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# *SOCIAL REASONING ABOUT RACIAL EXCLUSION IN INTIMATE AND NONINTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS*

MELANIE KILLEN  
CHARLES STANGOR  
B. SEFTON PRICE

University of Maryland

STACEY HORN

University of Illinois, Chicago

GRETCHEN B. SECHRIST

University at Buffalo, The State University of New York

*This research investigated the contextual nature of decisions about racial exclusion by analyzing why individuals might be willing to accept members of other racial groups into some types of social relationships but nevertheless exclude them from other types of relationships. Our analysis examined the underlying reasoning processes used to make such decisions. We conducted two studies to test the types of reasoning used by young adults regarding cross-race interpersonal relationships. Study 1 (N = 292) demonstrated that racial exclusion is more likely to be condoned and justified as an issue of personal choice and less likely to be seen as an issue of overt racism in intimate than in nonintimate contexts. Study 2 (N = 196) demonstrated that participants viewed it as more wrong to exclude others from cross-race than same-race relationships and that when relationships were high (vs. low) in physical contact they were viewed as more likely to be issues of personal choice, regardless of whether they were same- or cross-race. The results help explain why there are substantial contextual differences in the extent to which exclusion of individuals based on racial group membership is perceived as acceptable.*

**Keywords:** *intimacy; intergroup relations; adolescence; prejudice*

**Research on social relationships** has shown that judgments about intimate relationships differ from nonintimate relationships on a number of dimensions. Aspects of social relationships that have been stud-

ied include beliefs about relationship destiny (Knee, 1998) and degrees of self-disclosure and partner disclosure (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998), as well as the ways in which romantic partners provide social support throughout adolescence and young adulthood (Laursen & Williams, 1997). Research has shown that through the course of adolescence and young adulthood, romantic partners take on increased importance in individuals' lives and by college are listed as the most significant "other" in a young adult's life (Furman & Wehner, 1994). Additionally, research suggests that with development, the function and structure of intimate relationships change; moving from a kind of "pseudointimacy" in early and middle adolescence to a more "true" form or intimacy, characterized by more emotional depth and long-term commitment during late adolescence (Furman & Simon, 1999). Finally, Sternberg (1986), in studying young adults and adults, proposed a model of intimate relationships that points to the multifaceted dimensions of intimacy, which include the ways in which intimate relationships vary according to the degree to which they include passion, long-term commitment, and emotional involvement.

Surprisingly, few studies have examined the extent to which race plays a role in individuals' evaluations of close relationships. Although many European Americans may be willing to vote for an African American mayor in their city or to become friends with their African American coworkers, they may nevertheless be willing to exclude African Americans as partners in intimate relationships. In fact, recent research has shown that although in 1958 most White Americans said they would not be willing to vote for a well-qualified Black candidate, in 1994, over 90% said they would (Davis & Smith, 1996). On the other hand, the percentage of interracial marriages as a percentage of all marriages has increased from only .4% to 2.2% between 1960 and

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1990 (U.S. Census Bureau, 1992). Because decisions regarding racial acceptance or rejection vary across different contexts, a full understanding of race relations will involve not only the measurement of levels of prejudice but also a consideration of the perceived appropriateness of engaging in or avoiding different types of intergroup behaviors. This calls for an analysis of the extent to which race becomes a factor in evaluations of interpersonal and intimate relationships and how this varies by the social context.

Research on cross-race friendships has provided some findings that bear on this issue. In a recent study by Aboud, Mendelson, and Purdy (2003), students rated cross-race friendships as lower on intimacy than same-race friendships. Yet this was the only factor that differentiated these types of relationships. There were no other significant differences in these types of friendships for five other friendship functions (reliable alliance, exciting companion, help, self-validation, and emotional security). These findings indicate that intimacy is a distinct issue for individuals when evaluating racial exclusion in social relationships, and furthermore that this factor may contribute to an age-related decline in cross-race friendships, which are viewed as necessary for prejudice reduction (see Aboud & Amato, 2001; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000).

