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Racial Identity On Dating Apps: A Cultural Criticism Of Modern Romance

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RACIAL IDENTITY ON DATING APPS:
A CULTURAL CRITICISM OF MODERN ROMANCE

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A capstone project submitted for Graduation with University Honors

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ABSTRACT

This capstone project explores how racial identity is constructed on dating apps and the ethical debates surrounding such constructions. Dating apps are quintessential to the new era of human connection and romance. Using a dating app requires the creation of an electronic profile, where one can display as much information about oneself as one desires. Due to the nature of dating apps, users must carefully curate and display an identity that will be shown to other users.

Through a review of social scientific research on this topic, this paper explores how this identity is constructed, specifically how race is constructed and represented by heterosexual and homosexual dating app users. I will also examine social scientific research that delves into how historic racial hierarchal systems affect how one's racial identity is perceived, especially in terms of attraction, by users on dating apps. By doing so, I seek to improve our understanding of how attraction and the desire to be attractive to others influence how one displays oneself on dating apps. Moreover, I explore the impacts of emphasizing or masking qualities one has on dating apps. Regardless of people's motivations to curate a specific identity, I examine, both philosophically and through a review of recent empirical research, how the construction of identity on dating apps and the use of such profiles affects genuine romance and connection. Drawing insights from Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophical views on love and personal identity, I highlight the negative impacts of basing attraction on a created, or virtual, identity. I argue that this attraction, based on an identity created online, involves dishonesty, insofar as it distorts how humans fundamentally and naturally connect.

Keywords: race, identity, dating apps, Sartrean philosophy

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INTRODUCTION

Casual dating is a modern phenomenon. As technology has progressed and society has relatively loosened its ideas on what is permissible for dating, dating apps have come to fruition and become an exceedingly popular and accessible way for people to meet. For this reason, dating apps are the best way to examine modern dating and romance. More and more couples are formed from dating apps, and more individuals are utilizing dating apps. From taboo sexual requests to generic dates, dating apps have become the quintessential apps on any single person's phone to fulfill sexual and romantic desires.

The novel *Pride and Prejudice* provides a classic example of dating in earlier centuries. Mr. Darcy was championed as an excellent partner because of his wealth and status. While society has socially progressed since this era, the question is whether we have progressed as much as we assume. Dating apps, based on curated identity, explicitly show or carefully hide various parts of one's identity. Due to the nature of dating apps, users strive to be as attractive as possible. Thus, examining the use of dating apps is also an examination of what parts of identity are self-perceived and socially perceived as attractive. There has been considerable empirical research as to why people are more sought after than others, but none discuss the ethical ramifications of this. While multiple factors affect attraction and desirability, this paper explores how racial identity affects how desirable one is and the ethical as well as practical implications of this. In particular, I examine how the creation of racial identity affects one's sense of innate identity and one's ability to form and build authentic, genuine romantic relationships.

Dating apps are quintessential to the new era of human connection and romance. An online dating application is a dating service one can download on their phone to find other people who are looking to date someone. Dating apps provide users with a range of information

about potential dates, from the geographic location of their place of residence and their occupation to their race and height. Through an algorithmic connection, dating apps form matches. Identity becomes a curated identity when one carefully and meticulously selects what encompasses their identity. To illustrate, only online dating apps allow an individual to pick what another person can see about them. Whereas, in traditional in-person dating, one cannot choose what the other will perceive of them. Thus, the curation of identity on dating apps is not only important for its possible effects on individual identity but also in the discussion of how identity affects authentic, genuine relationships. This capstone project seeks to understand how racial identity is constructed on dating apps. This may seem very counterintuitive since one cannot simply forgo their race or identify as another race. However, race, while seemingly observable and thus obvious, can be curated. It is important to clarify that this paper will discuss the implications of curated identity, especially the curation of racial identity rather than changes in racial identities. In this paper, I will discuss how one can specify how much of one's racial identity one would like to express to others through dating apps. This becomes especially interesting when considering people with mixed or ambiguous racial identities.

