = .03, \eta^2 = .08$. Specifically, the Post
Hoc analyses revealed an approaching significant difference between the WB race combination group ($M= 3.05, SD = .13$) and the BW race combination group ($M = 3.53, SD = .13$) ($p = .06$) and the BB race combination group ($M = 3.51, SD = .12$) ($p = .06$) (Table 4).

**Analysis of Anxiety**

The hypothesis that males in the different race conditions will report a higher level of social and intergroup anxiety was analyzed using a MANOVA. Using the Wilks’ statistic, there was not a significant effect of race combination condition on social or intergroup anxiety, $\lambda = .98, \, F(6, 226) = .37, \, p = .90, \, \eta^2 = .01$ (Table 5).

**Analysis of Intergroup Anxiety**

An independent t-test was used to analyze participant race on intergroup anxiety scores to test the hypothesis three that Black and White participants would show different levels of intergroup anxiety. Using a between-subjects test, it was shown that the amount of intergroup anxiety measured by White Males ($M = 23.05, SD = 6.58$) was not significantly different than the measure of anxiety by Black Males, ($M = 22.03, SD = 6.66$), $t(116) = .84, \, p = .41, \, \eta^2 = .01$ (Table 6).

**Discussion**

This study sought to examine date initiation strategies in the context of interracial dating, while investigating the role of social and intergroup anxiety. Previous research investigating date initiation has found differences in strategy selection by gender, race, and personality (Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000; Hirsch & Paul, 1996; Shumaker, 2010). The results of the current study further supported previous evidence regarding differences in date initiation strategy. The main finding of the current investigation revealed support for the primary hypothesis that participants would employ different date initiation strategies, direct versus indirect methods, when
communicating romantic interest to a same race target than to a different race target. There was a significant difference in dating strategy selection when participants were expecting to interact with a female who belonged to the same race racial group as themselves. Specifically, males utilized significantly more direct strategies than indirect strategies. This research supports Harris and Kalbfleisch’s (2000) finding that the race of the potential target directly affects the strategies an individual uses in order to initiate a date.

As seen in the analysis of dating strategy selection, there were differences in direct and indirect dating strategy section based on the race combination condition. However, there were further differences observed based on the race of the participant. Black male participants employed the highest use of direct strategies for both same race targets and different race targets, while White males used far less direct strategies when the target female was a different race than when the target female was the same race. Perhaps the differences observed from Black and White males are related to the findings in research showing that the highest percentage of interracial dating based on couple combination is Black males and White females and one of the lowest couple combinations is White males and Black females (Childs, 2005). It may be the case that Black males have more experience with interracial interactions and overall have more positive attitudes towards interracial dating because their date initiation strategies remain similar no matter the race of the target females. In that same light, it is plausible the results display a significant difference because White males do not share the same positive attitudes toward interracial dating or have the same experience as Black males in regards to interracial dating.

As revealed from analyses specifically looking at the use of indirect strategies, the same patterns appear by participant race and by race of the target female on strategy selection. White males’ indirect strategy selection changed depending on the race of the target female. Black
males in both the same race and different race target situations use the same number of indirect strategies. These findings concerning Black males are inconsistent with the results of Harris and Kalbfleisch (2000) in which they found that Black and White participants both changed their strategy selection based on whether they were imaging an interaction with a same race person or a different race person. These differences in findings from the current study and the Harris and Kalbfleisch (2000) study could perhaps again be due to the increase of acceptance ratings and increased frequency of Black male/White female couples. It is apparent from these findings that White males in an interracial romantic interaction tend to change their methods for date initiation.

Furthermore, this research also investigated the role of intergroup and social anxiety as possible factors for the apparent differences in date initiation strategies found in the literature (Kugeares, 2002). In looking to see if males in the different race conditions report higher levels of social and intergroup anxiety, the analysis revealed that the hypothesis was not supported. The present study did not find differences in social anxiety between males expecting to interact with a female of the same race or different race. While research pertaining to the investigation of social anxiety in the context of interracial dating is limited, social anxiety has been shown to affect the behaviors that occur during a romantic interaction (Kugeares, 2002; Daniels, 2007). Research by Kugeares (2002), found social anxiety was influenced by several factors during the process of date initiation and that males reported a higher level of anxiety than females. One factor that effected the level of anxiety was the physical attractiveness of the target. (Kugeares, 2002). Specifically, levels of anxiety were highest when the level of attractiveness of the target was perceived as high, and lower anxiety was reported when the target was perceived as being less desirable than themselves. The discrepancies between the current findings and Kugeares
(2002) might be due to the perceived attractiveness of the female targets. While both women were rated equally very attractive in a pilot study, their level of social anxiety may not have been altered because the male participants in this study only viewed a picture of the target female and did not actually interact with them face to face before reporting their anxiety.

