She's Just Not My Type: 
Queer College Women and the Negotiation of Racial Sexual Profiles 

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By 

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Abstract

This study strove to identify trends of sexual and romantic racial preference among queer college aged women and how queer women renegotiated and constructed desirability. It was a project concerned with how queer women imagined different races of women as potential partners and imbued them with both physical, emotional, and political characteristics. It was a study of their negotiations of racial sexual profiles against a backdrop of America’s contemporary racial system and culture. I conducted 13 qualitative interviews and 99 surveys. Principally, I have found that there is an important distinction between imagined beautiful partners and imagined desirable partners. Queer women did not necessarily desire or were willing to date the most beautiful women they could imagine. Rather, they triangulated desirability with two major criteria: imagined ability for masculine presentation and perceived political progressiveness when imagining Black, White, and Asian women. Under these criteria, my research suggests that queer women favor White and Black women over Asian women in the imagined romantic and sexual marketplace. Further, participants reported that they are very open to interracial dating. While the heterosexual and queer male sexual marketplaces privilege racialized partner’s ability to conform to hegemonic masculinity and femininity, queer women’s market represents a drastic departure. In these ways, queer women differ greatly from every other demographic group. Further research is crucial to fully understanding how queer women construct desirability and negotiate racial boundaries.
INTRODUCTION  Dating, Racial Sexual Profiles, and Theory

This is a thesis about dating, romance, and sex. It would not be the first such thesis written by a college student. In this investigation, however, I explore the role of race for women dating other women. As profoundly as the dating scene has changed over the last 50 years to include the public acknowledgment and often even acceptance of LGBTQ romance, racial hierarchies of preference remains stubbornly in place two decades into the American 21st century. It was not too long ago that marriage and dating were familial pursuits rather than that of individuals (Ullman 1997). Family heads would weigh the economic and social status of potential partners and arrange desirable, legitimate or homo-racial unions. Modernity has, to an extent, untethered the individual from the social, geographic, and economic constraints of the nuclear and extended family. Modern sexuality encourages self-actualization through romantic and sexual partnership, stressing romantic pursuits (Ullman 1997). Pre-marital sex and dating is largely acceptable and even encouraged. Now, individuals must arrange for themselves desirable unions with desirable partners. Yet, individuals remain tethered to an American racial system which delineates desirability greatly based on racial status. I contend that before individuals even initiate flirtatious contact with desired, they must first imagine and construct a desirable partner. It is in this imaginative space that individuals employ and renegotiate larger racial sexual stereotypes which color which races and gender presentations of individuals are desirable and how they view others’ abilities to be adequate partners.

Understanding romantic and sexual attraction and relations is crucial to understanding the state of race in America. These relations are heavily influenced by race-based conceptions of
beauty and desirability. Beauty and desirability, then, are discourses of power. America has Anglo-Saxon beauty standards which marginalize and dehumanize “ethnic” traits that do not fall into that category (Craig 2002). Beauty and romance is a matter of which groups are afforded “justice” in Bedi’s sense and the possibility of being loved, valued, and afforded all the privileges of beauty (Bedi 2015). Furthermore, to understand desirability and its subsequent role in the romantic experiences of queer women is to add to a largely nonexistent body of work concerning female sexuality. The complexities of what it means to be desirable among women who are further marginalized by their queerness brings up interesting questions about how queer women might differently envision and strive for romantic and sexual desirable than heterosexual women. All these internalized ideas about race and skin tone will intersect with their queerness and manifest what they find desirable and beautiful.

Romance and sex are political pursuits of power and social capital. They are also activities that police and policed by in racial boundaries. The following text will consider the establishment of hegemonic sexual profiles in the turn of twentieth century America and the profiles’ development into the twenty-first century. These profiles influence which racialized bodies interact, how they interact, and under which circumstances the bodies interact. From there, it will move into a discussion of contemporary interracial dating literature. It discusses the inadequacy of a range of major theories to fully capture the complexity of racial preferences in dating. Rather, this study posits that Americans negotiated the profiles proscribed to them and other racial groups to make partner choices. While crucial to our understanding of race, the literature is overwhelmingly focused on heterosexuals and, to an extent, queer men. There is an
absolute dearth of research surrounding the racial preference trends among queer women. This study partially fills that void.

My research points to the great wealth of knowledge that can come from studying queer women’s sexuality at the intersection of race. Principally, I have found that there is an important distinction between imagined beautiful partners and imagined desirable partners. Furthermore, my research suggests that queer women favor White and Black women over Asian women in the imagined romantic and sexual marketplace, report that they are very open to interracial dating, and construct hierarchies of desirability based on imagined masculine presentation and political progressiveness. Queer women differ greatly from every other demographic group in their trends of preference and willingness to engage interracially. They are not like heterosexual women since they overwhelmingly report willingness and even desire to date interracially (Lin & Lundquist 2013; Fisman et al 2008). They are not like queer men who mimic heterosexual women in their privileging of races of men that are seen as more hegemonically masculine (Eguchi 2011; Fisman et al 2008). Finally, they are not like heterosexual men in that they do not find Asian women desirable and do not delineate desirability as ability to conform to hegemonic standards of femininity (Nemoto 2009). Indeed, the trends within queer women’s sexual marketplace do not easily conform to traditional theories of interracial romantic contact.

To uncover these results I originally strove to answer two fundamental questions. First, what are the large trends of romantic and sexual racial preferences among queer college aged women, and what is considered desirable within the community? Second, how are these preferences negotiated among queer women as womanhood intersects with queerness? The purpose of this study was to explore how queer college aged women constructed and negotiated
racial sexual profiles and how these constructions shaped their racial preferences in the sexual marketplace. Racial sexual profiles are bodies of common sexual stereotypes surrounding men and women in each racial group. I use the framework of the marketplace because I contend that individuals participate in a physical and, most importantly, imagined sexual and romantic marketplace. The physical romantic marketplace is a metaphor for the romantic options available to an individual given her geographic and social location. This project is focused particularly on the imagined romantic marketplace. It is within this marketplace that individuals both construct the follies and charms of imagined potential partners and weigh them against each other. Yet this process of construction is not divorced from our larger socio-political world. I contend that individuals participate in a project of collective imagination wherein they renegotiate and reimagine hegemonic racial sexual profiles and align those profiles with varying degrees of desirability.

I. Anti-Miscegenation, Popular Performances, and Comparative Anatomy: the Establishment of Sexual Profiles

America is a country built on the forced labor of African slaves, the marginalized labor of immigrants, and removal of the indigenous population, to the economic, political, cultural, and sexual benefit of White European colonists and White Patriarchy. This new world with a motley population gave way to an American eugenic system of race at the turn of the twentieth century which split the world’s population into a small menagerie of racial groups such as “Black,” “White,” and “Asian,” and theorized that race as something determined by the race of the biological “mother” and “father” (Sommerville 2004). Given that race and the inheritance of
racial privilege and are determined by the race of the “mother” and “father,”” interracial sexual interactions have been highly scrutinized and policed throughout American history. A huge part of this policing took place in the form of anti-miscegenation laws and popular “other-izing” racial performances such as minstrel shows, legitimized in turn of the twentieth century civilization discourse, obsessed with comparative anatomy (Sommerville 2004; Sommerville 2000).

Anti-miscegenation laws outlawed interracial marriage, firmly establishing the illegitimacy of mixed race households in relation to the state and refused interracial couples economic, legal, and social privileges that came with marriage. The laws sought to create the legal romantic and sexual boundaries between races and deliver Whiteness from potential racial ruin. There is a wealth of literature on anti-miscegenation laws which attempted to codify sex and marriage as strictly intraracial activities in order to preserve the White race in an America embroiled in the discourse of racialized civilization (Bederman 1996). These laws reflected a larger cultural establishment of White Anglo-Saxon beauty standards as delineated a part of ideal heterosexual relations.

Similarly otherizing performances such as minstrelsy or American freak shows established racialized caricatures of non-Whites, underlining their innate bodily and sexual primitivity as objects of mockery, scorn, and voyeurism. The performances established the social and sexual superiority of Whiteness and White sexuality.

At the same moment, the “scientific community, embarked on a racial project based on comparative anatomy to identify the sources of racial difference, constructing the normative body as a “White” body against which other races deviated. Turn of the century sexologists and
anthropologists located Black sexual deviance in the physical excess inherent in their sexual appendages. This new race science not only imagined the black body as a body with large sexual appendances, but imbued this imagined excess as indicative of Black individuals’ inherently deviant hypersexuality. Thus, the “Hottentot Venus” became the embodiment of the quintessential racial sexual profile for black women. She was seen as sexually promiscuous and aggressive because she had dark skin, abnormally large rear end, clitoris, and breasts, and she had such abnormally accentuated “sexual” organs because they were promiscuous and aggressive (Sommerville 2000). Interestingly, doctors remarked that lesbians or “inverts” could be also identified as such by their abnormally large clitori which was both the source and proof of their deviant sexuality and gender rebellion. White and heterosexual bodies were implicitly invoked in these journals each time scientists remarked that that deviant bodies were “abnormal” in some way. It denoted the ideal femininity and beauty as White while marginalizing non-Whiteness as inherently transgressive and inferior. These scientific understandings of racialized bodies and their supposed implications for gender and sexual presentation gained popularity in nonacademic society. Thus, it becomes clear that physical attributes have been deeply coded with social meaning, eroticized as a part of racial explanations of deviance and normality.

II. Theoretical Lenses and 21st Century Employment of Sexual Profiles in Dating and Sex

While Loving v. Virginia overturned the ban on interracial marriage in 1961, minstrel and freak shows went out of style, and intellectualized scientific racism gave way to “cultural
"racism" in the later half of the twentieth century, turn of the century racial caricatures persisted even to our supposed “post-racial” historical moment. For example, Asian women are continued to be viewed as exotic, hyper-feminine, and quiet as is evident in magazine advertisements for silk stockings (Moy 1993). Just as anti-miscegenation laws, othering performances, and pseudo-scientific ventures in comparative anatomy were efforts in racial boundary making in by way of law, popular performance, and empirical embodiment, romance and sex are necessarily negotiations in racial boundaries (Feliciano et al 2011). They are contestations of power and status. Americans in the sexual marketplace perceive and are perceived by others through the gaze of Anglo-Saxon desirability. A huge part of racial power and disempowerment lies in the access to being perceived as beautiful and sexually and romantically desireable through racialized sexual profiles. For example, studies have shown that lighter skinned and White-passing women of color tend to make more money, are more likely to be married, and are more likely to hold higher educational degrees (Hunter 2005). Other studies have shown that attractive men and women make more than their less attractive counterparts (Mobius & Rosenblat 2006; Andreoni & Petric 2004).