Moreover, the use of dating apps creates attraction based on identity. Dating apps require users to input markers of identity to represent themselves to other people. I will argue that before dating apps, identity was not stated but more so created by the viewer rather than the person who holds the identity. Thus, people on dating apps value others through these markers and gain desire and attraction through these markers. Furthermore, by delving into identity through dating apps, I will conclude how this dependence on identity negatively affects the development of authentic relationships.

Identity in the context of dating apps is necessary to discuss because of its philosophical impacts, especially on one's essence. The argument in this paper will rely on a conceptual difference between identity and essence. Both of these terms signify a description under which an individual falls and an ideal for that individual. But essence is more personal, whereas identity is interpersonal. Identity is weak or sensitive to outside sources. My identity consists in how I am viewed or defined by others, whereas my essence consists in how I define myself. Further in this paper, I will delve into how negative and positive reactions to one's identity causes one to change one's identity. Comparatively, essence is more internal and thus may or may not take others into account. To illustrate, one can identify as an 'Asian man' on dating apps and be viewed as one who identifies as being a 'submissive man' since that is how Asian men are frequently viewed by the public. But the same person may view their essence to be a creative journalist, and thus act and desire to act in creative ways. This shows that one's perceived racial identity and essence are not always overlapping. However, they can coincide: one might identify as an Asian man and define oneself (or one's essence) as a 'submissive' man, consistent with racist and gendered stereotypes of Asian men. According to Sartre, essence is acquired because you have chosen it for yourself. Even if one were to make race part of one's essence, it would require the individual to believe race is part of their acquired self. This would imply that one has chosen to include race as part of one's essence.

Identity, like essence, requires one to have an ideal and to pursue it. For, if one no longer holds a certain ideal, one should no longer hold an identity in congruence with that ideal. This does not mean that if one failed to act under an ideal one can no longer hold that identity. Rather, once one stops pursuing that ideal is when it should stop being part of one's identity. Thus, the success one has in obtaining that ideal is irrelevant. Consequently, identity requires honesty with

oneself. Essence, like identity, requires honesty but in terms of self-reflection. Essence requires honestly considering what one does and stands for. Essence is the product of what we do and of our creative activities. Essence is what one makes and is responsible for. For Sartre, there is no innate essence as one is not given an essence. Moreover, in making one's essence, one makes certain values for oneself and can assess one's actions as good or bad based on whether they align with one's values.

This capstone project applies the philosophical insights from Jean-Paul Sartre to evaluate the ethical implications of the rising use of dating apps in the contemporary world of romance. Sartre was a 20th-century French philosopher who was a key figure in existentialism. Below, I will review and apply Sartre's insights from two of his key texts: *Existentialism: Basic Writings* and *Being and Nothingness* (2001) to highlight the pitfalls and limitations of using dating apps to form romantic relationships. Existentialism is acutely relevant to our discussion of identity because it explores the topic of essence. As an existentialist, Sartre believed one's existence came before one's essence. Thus, no one is born with an innate essence and one creates their essence over time. Sartre (2001) claims that one's essence is made over time through the choices one makes. To draw the connection between essence and identity, essence is similar to identity but on a deeper level. Identity includes how one sees himself and how one wants to be viewed. Comparatively, essence is the truest form of self. Essence is independent of the ways one is perceived by others. It is the fundamental composition of an individual. The most applicable part of Sartre's philosophy to our understanding of dating apps and the role of curated identities in modern romance is his idea of bad faith. To elaborate, human reality is composed of the material world and one's physical conditions and given capabilities (facticity), and one's consciousness or ability to project oneself, future for oneself, and out of their facticity (transcendence). For Sartre,

a person using a dating app is inauthentic if they are solely identifying themselves with their facticity (racial identity). Consequently, the person is living in bad faith and does not realize their true freedom in life. Thus, conflating racial identity as the entirety of one's essence is not only inauthentic but also has potentially negative ramifications. For, if racial identity is considered as the entirety of one's essence, then racial identity dictates what one is and what their actions can be. It constrains an individual from a social construct, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and inauthentic ways of being. It also creates superficial standards for being a certain race and upholds one's facticity as definitive of oneself. In this paper, I will show that identity-based on racial features negatively impacts one's value system. In creating one's essence, allowing racial identity to constitute one's identity as a whole corrupts one's value system by unilaterally upholding one's facticity as definitive of oneself. Consequently, having a racial identity creates a value in holding a certain race which is problematic and inauthentic. In this paper, I will show that from a Sartrean perspective, it is inauthentic to make one's essence comprised of solely racial identity.

THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Identity & Authenticity

The intentional focus on identity on dating apps stems from my interest in identity formation in digital spaces. To combine social scientific and philosophical concepts, the focus on identity became an even easier choice. A social scientific examination of identity allows for discussion of historic hierarchies, identity formation, and social perception. A secondary philosophical examination propagates discourse on the personal ethics of dating apps that are not centered upon one's decisions toward people. Although this topic will be addressed, my main focus is on the individual ramifications of making such constructions.

To truly understand the complexity of identity, one must understand the reciprocal relationship between presented identity and identity verification. In other words, how one identifies themselves, is affected by their presented identity, the identity one shows to others and which is curated, and whether others verify that presented identity (Davis 2014). Davis' work offers an all-encompassing discussion of identity creation and negotiation. While much social scientific research poses identity as a singular, personal creation, Davis delves into how identity is cumulative. While identity is created by self-definitions, it is undeniable that others' reactions to one's identity can alter one's identity. To illustrate, if one receives a positive reaction to a part of their identity, one will respond to that feedback by continuing to hold that identity. Comparatively, if one receives a negative response to a part of their identity, one will consider negotiating and changing their identity so one is perceived to be at their best. This idea is especially pertinent to this paper's discussion. Digital settings promote identity negotiation because of one's ability to hide or promote oneself in any manner one likes. Thus, in dating apps

where attracting others is already a concern, I argue that identity negation is especially exasperated.

I argue that identity in the digital era and dating apps are not stated but more so created by the viewer rather than the person who holds the identity. There are historical hierarchies and cultural norms that grossly affect what is perceived as attractive. Interestingly, societal and cultural norms ebb and flow into one's dating preferences. As discussed, one's identity is negotiated to be acceptable to others. The views that one has affects how another person's identity is perceived. Thus, identity is not just personal and created, but also socially given.

While dating apps can make creating profiles easier and thus the user has fewer markers of identity to choose themselves, the way one markets oneself on dating apps is completely dependent on the individual. It is a conscious act (Finkel, Eastwick, Karney, Reis, and Sprecher 2012). On dating apps, identity tends to be carefully created. One can pick what parts of their identity to disclose. This is an almost exclusively modern phenomenon in dating. Before dating apps, when one met someone they would like to date, barring any previous ties or common friends, one would have understood someone's identity. Of course, it would be dishonest to state that daters before dating apps were not concerned with their perceived identity or the identity of others. However, dating apps are an especially interesting way to dissect or construct identity because of the freedom it gives people to pick and choose their perceived identity. They can manipulate what is known about them the first time someone perceives them, an important moment where another creates an understanding of the other (Bridges 2012). Of course, some nuance must be considered. For example, one cannot change physical traits that can affect how others identify one as. However, I will argue that one has radical freedom in identity construction

on digital applications such as dating apps. One can simply identify as one pleases, regardless of whether society agrees.

Authenticity is often discussed in discourses about identity. Authenticity in identity is uncalculated and is reflective of one's inner self. With dating apps and online platforms, the curation of identity is consciously done. Identity becomes a performance. Thus, genuine authenticity, or more so the possibility of authenticity in dating apps, is debatable. Authenticity is also a criterion that is prevalent in existentialism. For, if one does not have an innate essence, how can one become authentic? What would authentic mean if there are no measures? For existentialists, authenticity shows the congruency of one's actions with one's values. Oftentimes, existentialists warn against conforming to societal or material world norms that can distract one from pursuing their most authentic self. As described, authenticity is personal. There is no other correct way to be authentic than to be in congruence with one's values. Consequently, a dichotomy is created between the presentation of self versus the conception of self. The presentation of self is partially represented by racial identity, and the conception of self, in Sartrean terms, is one's essence. The dichotomy persists because, arguably, racial identity is not equivalent to one's genuine essence. As will be discussed, one is not solely comprised of their facticity and to limit oneself to their facticity would be a disservice to the person identifying as such and any viewer.