Researchers examining social reasoning about interpersonal relationships using a social domain model have shown that children, adolescents, and adults view decisions about the choice of interpersonal relationships (e.g., friends) as a personal decision (see Nucci, 1996, 2001). When asked who should decide who gets to pick one's friends, the vast majority of children and parents state that it is up to the child to decide; choosing friendships is a matter of personal, not parental, jurisdiction or regulation. This has been shown to be the case in many different contexts and with different age groups (young children, Killen & Smetana, 1999; Nucci & Weber, 1995; childhood, Tisak, 1995; adolescents, Smetana, 1989; Smetana & Asquith, 1994; parents, Nucci & Smetana, 1996). These findings have been validated in a number of cultures (e.g., Brazil, Korea, China, Japan, Colombia; for a review, see Nucci, 2001). Based on these findings, it is expected that individuals would evaluate the choice of a partner for an intimate relationship as a personal decision. How race is involved in this type of decision, however, is not known.

At the same time that research has documented how individuals evaluate choice of friends, recent research has shown that children and adolescents evaluate exclusion using multiple forms of reasoning (Killen, Lee-Kim, McGlothlin, & Stangor, 2002; Killen, McGlothlin, & Lee-Kim, 2002). For example, children and adolescents view racially based exclusion by a peer group as unfair (Killen & Stangor, 2001), and, at the same time, adolescents view friendship choices based on race as a personal decision as well as a moral issue (Killen, Lee-Kim, et al., 2002). Reasoning was evaluated using a social-cognitive domain model, which has postulated that different forms of reasoning are brought to bear on complex social decisions (Killen, Pisacane, Lee-Kim, & Ardila-Rey, 2001; Killen & Stangor, 2001; Smetana, 1995; Turiel, 1983; 1998; Turiel, Killen, & Helwig, 1987). In this past work, moral reasons typically include fairness, others' welfare, and rights; conventional reasons usually involve cultural norms, customs, and stereotypes about others; and personal reasons typically involve decisions that affect the self, such as choice of friends, dress, and name. Theoretically, these different forms of reasoning bear on decision making about interpersonal relationships. No research that we know of, however, has examined how individuals reason about racial exclusion in intimate and nonintimate social relationships. Given that research has found long-term negative consequences to the experience of exclusion based on race (Leary, 1990), this issue warrants investigation.

Prior research on this topic in social psychology has predicted that social approval or social-conventional reasoning forms the basis for evaluations of the appropriateness of engaging in social relationships with members of another race. White high school students (sampled at three different time periods across three decades) rated the appropriateness of engaging in a set of behaviors (e.g., "Work with this person"; "Accept this person as a buddy") with White and Black students (Cox, Smith, & Insko, 1996; Moe, Nacoste, & Insko, 1981; Robinson & Insko, 1969). The behaviors were scaled in terms of both perceived intimacy and perceived social disapproval by the same or similar participants. Although ratings of perceived social disapproval of the behaviors (by parents and peers) were highly negatively correlated with

appropriateness judgments, ratings of the perceived intimacy of the behaviors were not related to perceived appropriateness.

A close inspection of the findings of these studies, however, shows quite clearly that one of the rated behaviors—"Accept this person as close kin by marriage"—was judged substantially more acceptable for own race than cross-race relationships at all three time periods and was also rated as being high in intimacy. These results seem to suggest that it might be acceptable to exclude individuals on the basis of race in intimate relationships (at least in terms of a very intimate behavior such as marriage), while being unacceptable to exclude individuals on the basis of race in nonintimate relationships.

It is not clear, however, from the data reported by Insko and his colleagues (Cox et al., 1996; Moe et al., 1981) exactly which components of the behavior "Accept this person as close kin by marriage" might contribute to its greater rejection for cross-race than within-race encounters. First, there was no measure of the types of reasoning that individuals used to evaluate their ratings. On what basis did the students think it was all right to treat intimacy differently in cross-race contexts? Second, there was no attempt to analyze the components that contribute to the types of social relationships surveyed. Is excluding someone from a potential marriage partner on the basis of his or her race acceptable because of the implications entailed in an emotional or long-term and committed relationship or because of the physical (sexual) contact involved?

To understand how individuals evaluate racial exclusion, we conducted two studies to test our predictions about intimacy and racial exclusion. In Study 1, we assessed how young adults evaluate decisions that involve exclusion based on race in three contexts that varied in the degree that intimacy was part of the relationship. We predicted that using race as a criterion to make a decision about a nonintimate relationship would be viewed as wrong on the basis of moral reasons, such as unfairness, and that using race as a criterion to make a decision about intimate relationships would be evaluated with multiple forms of reasoning, moral (wrongfulness), personal (individual choice prerogatives), and social-conventional (negative social feedback from others). Study 2 was designed to examine what components of intimate

relationships are viewed as pivotal when making decisions about cross-race and same-race relationships. Sternberg's (1986) taxonomy was used to test which of the following three components were most central for decision making involving same-race and different-race relationships: physical contact, emotional interdependence, and long-term commitment. For example, would young adults evaluate relationships that are high in physical contact as more a matter of a personal decision than relationships that are low in physical contact, and would this interact with whether the relationship was same-race or cross-race?