These sexual profiles are bodies, often contradictory, of stereotypes of how men and women of different races conduct themselves sexually and romantically as well as assumptions of racial physicalities. Hegemonic sexual profiles include but are not limited to such as the hyper aggressive and bodacious Black woman, the submissive, slender Asian woman, and the morally virtuous, blue eyed White woman (Moy 1993). While hegemonic racial sexual profiles and the way the profiles are perpetuated and change over time along with constructions of race and gender, hegemonic they remain in service to White Patriarchy and legible to inheritors of
American race culture. As race effects economic and social outcomes for individuals, racial sexual profiles systematically affect all Americans in the sexual and romantic marketplace. Sonu Bedi, a philosopher, calls the employment of these racial caricatures or sexual profiles in the service of forming racial preferences which reinforce White Supremacy sexual racism (Bedi 2015). Sexual racism has been a well documented social phenomenon among both the heterosexual community and the queer male community (Feliciano et al 2011; Emens 2009; Fisman et al 2008; Eguchi 2011).

Yet the literature on interracial dating often neglects the importance of gendered stereotypes as a major shaper of desire. Literature on racial sexual and romantic preferences in terms of interracial marriage and dating patterns has largely been concerned with a selected body of theories, namely, classic assimilation theory, the sexual strategies theory, and group position position (Feliciano et al 2011). All these theories have proven to be inadequate to fully explaining the ways in which the intersection of an individual’s gender, sexuality, and race form their racial preferences.

The problem with sexual strategies theory lies both its heteronormative assumptions and its reliance on evolutionary biological thought. Sexual strategies theory posits that there is an innate psychological difference among men and women in their strategies towards sex and romance (Buss & Schmitt 1993). It posits that men are innately driven to impregnate as many women as possible, choosing mates based on their beauty and ability to mother children since beauty is indicative of health which will lead to the survival of offspring (Buss & Schmitt 1993). Women, on the other hand, are allegedly choosier and driven to choose the male that will best provide for their offspring materially (Buss & Schmitt 1993). When applied to the question of
interracial dating, the theory posits that women will be attracted to men who are part of high-earning socioeconomic groups such as White and Asian men. Men of all races will be more open to dating women of all races, compared to women’s desire for outdating, as long as the women are beautiful (Buss & Schmidt 1993). The theory’s complete inadequacy to act as a unifying theory through which to understand all dating lies in its three main assumptions. First, it assumes all people are heterosexual. Secondly, it assumes that differences between men and women’s preferences and strategies stem from innate biological differences rather than historically specific socialization. Thirdly, it assumes that “man” and “woman” are biological realities rather than social constructions. These assumptions are part of the reason why sexual strategies cannot explain the deep marginalization of Asian men and Black women by all groups of races of American women and all but Black men respectively (Robnett & Feliciano 2011). Asian men are thought to have some of the highest educational and financial attainment in America. Further, studies have consistently shown that Asian women are much more likely than Asian men to desire and even prefer engaging outside of their race (Robnett & Feliciano 2011). Further, the theory assumes that sex and romance is linked to biological reproduction of the species and that dating is a universal phenomena. The theory also assumes that sex and romance is about family making according to a very constricted and culturally normative model of family. Indeed, there are books and books that could be written on the unwarranted, reductive, and damaging assumptions the theory posits.

Classical assimilation theory is better equipped to predict and explain the ways in which racial boundaries are negotiated between Whites and immigrants through marriage, but is limited in its untroubling of “assimilation” as both a post racial achievement. Modeled after the path to
“Whiteness” that turn of the twentieth century European immigrants, it argues that new immigrant groups are placed between White and Black Americans in the social and racial hierarchy and inevitably follow a path of incorporation into Whiteness and superiority to Blacks. Immigrants will assimilate structurally through economic prospects and social institutions. Through intermarriage with Whites, immigrants will lose their ethnic identification thus their positions as marginalized racial targets (Lee 2009). While the intense interest in and evidence of romantic and sexual engagement between Asian women, Latinas, and Whites suggest a level of “assimilation,” racism has not ended (Robnett & Feliciano 2011). In fact, intermarriage and interracial dating patterns reveal that Asian and Latino, to a much lesser extent, men are incredibly marginalized sexually among all groups of women. Rather, it seems that the asymmetrical incorporation of Asian women into interracial relationships with White men reinforces White Supremacy and reifies racial boundaries of socio-sexual power rather than undermines them (Nemoto 2009). Classic assimilation theory is inadequate explaining the racism which can drive and persist after interracial dating with Whites along with the gendered nature of interracial preferences. Furthermore, the untroubled concept of “assimilation” is a neo-colonial fantasy that falsely conflates Whiteness with “Americanness.” Assimilation also locates the origin of prejudice in non-Whiteness, advocating for the disappearance of racial others. It fails to recognize Whiteness as a category which is constructed as the superior, racial norm is the determinant of prejudice.

Between sexual strategies and classical assimilation theory, group position theory leaves more room for romantic nuances but struggles to explain phenomena that span beyond the Black/white binary. Group position theory is a sociological analysis of racism which posits that
its source lies in the structural relationship of racial groups in a given society rather than something located in the individual. Racial prejudice is a matter of “(a) racial identification made of oneself and others and (b) of the ways in which the identified groups are conceived in relation to each other” (Blumer 1958). Through the identification with a group, individuals are aware of the groups position to others and the socio-political meanings associated with that position. Group position theory conceptualizes American society as containing a White “dominant racial group” and a subordinate group (Black) (Blumer 1958). Whites must maintain supremacy through a fluid process through which “the dominant racial group is led to define and redefine the subordinate racial group and the relations between them” (Blumer 1958). Part of that definition of the racial other has historically been the creation of sexual profiles. The process of constructing the sexual profile of the “other,” implicitly created the profile of the “White” as the superior, normative.

Yet, group position theory has historically been limited in its Black/White binary and needs to be understood in a Foucauldian sense and incorporate racial triangulation. While Whites maintain innumerable facets of power in America, the theory does not take into consideration the multi-faceted nature of power. A Foucaultian view would understand that power emanates from multiple positionalities in an inexhaustible number of ways (Foucault 1990). The definition of racial groups in terms of sexual profiles and socio-economic access is a process of negotiation both among Whites and people of color. Although people of color hold less power to shape hegemonic profiles, it is important recognize their potential to renegotiate the terms of such profiles. Furthermore, to understand power as Foucauldian is to understand that groups of color sometimes reinforce damaging sexual profiles onto other groups of color as ways to further their
own group position such as Asian men who attempt to supplement their profile’s desirability by highlighting the dangerous nature of Black men (Kim 2008).

Group position theory must be incorporated with racial triangulation theory in order to understand the racial politics driving racial preferences in dating and sex. Political scientist Claire Jean Kim has conceptualized the socio-political space of Asianess relative to Blackness and Whiteness by adding upon Black feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins theory of racial triangulation (Kim 1999). In terms of exploring the relationships between Blackness, Whiteness, and Asianness, racial triangulation allows scholars to tease out the nuances in privilege and disempowerment. Racial triangulation theory espouses that there are multiple valences of power. In the case of Asians, Blacks, and Whites, prevalent forms of power are “relative valorization” and “civic ostracism.” Whites are seen as both high achieving economically and possessing citizenship. Black Americans are seen as low achieving yet American. Asians are above Black Americans in the socioeconomic hierarchy but are perceived to be foreign, cultural outsiders (Kim 1999). Valorization and ostracism carry with them sexual undertones which intersect with race and gender and inform individual decisions in mate choice. Dating valorized groups does not carry stigma in the hegemonic American popular imagination. However, ostracized groups are seen as inherently foreign and even exotic which code male bodies as undesirable and female bodies as desirable. Rather than having the two factors intersecting to demarcate a racial group’s position in the larger American society, we can identify major factors behind racial sexual object choice and triangulate them to demarcate a racial group’s position in the sexual market.

The overarching racial trend for both heterosexual and queer male markets is racial homophily (Lin & Lundquist 2013). Yet, I argue that within these marketplaces, the two most
important factors to determining interracial dating trends are relative valorization and a group’s sexual profile’s ability to conform to hegemonic standards for femininity and masculinity. Further, a profile’s alignment with hegemonic standards are more decisive than a group’s valorization in predicting desireable groups. This lens explains the main interracial preference trends among heterosexuals and queer men: 1. the deep marginalization of Asian men, 2. the deep marginalization of Black women 3. desirability of both White men and women.

Valorized partners, like Asians, do not systematically depreciate the social capital of their partners, as opposed to Black Americans. This lack of valorization leads to well established trends of marginalization of Black men and women in the sexual market from potential partners who avoid engaging with Black partners, fearing social disapproval (Bany 2014). Yet Asian men are seen as effeminate by both heterosexual women and queer men, and their racial sexual profile’s inability to conform to hegemonic masculinity leads to a deep marginalization in the sexual market (White et al 2014; Han 2008a; Eguchi 2011). This approach explains the ways in which heterosexual women value Black men as partners more than heterosexual men value Black women (Mendelsohn et al 2014). Black men are not valorized but their sexual profiles are hegemonically masculine, albeit dangerously hypermasculine (Hill Collins 2004). However, Black women are not valorized. Their sexual profiles are hypermasculine and were formed by Whites in opposition to White femininity. Black women have historically had to fight to be included under the category of woman, and even Black men have expressed more reluctance to date Black women due, in part, to their perceived unfeminine attributes (Craig 2002; Siddique 2017). Finally, Whites’ positions at the top of the sexual and romantic hierarchy are reflected in
their high valorization as well as their ability to conform more easily to hegemonic masculinity and femininity since those standards were created in service to Whiteness.

Through this marriage of group position and racial triangulation, it becomes clear that the dating trends in both the heterosexual and queer male marketplace are governed by strict adherence to hegemonic, racialized norms of masculinity and femininity. In viewing individuals as negotiators of racial sexual profiles rather than as primal men and women seeking to reproduce or assimilating immigrant groups, we will be able to more accurately predict and make sense of racial preference trends. It is important to note that this White Supremacist triangulation of desire is not all encompassing for there are always counter-hegemonic desires and ideologies at work.