Self-presentation is important for self-formation. Self-presentation is not self. While self-presentation is a part of self in the sense that what one presents shows how one view who one genuinely is, it is not to say that self-presentation ultimately defines self. I argue this because of Zhao's (2005) empirical work on the digital self. Self-presentation is shown to be affected by the views of others. Moreover, not everyone can affect one's self-presentation. For example, if

one did not respect or feel the need for others' approval, that person's disapproval will not matter. This becomes tricky when one considers the historical context of racial identity. Often, the people on dating apps are important for the individual because they want to be seen as attractive. Thus, the majority of people's opinions matter. Even in the circumstance that a dating app user is quite picky and does not want to cater to the majority of people, it is undeniable that the way people view another, especially in attraction, does affect the user or their decisions. Unfortunately, the opinions or view of one's racial identity matters on dating apps due to one's need to be perceived as attractive, and not because of genuine respect for the other's views. Additionally, what viewers approve of is tied to prevalent historical and societal values on race. Of course, many people would like to think that racial identity is not intentionally created or altered to benefit them, but the created presentation of racial identity makes this argument difficult to hold. For, it is difficult to argue that views on racial identity are not affected by racism or racial privilege and how this can skew one's view on what one wants to present about themselves. By historical and societal norms affecting how one acts, one is acting inauthentically. This consequently has societal and philosophical negative repercussions.

A Review of Empirical Research on Dating Apps

There is a wide diversity of users and dating apps. Some apps specialize in creating easier access to sexual encounters and other apps specialize in creating long-term romantic relationships. Some apps are specific to age, sexuality, intention, and location. Nonetheless, this paper will focus on how different relationship dynamics affect identity. Throughout this paper, I will delve into the impact of environmental factors on racial identity to understand why there is a hierarchy in racial identities. Moreover, I will focus on gay male relationships, heterosexual relationships, racially homogenous relationships, and interracial relationships. These

relationships are specifically chosen because of the abundance of empirical work on these types of relationships and their direct ties to racial identity. Lesbian relationships are not examined in this paper because, to date, there is not much empirical research on racial identity in this type of relationship.

Geographical location affects preferences and thus also affects the construction and perception of curated identities in dating apps. Studies have examined how geographical or community context impacts one's decisions about potential mates. Multiple studies conclude that the more diverse a location is, the more one will accept different races for identity. This shows that perhaps the way one shows oneself by articulating their identity on a dating app has a minor effect on how one is viewed. Socio-geographic segregation and societal norms are the prevailing ways of preference, and thus attraction is created (Fisman, Iyengar, Kamenica, and Simonson 2008). While the debate on the ethics of racial preference is contentious, it is undeniable that racial preferences are an important part of one's identity. One's racial preferences often shape what one deems as attractive and thus who one would want to be with. It separates who one would romantically consider and how they value and treat others. Racial preferences are not coincidental or due to innate desire. They stem from prevailing social, cultural, and historical norms. Studies of interracial marriage best illustrate this occurrence. In places like the American South, where racism is more common, the more segregated racial groups are and the less common racially integrated romantic relationships are (Fisman, Iyengar, Kamenica, and Simonson 2008).

This has profound impacts on identity and attraction. One's racial identity can cause one to be deemed attractive without any knowledge of the person. On the other hand, fetishization is when one's racial identity can cause one to be deemed more attractive by others without any

prior knowledge of the person. Racism and fetishization of a certain identity often shape the use of dating apps (Callendar, Holt, and Newman 2016). It is shown in users' decisions and even explicitly declared in the biographies of some users. Consequently, the discussion of racial identity is extremely helpful in understanding modern relationships. Racial hierarchies undeniably impede the formation of authentic relationships and unfairly privilege certain individuals over others due to one part of a person's identity. In all studies, there is a disproportionate privilege in being perceived as white (Callendar, Holt, and Newman 2016). Due to these studies that conclude that racial identity impacts one's attractiveness, there is a discourse on whether race should be part of one's identity. For this argument, I urge an examination of what one pleads. The problem is not race or racial identity per se, but rather the association of race with attractiveness. For, attractiveness stemming from race is not innate. It is formed from discriminatory societal norms. Ultimately, the viewers' biases and environmental factors take a heavier role in forming attraction than I initially believed, and this will be demonstrated in the following paragraphs.