Additionally, the reported level of intergroup anxiety from males expecting to interact with a different race partner did not significantly differ from that of same race partners. Again, it is possible that there were no significant differences between same race situations and different race situation due to lack of one on one interaction with the expected target female. While research has documented that the mere expectation of interracial interaction can create feelings of apprehension; it was not evident in the current study (Plant & Devine, 2003; Stephan, 2014).

Whereas the second hypothesis examined the level of anxiety based on the race of the target female, the third hypothesis examined the race of the participant and their reported level of anxiety. It was predicted that which Black and White males would show different levels of intergroup anxiety. White males were predicted to report a higher level of intergroup anxiety in the different race condition than Black males. However, this hypothesis was not supported by the results of this investigation. This finding is inconsistent with previous research investigating interracial interaction outside of the context of interracial dating. Research regarding intergroup anxiety has shown that White individuals report significantly higher feeling of anxiety than minorities while anticipating or currently engaging in an interracial interaction than when engaging with an individual from the same racial group (Plant & Devine, 2003; Stephan, 2014).

Overall, the results of this research further provides support for the notion that differences in date initiation strategies exist in the context of interracial dating. However, this study did not
provide an explanation of support for dating strategy differences based on an individual’s level of social or intergroup anxiety.

Limitations and Future Research

While the current study did reveal interesting findings, there were some limitations. One limitation from the current study was the online speed dating manipulation paradigm. Participants were told that they would participate in a ten-minute online speed dating video session with the female they saw in the photo. While the majority of participants reported that they believed the interaction was going to take place (74%), several participants revealed that they did not find the speed dating cover believable. Therefore, they did not believe that they were going to be interacting with the women in the photo. This could perhaps account for why differences in reported anxiety level were not significant. The current study utilized the speed-dating paradigm due to very limited access to Black Male and Females in the area as potential participants. Therefore, the current study could not bring participants into the laboratory for in person speed dating interactions. Future research would benefit from creating a more believable cover story or by bringing participants into a laboratory to participate in real face-to-face speed dating interactions.

A second limitation from the current investigation was the self-report method for indicating choice of dating strategies. While there were still significant differences in reported dating strategy selection between males in the same race target condition and different target race condition, it may be of interest to investigate the strategies employed during actual interactions. Researchers may find similar or more extreme differences in strategy selection stemming from real interactions. Furthermore, employing the use of physiological measurements such as a heart
rate monitor during the aforementioned interactions might provide a more holistic picture of an individual’s anxiety level.

Since the current study did not find anxiety to be a factor for reported differences in date initiation strategy selection; future research should consider investigating an individual’s past experience with interracial dating as a potential factor. The current research found distinct differences between participant race and dating strategy choice. It is plausible that Black males have more experience with dating White females and this explains why Black males in this study used similar strategies in both target race conditions. Perhaps White males used different strategies in each target race condition because they have less experience dating Black females.

In addition to using Black and White males as participants and female target partners, future research might consider investigating differences in date initiation strategies with other racial groups such as Asian or Hispanic. Patterns in dating strategy selection might further differ between multiple racial groups. Therefore, understanding these patterns might help researchers discover more specific factors that account for the differences in the selection of dating strategies.

Finally, because the nature of interracial dating is so complex and involves several external factors that might play a role in the documented differences in date initiation strategies; it might be useful to employ open ended questions in order to allow participants to report reasons why they choose or not choose to date interracially and why they believe such differences occur in date initiation strategy selection. Harris & Kalbfleisch (2000) and Schoepflin (2009) employed the use of open-ended questions about interracial dating and found that individuals factor in target attraction, socialization, and the racial attitudes of friends and relatives when considering the initiation of an interracial relationship.
While the current study did have some limitations it also revealed several advantages. Firstly, the current investigation added to the current limited research in the literature focusing on date initiation in the context of interracial dating. Secondly, it replicated previous findings showing that when individuals believe that they will be initiating a date with someone of a different race the strategies they choose to employ differ from the strategies they choose when initiating a date with someone of the same race. However, the finding from this investigation differed slightly than that of previous studies. Specifically, unlike past investigations, college aged Black males did not change their strategies in either condition. The race of the target female did not seem to have an effect on the strategies that Black males chose to employ. Thirdly, the results revealed another interesting finding with regard to strategy use. While the race of the target female had a significant effect on the strategies that college aged White males chose to exercise, the results revealed that these differences were not due to White males actively choosing to use one strategy over another. Instead White males simply refrained from using as many direct strategies and indirect strategies when initiating a date with a female of a different race. Finally, the current investigation went beyond previous research and investigated the role of Social and Intergroup anxiety as possible factors resulting in the alteration of the strategies individuals choose to utilize during interracial date initiation. Research focusing on the initial interactions that occur between individuals of different races while in pursuit of a romantic relationship is limited. It is important that researchers continue to investigate these interactions to help uncover and perhaps better explain why the race of a potential intimate partner is appearing to have a strong effect on the behaviors that occur during what is considered a normal social interaction.
References