III. Queer Women’s Negotiations of Sexual Profiles in the Romantic Marketplace

Beyond the quest for an adequate methodological framework, it is interesting to consider that both heterosexual women and queer men display the same racial preferences in men. It suggests that these racial profiles are indeed widely legible and that their triangulation in terms of marketplace beauty standards have greatly influence interracial engagement trends. However, it remains to be seen is whether or not poly-sexual women, or women that experience attracted to a multitude of genders including men, exhibit different patterns of racial preference of men than exclusively heterosexual women. Further, as with most research on sexuality, the experiences of queer women, especially queer women of color, have been largely ignored. While the sexually racist tendencies heterosexual women display towards men of color clue us into the frank possibility of sexual racism within among queer women, it remains to be discussed to what
degree and what particularities sexual racism manifests and demonstrates based on the intersectionality among queer women. We do not know the extent to which these sexual profiles are legible among queer women and which characteristics are valued and triangulated in the marketplace.

The literature on interracial sexual contact and preferences among queer women is scant, preliminary studies have shown that queer women are more likely to date interracially than heterosexual women and the queer men (Lundquist & Lin 2015). Furthermore, a study sampled the engagement data of online White straight and gay users, including both men and women, on a popular dating site. The researchers found that between all four groups are most likely to engage with other White users, but “when interactions do occur with non-white daters, it happens most often among straight white men, second most often among white lesbians, third most often with gay white men, and least often with straight white women (Lundquist 2015). While the study attributes openness to interracial romance and sex as a sign of White progressiveness, studies have shown that interracial contact can easily be motivated by fetishization (Nemoto 2009). Easy explanations of White lesbian openness to interracial dating radically misunderstand the ways in which different groups of women have historically vied for empowerment. Different groups, particularly White women, have often defined their power in terms of beauty and their entitlement to civil rights at the expense of women of color, particularly Black women (Bederman 1996). Furthermore, the study did not differentiate the engagement data between different nonwhite groups. Thus, there is little data on how queer women, especially queer women of color, negotiated hegemonic sexual profiles and which factors are most decisive in the sexual marketplace.
This study delved into the romantic and sexual experiences and preferences of college aged queer women. It focused on the nature, legibility, and prevalence of these sexual profiles. It sought to determine whether or not sexual racism exists in the queer woman-identified community, and, if so, how it manifests and intersects with the myriad of marginalized social positions queer women situate. The study employed analysis of interview and survey data for queer women paired along with archival research. It focused mostly on the ways in which Asian, Black, and White women envisioned the sexual profiles of the other groups and were viewed by others.

The first chapter will explore the study’s methodology and provide participant demographic data. The second chapter analyzes interview participant responses to my prompting them to physically describe their ideal women. It found that participants’ imagined ideal women was greatly informed by White Anglo Saxon beauty standards, and participants overwhelmingly imagined their ideal women as White or with light features both in terms of skin tone, facial features, and hair texture. Furthermore, it found that participants valued masculine presentation among women as it denoted visible queerness, negotiating their attraction to potential women, utilizing new sexual profiles. I argue that part of the reason Asian women are so marginalized in the queer marketplace is because of the widely legible profile as hyper feminine, heterosexual, and sexually conservative. Yet there was significant conflict between the races of participants’ ideal women and the women to which and with which they reported attraction and engaged. This reveals the struggles participants experience while negotiating dominant racial sexual profiles with interpersonal experiences with different races of women and their own desire to appear racially progressive.
The third chapter analyzed survey responses wherein respondents indicated to which races of women they found themselves attracted, to which races of women they found themselves hesitant to approach, and to which races and to what valence they are open to dating. Surprisingly, survey respondents greatly desired White and Black women and a great deal reported no attraction towards Asian women, particularly among White women. Yet the trends of desire were highly variable depending on the racial group of the respondent. However, even though Black women are highly desired by White women, a significant amount of respondents, including Whites, reported hesitation to dating Black women. To complicate things further, respondents were more likely to express unwillingness to date all groups of Asian women. Respondents were willing to date Black women even though, they were expressed hesitance to approach them. Queer women have established more salient sexual profiles among queer women than among queer men and heterosexuals, wherein queer women triangulate the desirability of different races of women by two important factors: sexual progressiveness and more masculine presentation.

It must be said that I found that the primary difficulty and intellectual draw in studying desire is the tension between the private and the public, individualism and structuralism in both forming and explaining racial dating trends and preferences. Although neoliberal myths of complete individual agency narrate American dating, nothing, certainly not intimate contact between two human beings, is divorced from the political and larger structures of power. That said, the complexity of human interaction cannot be wholly explained as a product of structural determinism. Certainly, my research participants were not mindless agents of White Supremacy. Yet neither were they operating in a post-racial society. Rather, they were aware of and
renegotiating hegemonic racial sexual profiles in service to their own values and desires. This thesis is the story of those negotiations.
CHAPTER I Methods

Queer women are drastically understudied in nearly all academic literature. Even the studies which focus on queer women’s racial preferences often focus on exclusively on lesbians (Lundquist & Lin 2015). These approaches exclude queer women who are attracted to a multitude of genders, ignore the fluidity of gender and sexuality, and render meaningful analysis of queer women half-baked. An analysis of queer women, on the other hand, illuminates how race, gender, and sexuality intersect to reify racial boundaries in a specifically queer woman-centric setting. I chose this age group because this is the demographic to which I have the most access, and younger adults are more likely to be dating more often than be long-term coupled as compared to older adult. College students are also in an environment that concentrates other people their age in close geographic and social proximity. Dating and marriage data shows that couples tend to be part of the same race as well as the same age group.

To this end, I employed both qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys and compared my results to racial homophily literature among heterosexual and queer male communities. Studies that have employed purely quantitative methods have been able to identify trends on gendered outdating but have struggled to parse through the complexities which drive those trends (Lundquist & Lin 2015; Fisman et al). Interviews allow for in-depth, nuanced exchange between the interviewer and the subject and, most importantly, a chance for interviewers to ask for clarification (Luker 2010). I chose to conduct carefully crafted interviews given the complicated and politically charged nature of race and American race discourse (Steele 2011). Still, I wanted a larger sample of queer women’s preferences since interviews are less
compatible with large data collection. Thus, I designed and distributed surveys to better capture larger trends of preference and aversion among queer women.

I. Theoretical Framework

These questions are important given that decisions in sex and romance are inherently political. In fact, Sonu Bedi, a philosopher and political scientist, believes that love is a social primary good, and the opportunity to be a part of a reciprocal romantic relation is a matter of justice (2015). Bedi draws his conceptions of justice from Rawls and Nussbaum in the context of self-respect and capabilities. To be sexually racist is to deny someone that social primary good based purely on a racial stereotype that reinforces White Supremacy. Importantly, sexually racist individuals do not necessarily have to recognize that they are reinforcing White Supremacy since racist ideas have been internalized from the public to their innermost private mind (Bedi 2015).

The condition that it must fulfill is important to distinguish because it will distinguish the racial homophily among Blacks from the refusal of groups to date Asian men because of their social emasculation. Bedi’s ideas allow for the nuances in intention and for racial homophily among racial minorities to be read as radical political statements of self love and justice rather than manifestation of White Supremacy.

It allows the most minute personal interactions to be studied and connected to a larger racialized system of power and inequality. Sexual racism is not only a cancerous product of White Supremacy that reinforces prevailing racialized stereotype but a system that delineates who deserves sexual and romantic care.
Bedi is not the only scholar that has written on this topic. Holland’s *The Erotic Life of Racism* posits much of the same conclusion but devotes much of its methodological underpinnings to Black feminist scholarship and queer theory. Holland argues that the “erotic is a possible harbinger of the established order” which maintains and exacerbates the black/white binary (2010). Blackness is marginalized to an inhuman space undeserving of love while Whiteness, as it is constructed, freely bask in eroticism. The group in power enjoys and employs eroticism fully and to their advantage. I strove to break from the Black/White binary that Holland employs, expanding her assertion of the erotic as a tool by incorporating it into the racial sexual profile. I have designed my study and analyzed my findings with erotic and sexual racism as my theoretical backdrop.

II. Qualitative Interviews: Distribution, Design, and Demographics

The core of my research focuses on purposive interviews and surveys with queer woman identified undergraduate college students from throughout the United States. The interview participants attended a variety of institutions ranging from small liberal arts college on the American East coast to California state schools. I advertised my study and interview opportunities on social media and sent recruiting emails through different LGBT campus identity groups. Since the study is mostly focused on finding out the extent of sexual racism that is present among the queer woman-identified community, I encouraged women of color particularly to participate in the interviews and surveys. I believed that women of color, socialized as people of color in a White Supremacist society, would be able to offer me more
complex and nuanced reflections on how race, ethnicity, and color influenced their romantic and sexual opportunities and experiences.

Much of my questions involved asking participants to gauge the sentiments of a larger community of queer women and reflect on how any experiences with sexual and romantic popularity or rejection may be possibly connected to their identities. I did this with the understanding that humans are social beings and their attraction is something that is learned. I asked these question not only to try to uncover romantic and sexual preferences but discern the sources of these dating trends, whether these trends stem from attitudes within participants’ nuclear family, chosen friend circles, or their larger queer community.

I conducted in-person interviews when possible and opted for Facebook Video Calls when it was not possible to meet in person. I transcribed the interviews using Google voice typing and then coded it through Atlas.ti, paying particular attention to any passages in which participants invoked the idea of “personal preferences” or salient racial stereotypes. It was important that I was able to parse through the various complex reasons behind women’s dating and sexual partner histories spanning from population access to either conscious or conscious decision informed by White Supremacist racial tropes. At the end of the interviews, I also asked participants to consider how their perception of my race, ethnicity, and skin tone influence their answers during the interview. This better allowed me to consider my positionality as a queer, light skinned Asian woman and how women of different backgrounds related to me.

I conducted 13 interviews with queer college-aged women from a variety of American undergraduate institutions. Four interview participants were mono racially White. Four participants were monoracially Asian; within that group, two women were East Asian while two
women were Southeast Asian. Further, two interview participants were monoracially black, and one interviewee was Latina. The remaining participant was Black and East Asian. Most interview participants self-assessed themselves to have “lighter skin.” While some interview participants reached out to me after seeing an email advertisement through campus LGBT group mailing lists, most participants were found through snowball sampling. Thus, the findings are, to an extent, a reflection of a queer social network.

III. Surveys: Distribution, Design, and Demographics

The surveys called for the identification of possible dating or sexual trends among queer women while the interviews more detail and clarification into those trends—allowing for complexity. I advertised by posting advertisements on Swarthmore College’s weekly Reader’s Digest, Facebook, and asked leaders in queer student unions to send out my advertisement in their newsletters. Further, I designed, distributed, and analyzed internet surveys, collecting a total of 99 responses. I distributed the surveys through the same channels I used to advertise the surveys: Swarthmore’s Reader’s Digest, Facebook, queer student union email newsletters, and through word of mouth.