Racial preferences and especially racial homogeneity are highly contested. They ultimately affect if one will date the same race as one's own or a different race. From acceptable to unethical, people are divided in terms of the acceptance of the concept and what it means to hold a racial preference. First, racial preferences can be used positively by keeping a racially oppressed community together, and one can be used as an act of resistance to racism and as a way to continue ethnic bonds. On the other hand, racial preferences may be used to reinforce racial hierarchies and stereotypes. Simply put, having a racial preference shows one has a value of a certain race over another. As shown by research, it is clear that when one values one race over another it is typically due to extant racial hierarchies and stereotypes. While it would be

easy to dismiss discussions on racial identity as too abstract or as an unconscious decision of users, we should not dismiss the real ramifications of racial identity preference. For, it is not simply about race, but it also includes political, legal, and social markers that can reinforce or negate racial hierarchies. Interestingly, cultural authenticity is another subsection of racial homogeneity. To elaborate on racial homogeneity, there are tiers to dating preferences within the same race. For example, Latinos that speak Spanish are more likely to only date Latinos and/or desire someone who speaks Spanish. Speaking Spanish is valuable to those that speak Spanish because these individuals view this trait as especially pertinent to Latino culture. Thus, speaking Spanish is seen as a marker of authenticity as individuals that are fluent in Spanish are seen as having a closer proximity to Latino culture (Feliciano, Lee, Robnett 2011).

Gay male relationships have been heavily studied in terms of their use of online dating apps, including how it is shaped by race and ethnicity. There is a higher percentage of gay online daters that met their current partner online in comparison to straight heterosexual relationships (Callandar, Holt, and Newman 2012). Thus, a focus on gay relationships can offer important insights into the use and implications of dating apps. Racialization and discussion on racialized attraction are more apparent in online discourse (Callandar, Holt, and Newman 2016), and some researchers have examined how ethnosexual stereotypes shape gay male relationships and online dating. Ethnosexual stereotypes are the sexual stereotypes of an ethnicity. For example, Asian men are perceived as less masculine (due to historical reasons) and are thus considered to be less desirable on dating apps. Comparatively, white men appeared to hold the most desirability on dating apps. In a study where individuals were allowed to state information on oneself and what one desires in one's user profile, white men were more likely to declare racial preferences than any other race. However, non-whites were more likely to use race as a description of oneself than

white individuals (Callander, Holt, Newman 2012). This shows that the desirability one has on these apps creates different actions and opportunities. Desirability leads to more matches and conversations, and it also affects how one describes oneself and one's desires. Additionally, when one is less desirable due to race, one can experience sexual racism. Sexual racism ranges from ignorant statements to blatant discrimination based on race. Perhaps the most interesting part about identity within gay dating app circles is the usage of preferences in their profile. While this differs per app and location, individuals on a dating app can specify if they do not want a certain race, age, or body build. Thus, dating app users discriminate among potential partners based on a part of their identity. *Seeking* to partner only with people with certain racial identities perpetuates sexual racism. In one study, researchers found through survey data that offline gay men were less likely to express or experience sexual racism in comparison to online gay men (Callandar, Holt, and Newman 2012).

Research on heterosexual relationships also provides interesting insight into the construction and use of curated identities through dating apps. While there are many categories of identity one fills to complete their dating profile, race is among the identities that are first perceived, often because of the frequent use of photographs in dating apps. Multiple studies show that racial homogeneity is quite common. Racial homogeneity refers to the tendency of people of one race to desire other people of the same race rather than a different race. For example, white men and women are more likely to talk to another white person than a black person. Some studies argue that this homogeneity is due to shared culture, and some argue that this homogeneity is reflective of less racial integration in a specific area (Lin and Lundquist 2013; Robnett and Feliciano 2011). This shows that perhaps how one identifies has less of an effect on the viewer but more so on the person that identifies with that racial identity than originally discussed at the

beginning of the paper. While there have been many works discussing how one reacts to someone else's race, there is less discourse on how the race that one internalizes or accepts affects oneself. It seems that, through identifying with that race, one thereby views those of the same race as more similar to oneself than someone of a different race. This makes one see people of the same race as similar to them, and thus any acceptance or disapproval becomes a personal attack as race is part of one's identity.