Tsunokai, G. T., & McGrath, A. R. (2011). Baby boomers and beyond: Crossing racial


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Table 1

*Participant Demographic Characteristics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency (n)</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>M</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>48.3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Junior</td>
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<td>13.6</td>
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<td>Slightly Liberal</td>
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<td>Slightly</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Race Combination Conditions</td>
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<tr>
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<td>White male/Black female</td>
<td>30</td>
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<td>Black male/White female</td>
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Table 2

*Follow up Question Responses*

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<tr>
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<th>Frequency (n)</th>
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<td>Did you believe the cover story?</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>73.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you find the woman in the picture to be attractive?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>89.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you consider going on a date with the woman in the picture?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>83.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you consider dating someone of a different race?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>87.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12.7</td>
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Note. Frequencies and percentages
Table 3

*Group Differences in Selection of Direct Strategies by Race Combination Condition*

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<tr>
<th>Race Combination Conditions</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>White male/White female</td>
<td>3.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White male/Black female</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black male/White female</td>
<td>3.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black male/Black female</td>
<td>3.82</td>
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</table>

Note. Means and standard deviations
Table 4

*Group Differences in Selection of Indirect Strategies by Race Combination Condition*

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<tr>
<th>Race Combination Conditions</th>
<th>Indirect Strategies $M$</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White male/White female</td>
<td>3.47</td>
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<tr>
<td>White male/Black female</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black male/White female</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black male/Black female</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>.12</td>
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</table>

*Note.* Means and standard deviations
Table 5

*Group Differences of Intergroup and Social Anxiety for Race Combination Conditions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race Combination Conditions</th>
<th>Intergroup Anxiety</th>
<th>Social Anxiety</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>$SD$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White male/White female</td>
<td>23.37</td>
<td>7.53</td>
</tr>
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<td>White male/Black female</td>
<td>22.77</td>
<td>5.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black male/White female</td>
<td>23.07</td>
<td>6.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black male/Black female</td>
<td>21.15</td>
<td>6.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Means and standard deviations.
Table 6

*Groups Differences of Reported Intergroup Anxiety*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Race</th>
<th>Intergroup Anxiety</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>White Males</td>
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<td>6.58</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black Males</td>
<td>22.03</td>
<td>6.66</td>
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</table>

*Note.* Means and standard deviations
Appendix A: Demographic Questions

**Instructions:** Please answer the following questions about yourself honestly.

1. Please indicate your gender identity: *Choose One*
   - Male
   - Female
   - Male to Female Transgender
   - Female to Male Transgender
   - Other (Please Specify) ________________.

2. Please indicate your age. ____________.

3. Please indicate the race or ethnicity that you feel best describes you: *Choose One*
   - Black/African American
   - White/ Caucasian
   - Other (Please Specify) ________________.

4. Please indicate your grade level: *Circle One*
   - Freshman
   - Sophomore
   - Junior
   - Senior
   - Other (Please Specify) ________________.

5. What is your Major? ________________________.

6. How do you identify politically? *Choose One*
   - Extremely Liberal
   - Slightly Liberal
   - Moderate or Middle of the Road
   - Slightly Conservative
   - Extremely Conservative

7. Please identify your relationship status.
   1. Single or in an open relationship (for example, openly dating, not exclusive to just one partner)
   2. In an exclusive relationship (for example, not dating other people outside of the relationship, married or in a long term committed relationship)

8. Please indicate your sexual orientation. *Choose one.*
   - Heterosexual
   - Homosexual
   - Bisexual
Appendix B: Picture Stimuli
Appendix C: Date Initiation Strategies

**Instructions:** Please read each of the following methods and give your honest opinion about how likely (1 = Not At All Likely to 5 = Very likely) you would use each method in your upcoming video conversation with your matched partner.