I asked Respondents’ racial identities were crucial to my analysis given that I had planned to utilize a modified group position theory to analyze my results. Thus, I allowed survey participants to select more than one race when asking them for their racial and ethnic background and further provided an option for participants to write in any identities that were not adequately represented in the provided options. I had particular difficulty when designing the options for the
question concerning racial and ethnic background surrounding the option to disaggregate data. Most traditional demographic surveys will have aggregated racial data (Gonzalez-Barrera & Lopez 2015). For example, instead of allowing participants to identify with specific ethnic groups within the pan-Asian category, traditional surveys will often limit Asian participants to identify as “Asian/Pacific Islander.” This is based on an assumption of a unity of socio-political, cultural, and economic experiences of both Asians and Pacific Islanders even though this category represents the descendants of an entire continent and countless islands scattered throughout the Pacific. I contend that there have been historic socio-political divisions and that separate ethnic groups within the pan-Asian label which imbues different ethnic groups with differential sexual and romantic associations (Kim 2008). Accordingly, I disaggregated the pan-Asian group because I believed that Americans who have been socialized into contemporary White Supremacist race culture associate different sexual, romantic, and physical stereotypes with South Asians and East Asians. After collecting the data, I considered whether different Asian ethnic groups answered similarly enough to warrant collapsing the groups under a pan-Asian label.

Along the same vein, traditional demographic surveys will often offer only the option for participants to claim a Hispanic or Latino category, assuming that those groups constitute a race of people. However, Latin American racial systems are vastly different from American racial systems. Much like America, Latin American demographics have been a result of European colonization, participation in the transAtlantic slave trade, the intermixing of the indigenous population, and migration of countless other groups of people (Fish 1999). While Americans often conceptualize Hispanics and Latinos to a single physical stereotype, in reality, there are
many races and ethnic groups as defined by American standards within those categories. While race for Americans is genetic, race in Latin America is more based on phenotype. Thus, many Latin Americans consider themselves “White” based on skin tone and other characteristics like hair texture (Fish 1999). This informed my decision to create two categories for Hispanic demographic group: Hispanic non white and Hispanic white. From hindsight, I realized I should have provided a drop list of options for Hispanic non white such as Hispanic Black or Hispanic Asian to better articulate the nature of the Hispanic category. Survey results that were left blank past the consent portion were thrown out. I analyzed the survey data using STATA, a statistical coding program.

In short, I provided disaggregated racial/ethnic options for participants to avoid assuming that participants in the same racial group would respond in the same way. I planned to either aggregate or leave the data disaggregated based on whether or not members within a race responded in a cohesive manner.

<table>
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Chart 1. Survey participant racial demographics.

In total, 99 participants completed the survey. I originally disaggregated the pan-Asian category into three main Asian ethnic groups: South Asian, East Asian, and South East Asian
believing that there would be differences between the patterns of romantic and sexual attraction and aversion. After collecting my results, I compared the responses of different Asian ethnic groups to find to what degree a the creation of a pan-Asian was warranted. The particular responses of interest were those responding to questions about which racial and ethnic groups to which and to participants felt sexually and romantically drawn oradvers. Contrary to my hypothesis, I found that Asian participants responded relatively in consensus with one another and there were no significant differences between their preferences and aversions. It must be preaced that in total, there were only 15 participants who identified with any Asian ethnic group, and the consensus might easily be complicated with a larger, more representative sample. Similarly, I collapsed the White Hispanic and non-White Hispanic racial groups into one pan-Latinx group since their responses were very similar.

Beyond my decision to collapse the separate Asian categories to create the pan-Asian category, my data presented me another problem. Interestingly, almost a third of my participants selected more than one racial category. The vast majority of multi-racial participants were a part of a racial minority and White racial group. I addressed multiracial individuals by allowing their responses to count for all racial groups with which they identified. In essence, multiracial individuals have been double and sometimes triple-counted in my data.

In general, my interview and survey questions were designed to discern racial, ethnic, and color romantic and sexual preferences among queer college aged women and whether or not there were discernible preference trends among different racial groups. According to existing
academic literature on racial homophily, interracial dating, and the formation of sexual preferences, an individual’s family and previous sexual history are best indicative of a person’s preferences (White et al 2014). Thus, I began my interviews and surveys asking participants to talk about their dating history and the race, ethnicity, and skin tones of their past partners and then branched into questions about their parents’ and social circles’ expectations of their partners.

Part of designing and analyzing a study on race is working within the confines of American race discourse. While many common terms are not explicitly connected to different races, common terms serve as instruments of “dog whistle politics” which summon referrent systems and iconographies of race to the American imagination (Haney-Lopez 2014). I made note of these racially coded terms and coded them into transcribed files in Atlas.ti. Some widely coded terms included but are not limited to “preference,” “masculine,” “cool,” “feminine,” “small,” “homophobic,” and “loud” which appeared most frequently when participants were asked to explain their attraction or aversion to dating specific racial groups.

One question was centered in one of my greatest methodological concerns about the project as a whole: how could I ensure honest answers to minimize potential social desirability bias and stereotype threat (Luker 2010)? In order to ensure the most useful results, I carefully designed my interview questions and survey results to be as judgement free as possible. I avoided including words such as “racism,” “prejudice,” and “discrimination” in the survey or interviews, foregoing any mention of White Supremacy unless participants themselves brought it up. This methodological decision was driven by what Nadia Kim describes in *Imperial Citizens* as “American race culture” which has socialized Americans to intensely deny any connection to
racism or prejudice (2008). While everyday racist actions and thoughts are employed, Americans vehemently abhor being labeled “racist” (Bonilla-Silva 2009). This has led to a proliferation of colorblind racism which largely supplants explicit racial slurs with racially coded terms through which to perpetuate racism without outing individuals as racist. These measures were particularly important to obtaining reliable data from White participants who are sometimes stereotyped as racist in the American imagination (Steele 2011).

It must be noted that my attempts to reduce stereotype threat and remain neutral fell short sometimes. In the most extreme occasion, an irate survey participant took issue with my question on whether or not she had ever been romantically/sexually rejected based on her race or skin tone and told me to “stop asking stupid, whiny questions.” Her assertion that the question was “whiny” or “stupid,” shows how she links questions of racism and colorism as undeserving of analysis, and her aggression communicates that questions about race make her uncomfortable. Her response possibly stems from a belief in our society as a post-racial society where asking questions about race makes one inherently racist since it denies post-racial lenses (Haney-Lopez 2014). Other occasions included a White interview participant telling me that my Asian-ness made her “extra-careful” in her answers since she did not want to “offend” me. I interpreted those moments as indicators of the loaded political meaning behind mate choice and preference. After all, it is a matter of justice and injustice.
CHAPTER II  In Search of Ruby Rose: Queer(ing) the Ideal Woman

The following text will examine how and why the interview participants envision their “ideal” women in terms of certain races, physiques, and personality traits as well as the “ideal” woman for the majority of queer women. It is also touch on how participants explained the origins of their attraction. I will look at trends linking participants’ races, ethnicities, and skin tones to how they imagined their ideal women. In essence, I will explore to what extent and which races of queer women engage in imagined racial homophily in imagining their ideal woman. I originally hypothesized that if femininity is greatly prized among heterosexuals and that since Asian women (who are seen as absolutely submissive and feminine) and white women (who are the seen as the ideal femininity), they would be similarly prized among polysexuals (Robnett & Feliciano; Moy 1993). In asking this question, I originally intended to gauge each participant’s standard of the physical beauty for another woman and analyze how physical beauty is racialized and the origins of these racializations. However, after asking the question thirteen times and getting multiple answers from each woman, I see now that the question was quite naive. Participants envisioned their ideal women in terms of physical attributes, personality traits, political alignments, and, often, as idealized versions of themselves. It also important to stress the complexity of human attraction and the diversity of responses and reasons behind each of the women’s responses.

Yet, I found that, while somewhat overlapping, the most imagined beautiful partners are not necessarily the most desirable or ideal partners. The participants weighed imagined racial beauty with perceived potential cultural conflicts, political progressiveness, and exposure to
stereotype threat associated with different races. These considerations from participants showed their renegotiation of sexual profiles to fit desirability standards specific to queer women. While there is variance between imagined ideal women, participants generally imagined ideal women who were masculine, shared their racial background, and politically progressive. From there, they imagined either White partners or “light” partners. Masculinity and political progressiveness were of particular importance when imagining ideal partners and were triangulated according to Blackness, Whiteness, and Asianness.

When asked why they found certain physical attributes attractive, participants defaulted to a combination of explanations which include but are not limited to inherent individual attraction, an artifact of racially segregated residence, media constructions of beauty and race, and familial conflict. Most participants frequently and consistently claimed that attraction was inherent, personal, and different for each person, but often contradicted themselves by narratives of how American mainstream media either wholly excludes people of color or reduces them to White Supremacist caricatures. Further my interviewees’ descriptions of their ideal women were remarkably similar. With one exception, all ideal women were slender but “physically fit” which has been coded in the American popular imagination as thin (Herndon 2002), and the vast majority of the ideal women were White, light skinned, or racially mixed with White.

Even among the women who described their ideal woman as women of color, often women of color were favored due to a fetishized image of that racial group. Some participants were also incredibly resistant to specifying a specific race for their ideal women or general physical attributes for women. They opted instead to describe their ideal woman as “simply beautiful” and assuring me that race did not factor into it their ideal women. I argue that this
resistance was both a part of a larger colorblind race culture in America in which individuals are deeply wary of explicitly mentioning racial preference out of fear of being branded racist (Bonilla-Silva 2009). and a resistance among women to objectify other women and appear shallow. Thus, this was an expression of colorblind race ideology and solidarity among women.

According to Bedi’s (2015) and Holland’s (2010) respective definitions of sexual and erotic racism, I contend that sexual racism is rampant among my sample of queer college-aged women after an analysis of their imagined ideal women. The college-aged queer women I spoke with largely imagine their ideal women as White, light in complexion, or racially mixed with White. In contrast to the heterosexual aesthetic ideals for womanhood, queer women seem to perceive that more greatly prize masculine gender expression among queer women. However, this masculinity is specifically White masculinity among most queer participants. This privileging of racialized masculinity explains the romantic and sexual privilege that White queer women enjoy over hyper-feminized Asian women as well as constructed criminally masculine Black women whose access to White masculinity is complicated.