Research on interracial dating suggests that racial groups experience differential treatment by online daters. On dating apps, Asian males and black females are more likely to be excluded or to get fewer matches than members of other racial groups (Robnett and Feliciano 2011). Scholars point out that this is indicative of ethnosexual or racist stereotypes. Once more, Asian men are seen as less masculine, which makes them less desirable to women who seek a masculine partner. Black women are often seen as less feminine which makes them less desirable to many men. Both of these examples show how race and identity conflict with authentic attraction. By this, I argue that racial exclusion is not due to authentic incompatibility, but rather racism (Robnett and Feliciano 2011). Thus, having a racial preference can be unethical as it discriminates against others based on their racial identity.

Furthermore, interracial dating within immigrant communities is heavily influenced by differential treatment and racial stereotyping as well as the extent of integration within American social life. This is illustrated in a study of the Chinese-American community (Weiss 1970). Research participants that were most accepting and involved in American society were more likely to accept interracial dating. In contrast, those that were not involved were less likely to accept interracial dating. Overall, this study of a Chinese-American community shows that interracial dating is sometimes encouraged. Interracial dating with white Americans is favorable

to some. As this study shows, the acceptance of other racial identities is shaped by cultural and historical factors.

Interracial intimate relationships are considered the ultimate sign of social integration and reduced racial stratification. Thus, multiracial individuals are seen as signs of such progress. While there are multiple combinations of multiracial individuals, Asian-white and Latino-white individuals tend to be preferred in comparison to black-white individuals. Still, white people are given the most preferential treatment (Curington, Lin, Lundquist 2015). Multiracial individuals are of interest in this examination of racial identity and authenticity. Unfortunately, there are few studies on multiracial individuals. Most studies are about multiracial individuals that are half-white. In one study, half-whites are almost always given preference over other types of people. In these studies, their mixed races were explicitly stated. (Feliciano, Lee, Robnett 2011). As previously discussed, racial preferences stem from prevailing social, cultural, and historical norms. The possible racial ambiguity of the multiracial individuals in this study was not stated, and this could have added more clarification about how other races fared. While there is research that expounds on how users react to mixed racial profiles, there is little work that discusses how racial identity is formed online or the possible ramifications of racial identity. I argue that racial identity should be authentic. If one genuinely believes and aligns with that race, one should be able to include that as a marker of identity.

After thoroughly discussing racial identity, it is apparent that how one identifies has less of an effect on the viewer but more so on the person that identifies with that racial identity. This is because, through identifying with that race, any acceptance or disapproval becomes a personal attack as race is part of their identity. Racial preferences are highly contested. From acceptable to unethical, people are divided as to the acceptance of the concept and what it means to hold a

racial preference. There are many thoughts about racial preferences. First, they may be used positively to maintain a community. There are mixed opinions on whether this reasoning is acceptable. Arguably, it can be used as an act of resistance among people of color to continue their racial or ethnic bonds. On the other hand, racial preferences may be used to reinforce racial hierarchies and stereotypes. Simply put, having a preference shows one values a certain race over another. Previous research, suggests that when one values one race over another, it is typically due to extant racial hierarchies and stereotypes. While it would be easy to dismiss discussions on racial identity as too abstract or as an unconscious decision of users, we should not dismiss the real ramifications of racial identity preference. For, it is not simply about race, but has political, legal, and social implications that can reinforce or negate racial hierarchies. As shown from the empirical evidence, it seems that regardless of how one identifies or whether one makes race a major or minor factor of their identity, it will impact their desirability to varying degrees. Thus, we know that one unconsciously or consciously has some sort of racial identity preference. This consequently necessitates the following question — is racial identity ever personal or is it more so perceived? While the empirical research stated above seems to answer that racial identity is personal and perceived, in the following section of this capstone project I will be using Sartre's framework to understand racial identity in a personal sense.