We surveyed college students about these issues for two reasons. First, because research suggests that later adolescents and young adults are more likely to think about and be involved in intimate relationships that include all three components of Sternberg's model (Furman & Simon, 1999; Furman & Wehner, 1994), we felt that college students would be more likely than high school students to differentiate intimate versus nonintimate social relationships along these dimensions. Second, as a result of sensitivity regarding race and dating, we felt that the likelihood of ascertaining more candid responses would increase with a young adult population. We selected male and female college students from a large, mid-Atlantic, racially mixed, public university. We expected that gender would play a role in how individuals evaluate exclusion based on past studies that have shown that females are more sensitive to issues of exclusion than are males (Killen et al., 2001; Killen & Stangor, 2001) and that females score higher on prosocial responses than do males (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998; Wentzel & Erdley, 1993).

## STUDY 1

In Study 1, we asked students to evaluate three types of scenarios: dating someone of a different race, going to a baseball game with a group of friends that included someone of a different race, and voting for someone of a different race for president. The first scenario involved an intimate relationship, the second involved a nonintimate, social relationship, and the third involved a nonintimate, nonsocial re-

lationship. Our primary interest was the context in which a White woman refrains from dating, socializing, or voting for a Black man. This is because prior research has assessed the perceptions of European American participants about contact with African Americans, and we were interested in conditions in which exclusion occurs from a majority person toward a minority, as exists in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

We posed five questions to all participants, which were the following: Evaluation (All right or not all right to exclude?), Justification (Why all right or not all right?), Attributions (Why might someone exclude?), Evaluation of the use of race as a criterion (Good or bad reason?), and Rating of Reason (How bad a reason? on a scale from 0 to 6). Evaluation of exclusion determined whether participants thought it was all right or not all right to exclude someone on the basis of race in each of three specified contexts. Justification referred to the type of reason that participants gave for their decisions about exclusion. We coded students' justifications using standard approaches from the developmental social cognition field (Killen & Stangor, 2001; Smetana, 1995; Tisak, 1995). Attributions involved a measure of what reasons participants thought that someone might use to exclude someone else on the basis of race. This was asked because pilot data indicated that individuals differentiated between their view of what someone "should" do in a specified context and why someone "might" do something in a specified context. Coordination of responses provided a measure of whether individual participants gave multiple justifications. Using more than one justification indicates that the decision is complex rather than straightforward (see Killen, McGlothlin, et al., 2002). We also asked participants whether the use of race as a criterion was good or bad and to rate the reason on a Likert-type scale (0 to 6).

We predicted that students would not condone racial exclusion in the nonintimate scenarios because they would be seen as issues of racial discrimination and unfairness (morality) and yet would condone exclusion in the dating scenario because it was seen as an issue of personal choice involving potential intimate contact. We also predicted that females would judge the use of race as a criterion as more wrong than would males and that they would use more moral reasons than would males to justify their judgments (Killen & Stangor, 2001).



## METHOD

### Participants

Participants were 200 college students ( $M = 21$  years; range 18 to 28;  $SD = 2.4$  years), including 120 females and 80 males who attended a large public university in a metropolitan area in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The ethnic breakdown of the sample was 64% European American, 20% Asian American, 11% African American, and 7% other.

### Procedure and Design

Participants were enrolled in undergraduate college courses (psychology, human development, and business management) and completed in-class surveys during a regularly scheduled class period. The surveys took approximately 20 minutes to complete. Additionally, it was explained to all participants that their survey responses would be confidential, anonymous, and strictly voluntary.

Using a within-subjects design, participants responded to questions regarding three hypothetical scenarios that depicted a White female making a decision involving a Black male. The three scenarios were designed to vary the perceived intimacy of the relationship and to vary the context in which race was used as a factor to make a decision. The three hypothetical vignettes were (a) voting: a White female college student does not want to vote for a male student for student government president because he is Black; (b) socializing: a White female college student does not want to go to a baseball game with a female college friend because a Black male college student will also be going with them to the game; and (c) dating: a White female college student does not want to go out on a date with a male college student because he is Black. The three hypothetical scenarios were fully counterbalanced, creating six story orders. For example, for the voting scenario, participants read the following sentences:

“Jeanette and William are in the same year in college. William is running for student government president. Jeanette, a White student,

does not want William to become student government president because he is Black.”