This White masculine ideal’s prominence is even more apparent when comparing the participants’ ideal women to the image of whom they thought most queer women would be very attracted. Participants consistently invoked Ruby Rose, a White androgynous celebrity, when describing the romantic and sexual ideal woman among queer women. I contend that while an individual’s ideal woman is constructed by a combination of factors including but not limited to racialized geographic location, media constructions of beauty and race, familial interactions, and political alignment, the larger ideal queer woman is primarily a product of queer media as an extension of White media. This speaks to the power of public media representations in shaping
the individual’s private racial preferences and the role of the media in negotiating, perpetuating, and constructing racial boundaries through White Supremacist racial stereotypes. The media is somewhat less influential in determining individual attraction.

I. White and Light is Right

Out of my sample of 13 women, 11 of them attributed race-specific traits such as red hair, blue eyes, or “afros” when asked to describe their ideal women. I define “race-specific traits” as traits that are aligned in the larger American cultural imagination with a certain race. While individuals in racial groups, as defined by an American system of race and ethnicity, do not necessarily share in physical characteristics, there remains a culturally legible image of how an individual of a specific race should look (Bedi 2015). For example, while red hair is a trait that can and is possessed by many people of color, it is typically aligned in the American popular imagination with Whiteness and the White body. Four women, out of the 11 participants who described race-specific traits, described their ideal woman as White with light skin. Two participants out of the group that described race-specific traits specified that their ideal women were light-skinned black women. Two participants out of the group specified that their ideal women had red hair, a race-specific trait that are coded in the American imagination as White. One woman specified that her ideal woman was a woman with Asian and White ancestry. The remaining two women out of the group of 11 explicitly mentioned their ideal women were Asian. This last pair of women will be discussed in a later section examining racial fetishization and racial homophily since their ideal women were explicitly not White or light skinned. Overall, I
found that my participants favored Whiteness and lightness in their ideal women, and sexual racism and colorism was common among queer college-aged women.

Whiteness was greatly prized among some of my participants which points to a re-inscription of Anglo-Saxon beauty standards among queer-college aged women who primarily explain their attraction to White women as personal inherents. For example, one participant, Susan was a White, self-identified femme lesbian who specified that her ideal woman would be “White, with very dark hair, very pale skin….red lips” and “very masculine presenting.” Susan’s unabashed preference for other White women could be an artifact of racial homophily. In many studies of heterosexuals, women have been found to engage more in racial homophily than men, and White heterosexual women, in particular, were much more likely to prefer and date men of their own race than other heterosexual women (McClintock 2010). However, Susan’s preference for very masculine White women to an extent upsets traditional beauty standards for women which describes a traditionally beautiful woman as feminine, and hints at queer women’s romantic and sexual potential to subvert feminine beauty standards. She further notes that her preference for masculine individuals has led her to inadvertently date “a lot of pre-transition trans men,” implying that she is attracted to extremely masculine individuals. Susan’s preference for White masculine women is interesting in that it entails a queer woman privileging and preferring White masculinity.

When I asked Susan why her ideal woman is White and masculine, she located her preference as a personal inherent, stating that she is “just much more drawn to dating White people” and that “the physical type” she is “drawn to” is “White.” The word “just” was widely used among my participants in explaining their attraction, in their justification of their racial
dating and sexual preferences to assert the inherent nature of attraction. Yet racialized romantic preferences are not formed on an individual basis. If these preferences were “just” purely an individual inherent, isolated from a larger White Supremacist culture which imbues certain bodies and physical attributes with heightened social status and cultural meaning, there would be a greater diversity in/of how ideal women are racialized. Yet, almost all of my participants imagined White or light ideal women. Their ideal women are symptomatic of a larger White Supremacist system which demarcates Whiteness and light features as appropriate targets of affection and romance. Further, as Bedi has already touched upon in his work, there is more diversity within racial groups than between racial groups and “White” is not biological physical type (Bedi 2015). Rather, Susan is attracted to Whiteness as an ideal and White masculinity which has historically held socio-cultural and political supremacy in America as it is grafted onto White bodies.

According to current theories about how different racialized masculinities are privileged in the sexual marketplace, Asian masculinity is a castrated masculinity in America while White, Black, and Latino men are seen as inherently masculine. However, Black and Latino masculinity is seen as hyper-masculine and criminal, heavily penalizing Black men in the romantic marketplace (Bany et al 2014). Still, both heterosexual women and queer men are more likely to romantically or sexually approach a Black man than they are to approach an Asian man. Thus, even though Black masculinity is criminalized, it is seen as more sexually and romantically attractive than other masculinities by virtue of its embodiment of hyper-masculinity. Masculinity is socio-politically grafted onto the bodies of both Black men and women in America, and black women are often penalized in the heterosexual marketplace for this cultural association (Robnett
Black heterosexual women are particularly penalized in among heterosexuals since the primary beauty standard for heterosexual women is feminine presentation, and black women do not have equal access to being perceived as feminine. In fact, as early as 1851 Black women such as Sojourner Truth have vehemently fought to be understood and treated as “women,” by which they meant they wanted to be afforded some of the privileges White womanhood provided such as chivalry from men (Truth 1851). While even White women suffer and continue to suffer from sexism and abuse, White womanhood is still afforded privilege. Those privileges include but are not limited a less complicated access to beauty and sexual and romantic desirability in both heterosexual and queer marketplaces. Even though it seems that beauty standards for queer women lean more towards privileging masculine presentation and Black women have historically been considered more inherently masculine, Black women are still marginalized in the queer sexual and romantic marketplace.

Similarly, Catherine, a self-identified White bisexual, described her ideal woman as funny, “more masculine,” with “blue eyes or brown” and with “blonde or brown hair.” Interestingly, Catherine would like her ideal woman to be tan, with her skin tone resembling that of Mila Kunis, a pale olive skinned Hollywood actress. I found in my interviews that there was a vast difference between what participants meant when they said “tan” than when they said “dark” in constructing their ideal women. While many women indicated that they found tan women beautiful, they would bring up examples of White celebrities such as Blake Lively and Mila Kunis as their “tan” ideals. Thus, Whiteness was still privileged and colorism remains intact. In fact, one historian locates the “tan” as a beauty trend which communicates the possessor’s higher socioeconomic status (Glenn 2009). Tans, which take place after an individual
spends prolonged periods in the sun and accrue darker skin through skin damage, communicate a level of disposable income high enough to indulge in vacations and leisure activities. Thus, Catherine’s preference for masculine tanned White women is at once a product of Anglo-Saxon beauty standards, a creation of queer beauty standards of more masculine women, and a classism.

Furthermore, tan skin on White women is, in some ways, an appropriation of the features of women of color (Hunter 2005). Since darker skin like that of Pacific Islander women are fetishized as an exotic sexuality, White women who have tanned skin have, to an extent, appropriated the such exotic sexuality for themselves. Features such as darker skin or thicker lips are racially coded and imbued with cultural meaning which points to more exotic femininity in the case of the Pacific Islander woman or hyper-sexuality in the case of the Black woman in the larger American cultural imagination. Thus, rather than representing a breakdown in White Supremacist beauty standards and racial divisions of beauty, tanning among White women reifies racially coded sexual stereotypes and reinforces White beauty standards. The prevalence of tanning among White women and its popularity as an aesthetic trait hints at how darker skin is acceptable and beautiful only on White bodies.

This preference for White masculinity was also present in, Riley, another White participant. She spoke slowly and hesitated to tell me that her ideal woman would be “White or White passing upon first thought in terms of race” and “stereotypically androgynous-looking” with either short hair or an “undercut.” I found her hesitance to be indicative of a larger desire to not appear racist, a desire I found in most of my other participants. Riley’s use of the term “stereotypically androgynous” brings into question to whom the stereotype of the androgynous
queer woman is legible and, further, what is legible as androgynous. As Riley elaborates, the stereotypically androgynous woman has short hair or an undercut, a hairstyle that is where the bottom part of someone’s hair has been shaved off, and a slim body type. Riley’s answer is of particular interest because of her invocation of a larger queer culture among women wherein certain styles of dress and bodies are coded as “stereotypically queer.” It also hints to a larger trend of queer women being attracted to more masculine or androgynous women, and brings into question how the stereotype of the androgynous queer woman has been produced and distributed to create culturally literate queer women.

The last woman to explicitly describe her ideal woman as White was Victoria, a Vietnamese-American woman who said that she noticed that “White, tall blondes [were] more [her] type.” She further commented that she was a “sucker for eyes,” preferring “colorful eyes….like nice light gray or blue colors.” I found that Victoria was the only participant of color that explicitly described her ideal woman as White. While the Whiteness of ideal women of the aforementioned White participants could be partly attributed to a larger trend among women to perform racial homophily, Victoria’s preference for White women cannot be attributed to this idea that people are attracted to those similar to themselves. In fact, Victoria’s invocation of the White, tall, blue-eyed, blonde women very closely follows the stereotypical Anglo-Saxon beauty standard. Thus, even women of color have internalized White beauty standards and can be sexually racist. It also speaks to the inability for some queer women of color to conceptualize queer romance without the involvement of White bodies. I contend that this is partly due to queer media, scant as it is, portraying an overwhelmingly White protagonists and narrating White stories. Vivian’s attraction to White women is also a part of a larger trend of Asian women
engaging in interracial relationships with White individuals (Lin & Lundquist 2013).

Heterosexual Asian women are most likely to date outside of their race among other women due to the Asian man’s emasculated status in the larger American cultural imagination. However, Asian women have been very sexually desirable in the heterosexual marketplace.

While it is entirely possible for an individual to be attracted to women from many different races, Victoria had an aversion towards Asian women. When asked if she felt attraction to Asians, Victoria stated “usually I'm not generally attracted to Asians” because “Asian families are more silent, and they're not close emotionally and it's all based off of doing well in schools, making your parents proud, and becoming a doctor.” She answered in the affirmative if she believed that White families were warmer and more open minded. Thus, Victoria implicitly located her attraction to White women and their features as an attraction to progressive ideology and emotional warmth. Victoria created a binary where White is coded as emotionally warm, supportive, and socially progressive while Asian is coded as emotionally cold, overly pragmatic, and socially bigoted. Of course, the stereotype of the emotionless, robotic Asian whose only concern is financial success is well worn and rampant in American mainstream media. In fact, many studies have found heterosexual Asian women to favor White men over Asian men due to their perceived progressiveness and warmth (Kim 2008; Nemoto 2009). Victoria further maps her familial conflicts on the bodies of Asian women, and her aversion to dating Asian women is partly an expression of her unwillingness to deal with the cultural conflicts between herself and her Vietnamese-born mother. Interestingly, none of the White women mapped their familial conflicts onto the bodies of other White women. This suggests that dating as a person of color is
a negotiation of internalized racism and of familial cultural conflicts, and Victoria’s aversion to engaging with Asian women is an expression of internalized racism.