SARTRE'S FRAMEWORK

Jean-Paul Sartre offers the most promising philosophical framework for developing a dynamic theory of racial identity in comparison to other philosophers. His work on bad faith has created endless discourse both about the possibility of authenticity and how authenticity can be actualized. Sartre sees authenticity as of the utmost importance. In particular, not living in bad faith is crucial to genuinely living. Bad faith is a self-deception that causes one to not recognize their innate freedom (Sartre 2001). For Sartre, having a racial identity or preference is inauthentic. For Sartre, merely having a racial identity is not inauthentic. Rather, the supposition that one is nothing other than one's racial identity would be a kind of inauthenticity. Thus, solely identifying with one's racial identity is inauthentic because one is identifying too much with one's facticity. To elaborate, facticity is the physical, material world and its conditions. This would include our physical composition which affects our perceived race, and it also includes our environment and thus societal and cultural norms. For Sartre, when one identifies oneself with one's facticity without consideration of one's transcendence (the ability to be someone without facticity), one is inauthentic and living in bad faith. Consequently, not only is solely identifying with race inauthentic but also defining one's preferences entirely by racial attributes is a way of living in bad faith.

The self and identity are “collaborative accomplishments” (Davis 2014). Essentially, one cannot be for the self without forming an identity and vice versa. It is important to clarify the ethics of identity because one can and should be conscious of their identity. For Sartre, one has a radical innate freedom in life. While one may feel one is constricted to one's job or the world one is placed in, one ultimately can choose what one wants to do. One does not have to do anything, as there is no innate essence. Thus, there is an innate freedom in oneself that must be realized so

one can create one's essence and is ultimately conscious of one's essence and identity because both are comprised of one's actions.

While Sartre's argument may seem quite abstract or inapplicable in real life, I think his beliefs hold a ring of wisdom. Often, humans do hold their facticity as their identity. However, one truly is not just their facticity. It would be naive and inconsiderate to say one's facticity does not make one's identity at all, and Sartre understands this. However, his emphasis on considering how one is not *just* their physical condition is important to determining how authentic dating and romance are now. For, if one is basing romance on facticity, we forget to think about what also comprises that person, their transcendence and consciousness. Simply put racial identity and racial preferences can impede authentic relationships and connections.

Sartre's Critique

In this section, I will anticipate Sartre's critiques of the different research findings on how the use of dating apps are shaped by or relate to biracial identities. First, research on gay male relationships shows that they are often shaped by ethnosexual stereotypes (Callandar, Holt, and Newman 2012). Ethnosexual stereotypes are sexual stereotypes based on one's ethnicity. To assume one's sexuality or sexual behavior based on one's ethnicity is inauthentic. For, when one determines someone else's ethnicity on dating apps one is basing this observation on the other person's facticity. This calculation causes the person to put more emphasis on one's facticity than one's transcendence which is inauthentic. Second, research on same-race heterosexual couples reveals that there are multiple reasons why people desire people of the same race, and it often stems from environmental and cultural conditions (Callandar, Holt, and Newman 2012). If one prefers a person of the same race because of these reasons, one is living inauthentically because one is solely considering one's facticity rather than facticity *and* transcendence. Facticity

includes the nature of the world one is embedded in. Thus, the societal norms and status quo one is placed in are considered part of one's facticity. Thus, when one's racial bias is altered by social constructions, one denies one's innate freedom and lives in bad faith by forgetting one's transcendence and ability to go above the facticity one is born in. Similarly, interracial dating, the dating of two individuals of different races, is also influenced by social norms. In particular, in America, one's acceptance and willingness to participate in interracial dating are strongly related to one's social environment and the norms in that environment regarding interracial relationships. Individuals that are influenced by one's facticity are living in bad faith, in an inauthentic way of life. Since the acceptance of homogeneous and heterogeneous racial relationships can be based upon historical, societal, and cultural reasons, this shows that such constructions lead to inauthentic relationships and impede possible connections. For, if one were to consider that one is not solely one's facticity but also one's transcendence, one would be able distance oneself from the norms of the material world. Thus, for Sartre, the individual must understand where one's preferences stem from. If one's preferences are organic to an individual and not solely based on facticity, one can be authentic and find authenticity in relationships.

