

Critical Reflection Paper #2

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John McWhorter, author of *Woke Racism: How a New Religion Has Betrayed America*, claims that the new wave of anti-racist academia which seeks to dismantle institutional and interpersonal racist practices, is in itself, a form of racism. McWhorter's primary criticism is that "policing language and examining white complicity," does nothing to address the "real" problems faced by Black Americans today. As part of that very examination, authors Alana J. Peck, Dana Berkowitz, and Justin Tinkler counter this notion in "Left, right, Black, and White: how college students talk about their inter and intra-racial swiping preferences on Tinder" (2021), by addressing how minute interpersonal practices on dating apps affect the experiences of Black individuals. Authors Lawrence Stacey and TehQuin D. Forbes further this counter narrative in "Feeling Like a Fetish: Racialized Feelings, Fetishization, and the Contours of Sexual Racism on Gay Dating Apps" (2021), by exploring the reach of deeply rooted racial biases within the gay online-dating community.

In an interview with Marc Lamont Hill, McWhorter states that academia such as Critical Race Theory (CRT) and anti-racism focus far too much on the day-to-day practices of white people, and that those things, such as their [white people's] dating preferences, do not amount to much importance. He even goes as far as to suggest that dating preferences are not actually racist. Using the theoretical frameworks of the White racial frame and colorblind racism (both ideologies studied by CRT), Peck, Berkowitz and Tinkler explore how interpersonal racism plays out in the modern-day context of online dating. Peer-to-peer interviews with 137 heterosexual white college students revealed an obvious "preference" for partner selection on Tinder. When asked about why they chose to swipe right (accept) or swipe left (reject) potential dating prospects on the app, overtly and covertly racist answers began to explain the self-segregation often seen in real life as far as relationships go. Overtly racist remarks were mostly made by men, in which they used body and weight types to explain swiping left on specific women, those who they described as "darkies," "a coon," or "jungle bunnies" (Peck, Berkowitz & Tinkler, 2021,

pg. 31). These overtly racist remarks made by participants such as Sam and Randolph, are prime examples of how the White racial frame works: by idealizing white women, subscribing to stereotypes about Black women, and accepting the beauty standard in which those with closer proximity to whiteness are placed above those who are further. Through this racist lens, interpersonal and detrimental racism occurs, one which affects overall social relations.

Patterns of this nature persisted throughout the study; one participant, Leigh-Ann, attributed her fear of Black men as her reasoning for swiping left on this demographic. This exemplifies how centuries-old stereotypes about the aggressive and violent Black man continue to affect us today. The overt examples, however, were in the minority. Notably, the more covertly racist remarks (reasoning that was not explicitly “racist”), shows how colorblind racism persists, despite the newly adopted anti-racist rhetoric of today’s educated and progressive youth. Many of the white respondents explained how “it just wasn’t their preference,” to date Black individuals due to cultural or personality differences (Peck, Berkowitz & Tinkler, 2021, pg. 31). McWhorter argues that people in the US are well-aware of racism and that there is no longer a need for more academia to expound upon it. This study, however, reveals a contrary truth. The participants in this study described themselves as open-minded and inclusive individuals, unaware of how their actions perpetuate naturalistic and cultural racism.

The second study in question, undertaken by Stacey & Forbes, sought to explore the online dating experience of Black and brown men on apps such as Grindr, Jack’d and Scruff. This topic came about from the prevailing presence of dating apps and how they can facilitate dating selection based on race, and in these cases, curate the fetishization of minority groups. The researchers employed 858 different profiles and 26 in-depth interviews that were conducted over the course of two years (Stacey & Forbes, 2021, pg. 376). Through an array of interviews with men (ranging in race, gender, and sexuality), the researchers found salient themes of feeling racially fetishized (the phenomena of being overly sexualized for a particular racial trait or perceived feature), feeling stereotyped, or not taken seriously as romantic prospects. One

interesting result highlighted a disproportion in perceived racial fetishization wherein white men (self-identifying as bottoms) objectified other Black men on the app for their hands, masculinity, dominance, and penis size (Stacey & Forbes, 2021, pg. 378). The authors go on to give several specific examples of this type of experience, not just by Black men but also by other minority groups.

Although desiring an individual specifically for their racial identity may seem like the exact opposite of not desiring someone for their racial identity, they are, in fact, equally harmful forms of racism that can often leave people of color feeling used or accepting of these social designations. As outlined by the Black Feminist framework, Black women will often be treated as less feminine, serious, or beautiful due to the highly racist micro and macro practices that draw from historical caricatures of Black women such as Jezebels or “sassy mammies” (Simien, 2004). On dating apps, Black gay men will often internalize racist sentiments, either by lowering their standards or choosing to not date on these platforms altogether (Stacey & Forbes, 2021, pg. 381). If not for these studies, academic journals, inquiries, and examinations, as deemed necessary by CRT and anti-racist authors, such distinctions would never be perceived as consequential.

Both “Left, right, Black, and White: how college students talk about their inter and intra-racial swiping preferences on Tinder” (2021) and “Feeling Like a Fetish: Racialized Feelings, Fetishization, and the Contours of Sexual Racism on Gay Dating Apps” (2021), exemplify how implicit bias, interpersonal racism, cultural racism, naturalism and microaggressions play out frequently and at the expense of people of color. They reveal how dating patterns are not merely a matter of “preferences.” These studies also support the idea that colorblind practices continue to be extensive, despite McWhorter’s attempt to claim otherwise. Not only is it a social good to hold all Americans accountable for their actions through these types of texts and studies, but it is a vital step in undoing these seemingly harmless practices, which in the long run, continue to harm the very real, and personal lives of Black and brown people in America.

Bibliography:

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