Interestingly, I found that Asian participants’ preferences were more likely to favor White partners and mimic the tastes of White participants. This mimics the heterosexual dating patterns of non-Black groups of color such as Latinos and Asians in other studies (Feliciano & Robnett 2011).

II. Fetishization and Familiarity

Not all of my participants explicitly described their ideal women as White or light. The following discussions will analyze the responses of participants who described the women of color as their ideal women or, conversely, refused to describe any race-specific characteristics.

I found that my interviews with queer women who were attracted to men as well as women such as pansexuals and polysexuals offered great insight into how masculinity and femininity is coded to race. In asking them to describe their ideal women, I was particularly interested in whether the participants found themselves attracted towards masculine or feminine presentations and they they grafted that masculinity or femininity onto race. Then, for polysexuals, since hegemonic masculinity is ascribed to white men and a heavily fetishized hypermasculinity is ascribed to black men, polysexuals will probably prefer white and black men over Asian men. I asked Hillary, a White polysexual, what her ideal woman is and she said a small Asian woman because “they're just so much smaller,” further stating that if she was “with an Asian woman,” she “has to be the bigger spoon, the protector.” Thus, Hilary reinforces White masculine control over an imagined Asian femininity. Hillary further elaborated on her aversion
to dating White women to the point where she does not find White women “attractive” after taking “social justice courses” and “learning about racism in America.” In essence, Hillary sees her racial preferences for women of color as an act of political subversion and implicitly distances herself from the racism of other White women. In this way, Hillary tokenizes her relationship with women of color and implies that her relationship with them is proof of her allyship and social progressiveness.

While her desire to be a dominant protector figure might have denoted a larger inherent disposition, her description of her ideal man made it clear that she was subscribing to a White Supremacist view of White Supremacist conceptions of masculinity dominating that of “submissive” racialized femininities (Bederman 1996). When I asked Hillary about what her ideal man looked like, she said a white or a black man because then she would feel protected. I specifically asked if she found Asian men attractive and she told me she “physically is unable” to find Asian men attractive. Even though she is a queer woman, how she envisions her relationships is still very heteronormative and White supremacist in that there is a dominant racialized masculinity over a weaker racialized femininity. Interestingly, her aversion to romantically engaging with Whiteness is not extended to White men even though White men have also been some of the main actors historically committed to perpetuating White Supremacy. While Hillary may actually think her aversion to White women is an act of political subversion against White Supremacy, her preference for women of color is more about fetishization and white masculine dominance than allyship.

Interestingly, participants did not list their families as determining factors for their decisions to date women of particular racial groups. This lies in stark contrast to previous studies
of college-aged heterosexual racial dating preference wherein heterosexuals admitted to avoiding
dating socially stigmatized groups such as African Americans out of fear of social disapproval
(Bany et al 2014).

Charice was very anxious about encountering White racism, and linked her deep desire to
date fellow Asian women because they would “understand where she is coming from.” These
sentiments were shared by another Asian participant, Michelle who linked her desire for racially
progressive women to to her desire for partners of color. Michelle even emphatically asked
“Where are all the queer women of color? I am done with White women” during the interview.
The participants further used support for Black liberation movements such as the Black Lives
Matter as barometers to vet potential partners just as participants in another study did (Buggs
2017).

White women envisioned more the perfect partner as more hegemonically masculine and
politically progressive in terms of queer-friendliness. On the other hand, participants of color,
especially Black women, envisioned the ideal partner as more masculine presenting and
politically progressive in terms of racial politics.
CHAPTER III  Racial Attraction, Aversion, and Willingness: Imagined Love Stories

The following text will discuss the survey participants’ responses to questions soliciting their attraction and aversion to certain races of women, their willingness to date certain races of women, and their self image. The relationships between participants’ attraction, aversion, and willingness to date potential partners were at times counterintuitive. I three somewhat contradicting trends. First, participants reported that they do not find themselves attracted to Asian women but very attracted to both White and Black women. Second, participants reported that they find themselves hesitant and averse to approaching Black women, but not Asian women or White women. Third, participants reported more unwillingness to date Asian women than Black women. These three trends reflect the ways in which Asianness, Blackness, and Whiteness have been triangulated along with standards of masculine presentation and queer-friendliness in the queer marketplace. I argue that part of the deep hesitation towards approaching Black women stems from White fear of stereotype threat, and the relative lack of attraction towards Asian women stems from non-Asian women’s perception of them as socially conservative and feminine. It is important to note that Black, White, and Asian participants showed different trends of attraction, aversion, and willingness. Given that the clear majority of participants were White, it can be concluded that many of these trends of attraction, aversion, and willingness were driven by White responses. Additionally, it must be noted that many participants of color, especially Black participants, established counter hegemonic sexual profiles where in White women were seen as racially regressive and Black women were seen as the most racially progressive which fueled aversion towards White women.
I. Romantic and Sexual Attraction

The following section will analyze participant responses to the following question: “do you find yourself romantically or sexually drawn to women of the following races? If yes, please select all that apply.” The survey provided 10 racial and ethnic categorical options. First, I created a graph showing the amount of participants that selected each racial and ethnic categories. Then, I grouped participant responses into racial groups and created a graph showing the amount of sexual attraction to each race or ethnic group by participant racial group. Overall, I found there was a general relative lack of attraction towards Asian and Pacific Islander women and a relative abundance of attraction towards Black, Latinx, and White women. I found that there was a relative lack of attraction to Asian women in comparison to other racial groups among non-Asian participants. This relative lack of attraction towards Asian women was particularly high among White and Latinx respondents. The relative abundance of attraction towards Black women was highest among White women and much more muted among non-White participants. Since the majority of participants were White, I believe that these results better reflect the attraction trends of queer White women than those of queer women of color. I argue that White respondents’ relative lack of attraction towards Asian women and the relative abundance of attraction towards Black and White women are linked. The trends stem from racialized fetishization and White Supremacist beauty standards which enscribe beauty and status onto Whiteness respectively.
Graph 1. This graph shows the amount of participants that indicated their attraction to Black, Native American, Pacific Islander, South East Asian, South Asian, East Asian, Middle Eastern, Latino, White Latino, and White women respectively.

I found a relative lack of participant attraction towards all groups of Asian and Pacific Islander women and a relatively large amount of participant attraction towards Black, White, and Latinx women (Graph 1). The large amount of participant attraction towards White and Latina women were expected given the scholarly literature which have repeatedly found White and White Latina women sexually and romantically privileged in both online and physical sexual marketplaces (Lin & Lundquist 2013; Lundquist & Lin 2015). However, the large amount of attraction and the lack of relative attraction towards Black women and all groups of Asian women respectively was decidedly unexpected. First, the relatively uniform lack of attraction
towards all groups of Asian women communicate a potential consolidation of a pan-Asian sexual profile among queer women. Secondly, these results run counter to the respective sexual marginalization and sexual privilege Black and Asian women face in the heterosexual marketplace (Robnett & Feliciano 2011; Nemoto 2009). Data from an online speed dating experiment show that Black women are far less likely to get messaged or engaged with through messaging by male users (Fisman et al 2008). Asian women, on the other hand, have proven to be incredibly popular to men of all races in these same apps and have a much higher likelihood of being contacted or engaged with.

It is important to note that most of my survey participants indicated being attracted to more than one gender. Presumably, if the sociological literature on racialized app engagement is consistent with their experiences, Black women are not popular in the heterosexual marketplace and Asian women are very popular among men. Yet, the reverse is true in the case of the queer marketplace among women. While queer Black and Asian women remain the same, their potential partners are queer women who operate in a matrix of choice, preference, and aesthetic trends necessarily entangled with queer womanhood and popular culture. This different matrix produces different culturally legible sexual profiles of racialized queer womanhood. The queer profile of Black queer womanhood seem to be very attractive to queer women (in my survey), and the profile of Asian queer womanhood is less attractive to queer women.
Graph 2. This graph shows the amount of participants that indicated their attraction to Black, Native American, Pacific Islander, South East Asian, South Asian, East Asian, Middle Eastern, Latino, White Latino, and White women respectively. This second graph groups responses from the previously aforementioned question into racial participant responses.

However, I wanted to see how culturally legible these different sexually and romantically racialized profiles of women were to different racial groups of the participants. In other words, it is important to consider to which queer women these profiles are attractive. After grouping responses to the same question under participant race, I found that the relative lack of attraction towards all groups of Asian women is located primarily among White, Black, and Latina participants. Asian participants, however, do not seem to exhibit this trend, and the one Middle Eastern participant indicated that she felt romantically and sexually drawn to all races of women. White participants, being the clear majority of my sample size, drove the majority of relative
attraction trends. For example, the relative lack of attraction towards Asian women in relation to attraction to other groups of women was most pronounced among White participants (Graph 2). Similarly, the relative abundance of attraction towards Black women in relation to other groups of women was most pronounced among White participants (Graph 2). Furthermore, White participants indicated an abundance of attraction towards other White women, outweighing their attraction towards other groups of women. The queer sexual profile of Black women is very attractive to Black, Latina, and especially White women. The queer women’s imagined sexual profile of Asian women is much less attractive to Black, Latina, and especially White women.

Curiously, even after the vast majority of respondents indicated some sort of attraction towards different races of women, most respondents asserted that they had no romantic or sexual racial preference when asked to explain any racial preference or aversion. In fact, out of the 69 responses I got from the survey question prompting participants to explain any of their strong preferences or aversions to romantically and sexually engage with certain racial groups of women, half of them responded that they had no preference. One respondent simply responded “it [race] doesn’t really matter to me,” a representative and succinct response of the dozens asserting their lack of preference or aversion. While the participant may truly not consciously hold racial biases, the data collected clearly document racialized attraction and aversion. This communicates a deep dissonance among participants among their ability to self-assess the impact of race in their dating preferences in which they would at once indicate their preferences and deny the possession of racial biases. This dissonance was also a prevalent theme among my interviews and is driven by a deep desire to avoid being labelled as “racist” in the widespread cultural construction of a false “post-racial society” (Bonilla-Silva 2009). These assertions were
especially prevalent among White participants who are under stereotype threat as being racist because of their White identity (Steele 2011). Thus, navigating a survey which prompts participants to explicitly reflect and record their racial preferences and aversions also prompts a degree of defensiveness. One participant laid bare this psychic social navigation by stating that she

"[doesn't] have racial preferences cause as a white person, if I preferred white people, that would be racist as hell, and it would be too if I [fetishized] POC. (Cause I do think sexual race preferences are often a choice, esp for whites people.)... I am worried that my sex life disproportionately involves POC in the sense that I hope I'm not giving into some internalized fetish stuff, like I gotta be the most radical white person & date a POC. Of course I totally respect when POC don't date white people, but I think the racial preferences of white people are bullshit."

