
Comments on:
*Dating Markets – Theory and
Experimental Evidence*

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AEA Meetings

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Research Question

◆ Research question:

To what extent are differences in inter-racial matching driven by:

- Opportunities (segregation)?
- Preferences?
 - » Whose preferences?
 - » Which preferences?

Results

- ◆ Tables 1 & 2: Speed daters – and particularly women – are more likely to seek email addresses of those of the same race
- ◆ Table 3: No own-race bias in subjective evaluations of attractiveness
- ◆ Table 4: Races are not rated as equally attractive
 - Men: |-Asian-----Hispanic----White-Black-|
 - Women: |-Black—Asian-----White-Hispanic-|
- ◆ Tables 5: Own-race bias in speed dating choices survives controls for attractiveness of partner
- ◆ Table 6: ...And is somewhat diminished by controls for perceptions of “shared interests”

Just as Interesting: Non-Results

- ◆ Absence of interesting racial differences in ratings of whether the partner was:
 - Ambitious
 - Fun
 - Intelligent
 - Sincere
- ◆ *Objective* measures of shared interests were not predictive of speed dating choices
 - Paper reports subjective assessments instead

What is the Research Question?

- ◆ Estimating preferences?
 - But data are choices about whether to be available for a date
 - » Their view: Consumption => Preferences for a mate
 - » Alternative: Investment in assessing compatibility (2nd interview)
 - ◆ Demand for information may reflect uncertainty
 - ◆ 2-sided investment: Beliefs about succeeding in 2nd interview
 - » Either view: Low stakes decision
 - ◆ Why should revealed choices be more trustworthy?
 - Interested in magnitudes or hypothesis testing?
 - » Is it even plausible that preferences aren't important?
 - » Census data: 4% of marriages are inter-racial
 - Is this the most efficient way to assess race-biased preferences?
- ◆ Who wants to know?
 - Neoclassical economists
 - » Any of these results are consistent with efficient matching
 - Real people: Ethically objectionable
 - » But which is objectionable?
 - ◆ Differences in race-specific opportunities, or different preferences?
 - ◆ Or just different outcomes?
 - » And what can we do about it?

Abused Terminology

◆ Randomization

- What is being randomized?
- The relevant variable here is the race of the subject
 - » Not being randomized

◆ Experiments

- “In contrast to observational studies, our experimental approach allows for the direct inference of individual preferences and in contrast to survey-based evidence, the decision our subject make have ‘real’ consequences.”
 - » But their analysis is purely observational
 - » No experimental manipulations (in race paper)

◆ Revealed preference

- Whether or not I want your email address is revealed
 - » Preferences over bundles of (perceived) characteristics are revealed
 - » Preferences over specific attributes are not
 - ◆ Including skin color
- Attractiveness ratings, and shared interests (independent variables) rely on subjective self-reports

Interpreting the Evidence: An Analogy

- ◆ Fact: White workers are more likely to pass a screening interview with a white employer.
- ◆ Interpretations:
 - “The white workers had the skills that we are seeking”
 - “White workers of the same quality are more likely to accept the job”
 - “The white applicants are more likely to get along with our other workers”
 - “I [sincerely but mistakenly] believe that whites are better workers”
 - “I believe that blacks are riskier than whites”
 - “I hate blacks”
- ◆ Fact: White men are more likely to “get the digits” from female speed daters.
- ◆ Interpretations:
 - “The white men had the characteristics I seek”
 - “White men of the same quality are more likely to want to marry”
 - “White men are more likely to fit in my social network”
 - “I [sincerely but mistakenly] believe that whites are better spouses”
 - “I believe that blacks are riskier than whites”
 - “I hate blacks”

What Are Racial Preference?

- ◆ Revealed choice: Dating tendencies vary by race
- ◆ I tend not to date <race> because...
 - “I’m after someone who has <characteristics> and its just unusual I meet a <race> who satisfies this criteria”
 - “<Race> is just less physically attractive”
 - » “Everyone agrees; Heck, even ask men of <race>”
 - “I personally find <race> physically unattractive”
 - » “If not, I would date them... it’s not that I’m racist”
 - “I do not have much in common with <race>”
 - “I perceive myself not to have much in common with <race>”
 - “I find <race> beautiful, I just don’t want to date them”
 - “I just prefer to date within my own race”
 - “I hate <race>.”
- ◆ Which notion of discriminatory preferences are the authors interested in measuring?
 - Animus v. disparate impact

What is Discrimination?

What notion of discrimination are (or should) the authors be evaluating?

- ◆ Preferences over the race of my partner?
 - *Animus*
- ◆ Preferences over other attributes, which happen to be differentially distributed between blacks and whites?
 - *Sorting on unobservables (to the econometrician)*
- ◆ Preferences over seemingly irrelevant traits which are differentially distributed between blacks and whites
 - *Disparate impact*
- ◆ Preferences over other attributes, while I use race as an informational variable?
 - *Racial profiling*
- ◆ Misperceptions about the attributes of other races? [Shared interests]
 - *Mistakes*

Definitions remain muddy: What if I prefer to date beautiful people, but I find the other race to be ugly?

Evidence of Ethnic Preferences

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Justin Wolfers, Comments on "Dating Markets"

Alternative Research Design

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the address bar displaying <http://newyork.craigslist.org/cgi-bin/search?areaID=3&subAreaID=0&quer>. The page title is "new york craigslist > women seeking men". The search results are filtered by "new york" and "women seeking men". The search criteria are "keywords: SWF and SWM" and "Poster's Age: min max". The search results show 23 items found, displaying 1 to 23. The first few results are:

- Jan- 5 [awesome girl seeks awesome guy! - 19](#) (nyc)
- Jan- 5 [Sweet and Charming Dinner Date Available - 29](#) (UWS)
- Jan- 5 [SEXY•••SWF looking for a big, strong, muscular•••SEXY SWM - 30](#) (NYC/Nassau/Suffolk)
- Jan- 5 [Wanted for the New Year and always..... - 41](#) (New York)
- Jan- 4 [I've had it - 35](#) (nyc)
- Jan- 4 [BEAUTIFUL DOMINANT SEEKS SWM SUBMISSIVE](#) (UES)
- Jan- 4 [SWF seeks SWM that is fun, successful, and wants a LTR - 31](#) pic

Alternative Research Design

Number of Personals at www.craigslist.com

	Ads placed by women (<i>Women seeking men</i>)		Ads placed by men (<i>Men seeking women</i>)	
	New York	San Francisco	New York	San Francisco
Ads placed by Whites				
Whites	87	60	612	306
<i>Of whom:</i>				
Seeking Black	5	5	20	6
Seeking White Men	23	23	72	19
<i>% Stating racial preference</i>	32%	47%	15%	8%
<i>% Preferring own race / Preference</i>	82%	82%	78%	76%
Ads placed by Blacks				
Blacks	49	16	74	50
<i>Of whom:</i>				
Seeking Black Men	15	4	9	3
Seeking White Men	9	3	15	6
<i>% Stating racial preference</i>	49%	44%	32%	18%
<i>% Preferring own race / Preference</i>	62%	57%	38%	33%

Gender of searcher and preferences inferred by number of hits on “SWF”, “SBF”, “SWM”, “SBM”