



ASA NEWS

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On-site Press Office (Aug. 16-19): Hilton San Francisco Union Square, Union Square 1-2 Room, (415) 923-7506

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Study Identifies ‘Bonus Effect’ for Certain Multiracial Daters

SAN FRANCISCO — While previous research has documented the existence of a racial hierarchy within the dating world with white women and men on top, a new study finds that in certain circumstances multiracial daters are actually seen as more desirable than individuals from all other racial groups, including whites.

“The most interesting and surprising finding from our study is that some white-minority multiracial daters are, in fact, preferred over white and non-white daters,” said Celeste Vaughan Curington, a doctoral student in sociology at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst and lead author of the study, which she will present at the 109th Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association. “We call this the multiracial ‘bonus effect,’ and this is truly unheard of in the existing sociological literature.”

The researchers found that three multiracial groups were on the receiving end of the “bonus effect.” Asian-white women were viewed more favorably than all other groups by white and Asian men, while Asian-white and Hispanic-white men were also afforded “bonus” status by Asian and Hispanic women respectively.

“Although it may be tempting to try to fit multiracial people into a single position in the existing racial hierarchy of desirability, the ‘bonus effect’ demonstrates that this is probably not possible,” Curington said.

The study relies on 2003-2010 data from one of the largest dating websites in the United States, and focuses on initial messages sent between heterosexual women and men among the following seven groups: Asian, black, Hispanic, white, Asian-white, black-white, and Hispanic-white. Curington and her co-authors Ken-Hou Lin, an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Texas at Austin, and Jennifer Hicke Lundquist, an associate professor of sociology at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, analyzed nearly 6.7 million initial messages.

“While scholarly conversation on multiraciality in America has long been dominated by the concept of the ‘one drop rule,’ meaning that white-minority multiracial people are viewed the same as minorities, our study finds no support for this theory,” Curington said.

Rather, overall, the researchers found that white-minority multiracial daters (e.g., black-white daters) are viewed more favorably than their monoracial minority counterparts (e.g., black daters). “We find that ‘honorary whiteness,’ in the form of what we call ‘white equivalence’ and ‘multiracial inbetweenness,’ seems to be the most frequent way that both white men and women and some minority groups generally categorize white-minority multiracial people,” Curington said.

“A preference for multiraciality is closely akin to a preference for lightness or whiteness,” Curington explained. “Daters may be influenced by the popular media’s representation of mixed-race people as ‘exotic’ and sexually appealing.”

In terms of the study’s implications, Curington said, “The findings provide us with a better understanding of the social meaning of multiraciality in the post-civil rights era United States, and of how demographic changes in racial identification operate at the level of everyday interactions.”

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About the American Sociological Association

The American Sociological Association (www.asanet.org), founded in 1905, is a non-profit membership association dedicated to serving sociologists in their work, advancing sociology as a science and profession, and promoting the contributions to and use of sociology by society.

The paper, "Multiraciality in Cyberspace: Honorary Whiteness, Hypo-descent or Something Else?," will be presented on Monday, Aug. 18, at 4:30 p.m. PDT in San Francisco at the American Sociological Association's 109th Annual Meeting.

To obtain a copy of the paper; for assistance reaching the study's author(s); or for more information on other ASA presentations, members of the media can contact Daniel Fowler, ASA Media Relations Manager, at (202) 527-7885 or pubinfo@asanet.org. During the Annual Meeting (Aug. 16-19), ASA Public Information Office staff can be reached in the on-site press office, located in the Hilton San Francisco Union Square's Union Square 1-2 Room, at (415) 923-7506 or (914) 450-4557 (cell).

This press release was written by Sydney McKinley, ASA Public Information Office.

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