Her response includes many themes surrounding the central anxiety with potentially being racist, spanning from the anxiety that she is fetishizing women of color and the anxiety that she prefers White women. If either case were true, she would ultimately reinforce White Supremacy. Most interestingly, the participant connects the fetishization of women of color among Whites to the accrual of social justice political capital. Although Whites, particularly White queer women are under pressure for their dating preferences which, they perceive, will be perceived as racist whether they prefer White or women of color, this pressure can be relieved through becoming involved with a woman of color. Much like the trope of having the one “Black friend” being sexually or romantically involved with a woman of color adds to the social capital of a radical White person, signalling her transcendence of not only Whiteness but White Supremacy to become a true ally in the popular imagination (Nemoto 2009; Ziyad 2017). This trope points to the socio-political weight that is attributed to sexual and romantic partner and hints that the sexual and romantic choice matrix is inherently a political one. Further, certain preferences
among certain racial populations will be more heavily scrutinized than those of others. The different themes were not utilized in mutually exclusive ways and all respondents would often

I asked respondents to explain any preference or aversion to engaging sexually or romantically with any racial groups of women after asking them to select racial groups to which they were attracted. I found of the 69 responses, more than half asserted that they had no racial preferences or aversions. Of the respondents that indicated through that specific question that they had racial preferences, I found three themes through which respondents explained their attraction: intrinsic beauty and preference, familiarity through past experience, and political solidarity. While White respondents were more likely to attribute their attractions to intrinsic beauty and preference, respondents of color were most likely to mention how the desire to practice political solidarity informed their preferences. Both White and respondents of color explained their attractions through prior experience and familiarity with certain racial groups.

When explaining their attraction to certain races of women, respondents often pointed to the racial demographics of their hometowns as primary factors in shaping their racial preferences. One Asian respondent stated she had “mild preferences for women who are Asian and women who are mixed race” because she felt that contributed to “family compatibility” and because “being raised in a very homogenous (white) area and feeling very different racially and later, sexually, has made mixed race women particularly interesting and stand out to me.” Another White respondent linked her “strongly preference toward white women” to being “raised in a very predominantly white area,” that she only had access to White women when coming to terms with her sexuality, and her racial aversions to the fact that those racial groups were not present in her hometown. Past experiences further shaped another participant whose
first romantic and sexual relationship was with a half Black and half White partner and now prefers either Black or White women.

Others explained their attractions as simply inherent as one woman said she is “just attracted to [Black and White women.]” Another respondent connected racial features to foreign exoticness when she stated that she “strongly prefers mixed race women with Hispanic and some Asian because it makes it more difficult for me to figure out where they are from and often have a unique blend of characteristics that I find intriguing.” One Black respondent framed her romantic attraction to fellow black women as a political and cultural desire to “date black woman because as a black woman [we] are seen as ugly or undateable by society.”
II. Romantic and Sexual Aversion

Graph 3. This graph shows the amount of participants that indicated their aversion to Black, Native American, Pacific Islander, South East Asian, South Asian, East Asian, Middle Eastern, Latino, White Latino, and White women respectively.

After asking participants to indicate their attractions to women of certain races, I asked participants to indicate with which races of women they “felt hesitant to engage”. Hesitancy to romantically or sexually approach women could stem from fear of rejection, fear of emotional distress, or breaching social code among a vast sea of possibilities. Yet, I hypothesized that hesitancy is racialized in that some racial groups will be more likely to be hesitant to engage with some racial groups of women than others. I originally hypothesized based on existing literature on heterosexual and queer male sexual racism and the theory that the “Black category” in
America is the “exclusive other” on the bottom of the American racial hierarchy, that all groups of women, except for black women, would be hesitant to engage with Black women (Bonilla-Silva 2009). Further, I hypothesized that Black women as a group would be hesitant to engage sexually or romantically to White women due to a desire to practice political solidarity and avoiding White racism through dating decisions (Mirza 2017; Collins 2004).

Data pooled from all participants show a general relative hesitancy from participants to reach out sexually and romantically to Black, Asian, Middle Eastern, and, to a lesser extent, White women (Graph 3). Further, it shows a relative lack of hesitancy among participants to reach out to Native American and Pacific Islander women. There is an inverse relationship between attraction and hesitancy towards Black and Asian women. Data for this group was taken from a question asking participants to indicate any and all races of women to which they feel hesitant approaching sexually or romantically. It must be noted that a participants were less likely to indicate hesitancy or aversion to racial groups of women than to indicate their attraction to racial groups of women. This aversion to reaching out to Black and White women is especially curious considering the relative abundance of attraction among participants towards Black and White women among responses to the previous question (Graph 1). The aversion towards all groups of Asian women and Middle Eastern women is more consistent with the lack of attraction towards Asian women in particular. Comparing the responses from the question asking participants about their attractions and the question asking participants for their racialized hesitancies articulates that feeling of attraction does not necessitate a comfortability in approaching women of certain races.
Graph 4. This graph shows the amount of participants that indicated their aversion to Black, Native American, Pacific Islander, South East Asian, South Asian, East Asian, Middle Eastern, Latino, White Latino, and White women respectively.

This graph groups responses from the previously aforementioned question into racial participant responses. It is important to note there were much less responses to this question than the responses to the question prompting respondents to indicate to which races of women they were attracted. It shows that the relative aversion towards all groups of Asian women is located primarily among White, Black, and Latina participants (Graph 4). Asian participants, however, do not seem to exhibit this trend. Aversion towards Black women is the most extreme relatively among White women, Latina, and Asian women in terms of those group’s respective aversions to other groups. This aversion to approaching Black women is particularly interesting among White
women because White women indicated some of the highest relative rates of attraction towards Black women in the results for the previous question. The deep hesitancy towards reaching out towards Black women among nearly all racial groups of respondents except for Black respondents possibly supports the theory of Blackness embodying the ultimate and inferior “Other” in the American racial hierarchy and the idea that sex and dating are fields upon which participants vy for social standing (Collins 2004). Participants of color can supplement their racialized social standing by successfully or romantically engaging with individuals from racial groups of higher social standing ie. Whites and avoiding engagement with individuals from racial groups of lower social standing. The theory of Blackness embodying the ultimate inferior other would help partially explain the amount of hesitation towards engaging with Black women.

Anti-Blackness is well documented and rampant among other community of color like some Latino communities which vehemently deny their African roots to, most famously, the anti-Blackness among Asian communities which in part propelled the Los Angeles race riots in the early 90’s (Kim 2008). The mutual relative high hesitancy among Black and Asian respondents to engage with Asian and Black women respectively might be indicative of this continued racial tension between both communities. Since the 1970’s, Asian Americans have been used as a “wedge minority,” and have been seen as the “model minority” in the White Supremacist cultural imagination in order to shame Black communities and Latinos for suffering under systemic inequality by framing success as the product of an individual’s perseverance rather than an overarching systems of power (Bonilla-Silva 2009). In this way, individuals within Asian communities have internalized this narrative of innate cultural and racial superiority to Black communities and falsely believe that contact with Black communities will diminish their
social standing. Black communities, in turn, have charged Asian communities like the Korean community in Los Angeles for profiting off of them while maintaining anti-Black attitudes. There is necessarily tension between Black and Asian communities since the Black community is conceived of as the ultimate inferior other and the Asian community is conceived of as the model minority in the White Supremacist imagination to perpetuate White Supremacy.

Similarly, Whites can supplement their social justice capital by dating with women of color as an emblem of their perceived ability to transcend their position at the top of the White Supremacist hierarchy. Yet the allure of this social justice capital and the trope of the radical White feminist tokenizing Black partners in particular might actually push this hesitancy to engage with Black women. Since the trope of the White individual tokenizing and fetishizing Black women is culturally legible, this heightens White’s stereotype threat. Given the history of White/Black relations in America steeped in violent physical, sexual, and psychic repression, Whites might avoid engaging with Black women at all in order to avoid being in a situation where they feel they are under stereotype threat (Steele 2011). In other words, Whites might avoid dating or engaging sexually with Black women because they are afraid of being branded as racist or having to deal with internalized racism. Aversion towards engaging with Black women could further point towards the fetishization and hypersexualization of Black women by White women. White women may find Black women attractive, but they may be finding them attractive as an extension of racist sexual profiles of Black women as hypersexual, hyper aggressive beings.

This aversion is mutual among Black and Latinx women who indicated that they were hesitant to engage with White women. While Whites might be avoid engaging with Black and
Latina women in spite of their attraction towards them due to a fear of appearing racist or engaging with a perceived hypersexual being, Black and Latina women might be hesitant to engage with White women due to their desire to avoid White racism.

Among the responses explaining deep aversions or attractions, Black respondents’ and their aversion to White women and desire to engage with fellow Black women was most common. One respondent was particularly poignant in her explanation for her aversion towards White women:

“I would prefer black women because black women get it. I would be afraid of other races because of anti blackness and racism. I have often experiences a special kind of micro aggression from nonblack POC that hurts more because of the level of trust I have for women. I would probably never date a white women because I can't trust that they won't be racist. We can be friends, but I can't date someone who I spent a lot of my life trying to be more like or fit into. They are the people who have been hijacking black femininity and making money off of it for so long.”

There are multiple themes in her response. First that there is an inherent Black woman experience that would promote bonding and support between fellow Black women. Secondly, Whiteness and racism are closely related, and so is anti-blackness within non-Black communities of color. Thirdly, White beauty standards dominate the romantic and sexual market and, in some ways, a Black woman engaging with a White woman can be felt as a betrayal of Black radical self-love in favor of a toxic beauty standard. Along the same vein, one response detailed that she “prefers not to date Asians because of the backlash I will receive from my family” and that she “prefers to date a black/African-American because we can talk about issues that affect us both.”

This teases at a larger racial tension not only between White and Black communities but also between Black and Asian communities (Mirza 2017). Yet this desire to engage with and practice radical self love has been expanded to include other women of color like “Latinas” as respondents create an imagined socio-political communities away from White women with
whom are “hard to culturally connect and associate.” Thus, there emerges a conception of socio-political and cultural similarities among. In a way, queer women are creating the category “women of color” as a romantic and sexual category that provides racial solidarity and support.