I also discussed mixed-race individuals and the typically preferential treatment they encounter in comparison to their monoracial counterparts. To illustrate, half-Asian individuals are given preferential treatment through more engagement on apps in comparison to Asian individuals. This then leads to an ethical concern: could someone utilize their proximity to whiteness to capitalize on the societal norms that benefit one? For, being advantageous due to one's race does not mean one is being inauthentic or living in bad faith. That individual is simply who they are and was born with that racial identity, that facticity. To this question, I answer by dissuading the usage of white proximity through being mixed race as a way to boost one's

attraction. While one can be perceived as more attractive because of this, it is the ethical duty of an individual to not capitalize on this preferential treatment. This does not mean that one cannot racially identify as half-white or that doing so would be a benevolent act. Rather, to be as authentic as possible, one should only create a racial identity with the intent of authenticity and not approval.

Implications of Authenticity

Interestingly, in one scenario I examine, one can be seen as more authentic than another by simply being fluent in a language. According to the study by Feliciano, Lee, and Robnett (2011) discussed above, amongst Latinos that speak Spanish, a marker of racial-ethnic authenticity is speaking Spanish. This stems from the trait of speaking Spanish as being seen as an indicator of one's closer proximity to one's racial-ethnic background. Again, this shows that an individual is determining another person through measures created by one's facticity. One's facticity includes the norms of the world one is in, including cultural norms. By favoring those that speak Spanish one is taking one's facticity as a measurement of authenticity. This, in Sartre's view, is inauthentic because one should consider one's facticity and transcendence.

For Sartre, authentic identity is understanding one's transcendence and facticity. Thus, the argument for whether authentic identity is possible on dating apps becomes the question of whether one can understand their facticity and transcendence on dating apps. Sartre would hesitantly state that it is possible. As long as one is aiming towards being who they show, they are being authentic. To reiterate a previous argument, one can know that mixed-white individuals and white individuals receive preferential treatment and still identify as white without being unethical. As an individual, it is very difficult to influence or change societal norms. Sartre would argue that if one were to stop identifying a certain way due to one's facticity, like societal

norms, it would be disingenuous and inauthentic. One can only be authentic by genuinely believing that their racial identity is theirs and completing actions that go towards identifying this way. This would include not being shameful and pursuing actions that are congruent with how one believes one should act to hold such a racial identity.

CONCLUSION

Racial identity impedes authentic relationships and the use of racial identity to select potential dates through online dating apps impedes possible romantic connections. As discussed more fully above, previous research on the use of online dating apps provides clear evidence that how others interpret racial identity can be heavily influenced by various aspects of facticity, including existing cultural, societal, and social norms. Additionally, it is not the best marker of identity because race often is interpreted through a historical and cultural lens that is outside of the person's grasp. Dependence on identity negatively affects authentic relationships. Who one finds attractive is one of the most idiosyncratic choices an individual makes (Bedi 2015). It shows what one values and seeks. By basing our identity on race, we are being inauthentic and dishonest to ourselves and everyone else. While it may seem that society has transcended obsolete dating barriers, dating apps may continue to perpetrate these barriers to finding authentic romance. Thus, perhaps, dating apps are not improving romantic outcomes or making romantic connections more efficient. Instead, it makes authentic relationships and an authentic self more difficult to obtain.

Sartre's philosophical ideas regarding identities, and their relationship to facticity, transcendence, and authenticity, provide a useful conceptual framework and perspective for understanding the implications of racial identities within modern romance. Authenticity is applicable and should be heavily considered in relationships and thus romance. As Sartre holds, living in bad faith would be to live inauthentically. The authentic romantic connection would thus require a complimentary understanding of both individual's transcendence and facticity. Being solely attracted to someone due to their facticity is inauthentic and leads to inauthentic

relationships. Thus, the construction and use of racial identity on dating apps impede genuine romance.

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