*How likely would you do the following...*

1. Flirt with the attractive person by letting them know you find them attractive.
   
   Not at all Likely  
   Not Sure/Uncertain  
   Very Likely

2. Find out the attractive persons availability by asking if they are dating someone.
   
   Not at all Likely  
   Not Sure/Uncertain  
   Very Likely

3. Discuss mutual interests and related events.
   
   Not at all Likely  
   Not Sure/Uncertain  
   Very Likely

4. Mention an event and see if the attractive person is interested in going.
   
   Not at all Likely  
   Not Sure/Uncertain  
   Very Likely

5. Invite attractive person to study and get something to eat afterwards.
   
   Not at all Likely  
   Not Sure/Uncertain  
   Very Likely

6. Hope the attractive person will ask you out.
   
   Not at all Likely  
   Not Sure/Uncertain  
   Very Likely

7. Wait for the attractive person to indicate interest.
   
   Not at all Likely  
   Not Sure/Uncertain  
   Very Likely
8. Ask attractive person out on a specific night.

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all Likely Not Sure/Uncertain Very Likely

9. Ask if the attractive person is interested in dating someone and if so are they interested in you.

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all Likely Not Sure/Uncertain Very Likely

10. Talk to the attractive person without mentioning interest.

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all Likely Not Sure/Uncertain Very Likely

11. Ask attractive person for their cell phone number.

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all Likely Not Sure/Uncertain Very Likely

12. Directly ask attractive person if they want to get to know each other better.

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all Likely Not Sure/Uncertain Very Likely

13. Let the attractive person flatter you.

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all Likely Not Sure/Uncertain Very Likely

14. Try not to let the attractive person know that you are interested in them.

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all Likely Not Sure/Uncertain Very Likely

15. Indicate to the attractive person that you would like to be friends on Facebook with them.

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all Likely Not Sure/Uncertain Very Likely

16. Smile to show your interest to the attractive person and then you ask them out.

1 2 3 4 5
17. Hope the attractive person will arrange a double date.

18. Mention an event to the attractive person and ask them to go.

19. Hope the attractive person will indicate interest and wait for the attractive person to initiate future communication.

20. Hope that in the near future the attractive person will bump into them.
Appendix D: Interaction Anxiousness Scale

Directions: Indicate how characteristic each of the following statements is of you according to the following scale:

1 = Not at all characteristic of me.
2 = Slightly characteristic of me.
3 = Moderately characteristic of me.
4 = Very characteristic of me.
5 = Extremely characteristic of me.

_____ 1. I often feel nervous even in casual get-togethers.
_____ 2. I usually feel comfortable when I'm in a group of people I don't know.
_____ 3. I am usually at ease when speaking to a member of the other sex.
_____ 4. I get nervous when I must talk to a teacher or a boss.
_____ 5. Parties often make me feel anxious and uncomfortable.
_____ 6. I am probably less shy in social interactions than most people.
_____ 7. I sometimes feel tense when talking to people of my own sex if I don't know them very well.
_____ 8. I would be nervous if I was being interviewed for a job.
_____ 9. I wish I had more confidence in social situations.
_____ 10. I seldom feel anxious in social situations.
_____ 11. In general, I am a shy person.
_____ 12. I often feel nervous when talking to an attractive member of the opposite sex.
_____ 13. I often feel nervous when calling someone I don't know very well on the telephone.
_____ 14. I get nervous when I speak to someone in a position of authority.
_____ 15. I usually feel relaxed around other people, even people who are quite different from me.
Appendix E: Intergroup Anxiety Scale

**Instructions:** Thinking about the woman you are going to be interacting with shortly, please indicate how you currently feel about your upcoming video conversation as compared to other occasions when you are interacting with people from your own racial group.

1. I feel awkward…
   1 2 3 4 5
   Not at all Not Sure/Uncertain Extremely

2. I feel self-conscious…
   1 2 3 4 5
   Not at all Not Sure/Uncertain Extremely

3. I feel happy…
   1 2 3 4 5
   Not at all Not Sure/Uncertain Extremely

4. I feel accepted…
   1 2 3 4 5
   Not at all Not Sure/Uncertain Extremely

5. I feel confident…
   1 2 3 4 5
   Not at all Not Sure/Uncertain Extremely

6. I feel irritated…
   1 2 3 4 5
   Not at all Not Sure/Uncertain Extremely

7. I feel impatient…
   1 2 3 4 5
   Not at all Not Sure/Uncertain Extremely
8. I feel defensive…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not Sure/Uncertain</td>
<td>Extremely</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

9. I feel suspicious…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
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<th>3</th>
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<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not Sure/Uncertain</td>
<td>Extremely</td>
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10. I feel careful

<table>
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<th>5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
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Appendix F: Follow-up Questions

*Please answer the following questions honestly.*

1. In the current study you were told that you would be interacting with a woman through a video speed dating session. Did you believe this cover story?
   
   YES               NO

2. Did you find the women in the picture to be attractive?
   
   YES               NO

3. Would you consider going on a date with the women in the picture?
   
   YES               NO

4. Would you consider dating someone of a different race?
   
   YES               NO