Other non-black respondents of color reported their aversion to dating White woman as an expression of political solidarity to foster closer bonds between women of color and as a decision propelled by a desire to share cultural similarities. One Latina spoke of her past avowal to not engage sexually or romantically with White people” but she no longer has “that political belief” but she is “generally not attracted to White women.” Yet again, dating preferences as political beliefs emerge from the data. Another woman detailed that she is hesitant to engage with “White women” because of “cultural differences” that she found have effects on a relationship after dating a White man.

Some White respondents reported hesitance to date women of color because of they were scared of being perceived as racist and being put under stereotype threat. One respondent made sure to clarify that she “[doesn’t] really think that she would prefer to date a white person… just [that she would] feel slightly more comfortable with white people” because she “would be afraid of doing something racist or culturally insensitive to a POC partner.” This anxiety surrounding the desire to conform to American race culture discourse and aversion to “saying or doing the wrong thing” is further compounded with some White respondents feeling “intimidated by [people of color].” Interestingly, even though these White participants are trying to avoid reifying White Supremacist actions, their anxieties and hesitance to engage with women of color contribute to a larger economy of inequality of care wherein women of color receive less sexual and romantic attention than White women.
This desire to not appear racist or perpetuate racist attitudes simultaneously propels hesitance to engage with women of color and aversions to engage with White women. One respondent offered that she “is not interested in being in a relationship with another white woman because of white feminist attitudes that seem to persist through many people of that identity.” “White feminist attitudes” is social justice short-hand for exclusive feminism that particularly discriminates against women of color. The respondent felt that dating another White woman would be “pigeon-holing [herself] with a partner of the same identity.” This is particularly interesting considering that she suggests that by being a feminist who is White, other people are expecting her to date other White feminists and, essentially, be racist. Thus, the respondent announces her deep desire against being stereotyped as racist. To remedy this, she dates women of color, essentially tokenizing them in her bid for allyship and an escape from the label “White feminist.” Further, it implies that relationships and even sex can act as political breeding grounds wherein White Supremacy or any number of political ideologies can foment and develop. While another respondent does not take as extreme of a view towards avoiding White partners, she is “initially more suspect of white people, particularly white men” because “White people are less likely to have experienced discrimination in their lives.” She locates this type of White obliviousness as being bred in “largely white, privileged towns, where all sorts of -isms [other forms of discrimination] were common” thus implicating racial and income segregation in neighborhoods in providing spaces for inequality.

This desire to not only be socially progressive is not specific to White respondents, respondents reported a desire not only to be socially progressive but also to be with socially progressive partners. Respondents, often White, reported a desire to be with sexually progressive
partners. These respondents imagined socially progressive partners as not only holding progressive politics surrounding LGBT issues but must come from a racial and ethnic background that is progressive towards the same issues. In this way, sexual conservatism was grafted onto the bodies and cultures of women of color, particularly Black, Asian, and Middle Eastern women. These attitudes are continuations of White feminist and Eurocentric attitudes which preach that only White Americans have reached true progressive modernity while people of color and other countries lag behind both in economic and cultural development (Bederman 322; Moy 1993).

For example a respondent explained her lack of attraction towards Black and South Asian women as “partially social conditioning and partially just personal preference.” While trying to argue that these preferences are intrinsic and conditioned, she moves to state that she has noticed “that Middle Eastern (& North African) and Black LGBT women tend to be much more regressive in their views & politics, often espousing misogyny, transphobia and/or biphobia, which she finds reprehensible.” The bulk of her explanation superimposes queerphobic politics onto the bodies of Black and Middle Eastern women and takes shifts the focus from possible systems of racialized beauty and power to generalizations on the inherent regressiveness of Black and Middle Eastern women. Her aversions are shared with many other participants who “feels more hesitant to engage in romantic relationships with Middle Eastern or African American women out of fear that their families would be especially difficult to engage with long-term I already deal with a ton of homophobia within my own family and (although it's obviously stereotyping) I pause to think which ethnicities are most accepting of homosexual relationships.”

In this instance, progressiveness is a racial and ethnic trait and certain races are more queer-friendly than others. Some respondents explained their hesitation or lack of attraction towards Asian women as inherent aversions or lack of attractions. One woman said she is “just
not attracted to them [South, East, and South East Asian men or women]. This frames attraction in terms of inherent qualities divorced from a larger socio-cultural system of racialized beauty and sexual profiles. This points to a potential romantic and sexual community standard legible among queer women that dictates that the ideal partners not only be queer-friendly but have queer-friendly backgrounds. “Queer-friendly” has been coded as “White” and “queerphobic” has been coded as Middle Eastern, Asian, and, to a lesser extent, Black.

III. Participant Willingness to Dating Certain Racial Groups

[Graph 5. This graph shows the mean responses of participants that indicated their openness to dating different races of women.]
The following section analyzes responses to the question asking participants for their willingness to dating the following races of women, with responses ranging from “not open at all” to “extremely open.” The vast majority of respondents selected that they would be “extremely open” to dating each racial group (Graph 5). This is supports earlier studies which demonstrate that queer women are much more willing to engage in interracial dating than heterosexual women or queer men. However, this extreme trend among participants towards extreme openness to new partners makes it curious when participants selected any option that was less than extremely open. Thus, I grouped responses that ranged from “not open at all” to “somewhat open” into a group called “less or not open” and “extremely open” responses as “open.” I found that the instances where respondents deviated from the general trend to be “not open” were heavily racialized. For example, respondents were far more likely to be “less or not open” to dating South, East, and Southeast Asian than they were in relation White women. Respondents were far more likely to be open to dating White women and Native American. It is also curious to consider that Black women are rank among the highest in participants’ willingness to date them especially considering participants’ reported the most aversion to initiating contact with Black women. This can be another manifestation of White stereotype threat where White participants felt pressured to indicate willingness to date Black women to avoid being perceived as racist.
Graph 6. This graph shows the rate of participants that indicated their openness to dating different races pooled by respondent race.

Although the trend remains that Black respondents are hesitant to engage with White women and are similarly much more likely to be “not open” to dating White women than other groups of respondents. In fact, it seems that Black women largely, and, to an extent, Latinas, drive average participant willingness to date White women down. It is also interesting to consider that Black participants seem to be less willing in general to dating different groups of women, particularly in dating Asian women. This further suggests that there is great distrust between Black and Asian Americans. However, it should be noted that Asian participants did not seem to be as unwilling to date Black women as Black participants were unwilling to date Asian
Interestingly, all groups, with the exception of the two Middle eastern participants and Asian participants, indicated that they were less or not willing to date Asian women. I contend that, participants indicated their willingness to date different groups of women by imagined perceptions of political progressiveness. While Black participants, according to interview data and the qualitative portions of the survey were very concerned with finding racially progressive partners, it seems that some other groups such as White participants prioritized sexually progressive partners. In either case, Asian women were seen as politically conservative and undesirable.

IV. Participant Self Assessment of Attractiveness to other Queer Women
Graph 7. Box plot of participants' self assessment of their desirability to other queer women by racial groups on a 0-10 scale. 0 is the least desirable and 10 is the most desirable.

From my very limited, non-random sample of queer women, it seems that there is no significant difference between racial groups in their perception of how attractive other queer women find them. This is particularly interesting given the defined lack of attraction among respondents to Asian women, the general hesitancy to engage with Asian, Black, and Middle Eastern women, and the abundance of attraction towards White and Black women.
Conclusion

I initially strove to ask queer women which races of women they imagined to be most beautiful. I thought that their visualizations of “beautiful” would drive which races of partners they desired and approached the most. Yet, I found that, while somewhat overlapping, the most beautiful partners are not necessarily the most desirable or ideal partners. The participants weighed imagined racial beauty with perceived potential cultural conflicts, political progressiveness, and exposure to stereotype threat associated with different races. These considerations from participants showed their renegotiation of sexual profiles to fit desirability standards specific to queer women.

Overall, I found that there are divergent profiles between White and non-White participants regarding to what makes a desirable partner. Both profiles put Asians in the middle position but have different in which factors are important to queer women. While White women prized masculine presentation as it acted as a marker for queerness, they also prized social progressiveness in terms of queer-friendliness. Black participants, also prized masculine presentation as a marker of queerness but stressed their desire for racially progressive partners. Asian women are not seen as attractive due to their inability to fulfill queer standards of masculine presentation and socially progressiveness. White women’s sexual profile is one of a more masculine presenting, queer-friendly yet racially conservative woman. Asian women’s sexual profiles were feminine presenting, both sexually and racially conservative. Black women were more masculine presenting, somewhat unfriendly to queer politics but very racially progressive.
Principally, I have found that there is an important distinction between imagined beautiful partners and imagined desirable partners. Queer women did not necessarily desire or were willing to date the most beautiful women they could imagine. Rather, they triangulated desirability with two major criteria: imagined ability for masculine presentation and perceived political progressiveness when imagining Black, White, and Asian women. Under these criteria, my research suggests that queer women favor White and Black women over Asian women in the imagined romantic and sexual marketplace. Further, participants reported that they are very open to interracial dating. While the heterosexual and queer male sexual marketplaces privilege racialized partner’s ability to conform to hegemonic masculinity and femininity, queer women’s market represents a drastic departure. In these ways, queer women differ greatly from every other demographic group. Further research is crucial to fully understanding how queer women construct desirability and negotiate racial boundaries.

Through my thesis exploration, I found that queer women triangulated desirability and uncovered the tension between establishing dominant racial sexual profiles. Furthermore, I found that there is tension between how participants construct racial sexual profiles of women to which they are attracted, averse, and unwilling to date. These states are somewhat counterintuitive.

A great number of questions remain regarding the queer women’s racial preferences. First, it is unclear why queer women’s standards of desirability differentiate from heterosexual standards while queer men’s standards conform. Secondly, the study’s survey sample was quite White, and it is not quite clear how non-White groups might reconfigure desirability, especially queer Latinas and Native women. Beyond that, an analysis of user engagements among queer women on dating apps and websites would provide actual racialized engagement trends rather
than relying on women to self-report their preferences and past partners. The trends would serve to contrast with women’s imagined “ideal women” as well as their rather than perceived preference among interview and survey participants. My hope is that this study is only one of many that will continue to delve into the racialized erotic life of queer American women. The story of romance and sex, is a socio-political exercise which continually negotiates racial boundaries and cultural values.
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