For each hypothetical vignette, all participants were asked for their judgment of the White female’s race-based decision (e.g., “Is it all right or not all right for Jeannette not to vote for William for student government president because he is Black?”) and to evaluate whether the reason (i.e., race) for the female’s decision was a good one or not (e.g., “Do you think that Jeannette’s reason for not voting for William is a good reason?”). Additionally, participants were asked to assign a numerical rating of 0 (*not a bad reason at all*) to 6 (*a very bad reason*) to the hypothetical White female’s race-based decision (e.g., “Is it bad for Jeannette not to vote for William because he is Black? If so, how bad is it?”). Participants were asked also to justify their judgment of the White female’s race-based decision (e.g., “Why is it all right or not all right for Jeannette not to vote for William because he is Black?”) and to generate attributions regarding the hypothetical female’s possible reason(s) for making the race-based decision (e.g., “Why might Jeannette not want to vote for William because he is Black?”).

### **Coding and Reliability**

Participants’ justifications were analyzed using a coding system based on previous research that has examined social reasoning (Killen & Stangor, 2001; Smetana, 1995; Tisak, 1995). There were three different coding systems (Domain, Coordination, and Attribution); see Appendix A for definitions and examples. The Domain coding system was used to analyze participants’ justification responses. As shown in Appendix A, the Domain categories were (a) moral (fairness, equality, rights, the wrongfulness of discrimination, prejudice, and racism), (b) social-conventional (group expectations, traditions, customs, cultural norms, and societal approval), (c) psychological (personal choice/preference, psychological incompatibility), and (d) other (noncodable). Twenty-five percent of the protocols were coded for the Domain categories independently by a second judge. Using Cohen’s kappa, interjudge agreement for coding the responses was .97.

The Coordination coding system was used to analyze combinations of justification decisions and included the following mutually exclu-

sive categories: (a) only one category used (moral or social-conventional or psychological), (b) moral and social-conventional (e.g., "Everyone should be treated equally, but society still might not understand"), (c) moral and psychological (e.g., "She isn't really being fair, but I guess she can date whomever she wants"), (d) social-conventional and psychological (e.g., "Even though society might frown on her, it's still her personal choice"), (e) moral, social-conventional, and psychological (e.g., "Even though it's her own choice, she's being racist, and society might look down on her for that"), and (f) other (noncodable). Twenty-five percent of the protocols were coded for the Coordination categories independently by a second judge. Using Cohen's kappa, interjudge agreement for coding the responses was .94.

The third coding system, called the Attribution coding system, included categories designed to analyze participants' attributions for why someone might make a race-based decision. These categories were derived from pilot data and reflected categories used in the literature regarding prejudice and cross-race relationships. The Attribution coding categories were (a) prejudice and racist beliefs, (b) avoidance of negative social feedback, (c) psychological or physical incompatibility, (d) negative past experiences, (e) same-race preference, and (f) other (noncodable). Twenty-five percent of the protocols were coded for the Attribution categories independently by a second judge. Using Cohen's kappa, interjudge agreement for coding the responses was .86.

## RESULTS

Because our initial data analyses revealed no ethnicity of participant differences on any of the variables, we collapsed across participant ethnicity in the reported results.

### Judgments About Race-Based Decisions

Repeated measures ANOVA were conducted on the proportions of "not all right" judgments for race-based decisions. A 2 (gender)  $\times$  3

(story: voting, socializing, dating) ANOVA with repeated measures on the story factor revealed a main effect for story,  $F(2, 390) = 85.76, p < .001$ , and a significant main effect for gender,  $F(1, 195) = 15.43, p < .001$ . As shown in Table 1, a majority of the participants judged that it was wrong to not vote for someone ( $M = .80$ ) and to not socialize with someone ( $M = .72$ ) on the basis of race, whereas a minority of the participants judged that it was not all right to not date someone ( $M = .36$ ) on the basis of race. Follow-up analyses indicated that there was a significant difference in judgments between the voting and socializing contexts ( $p < .01$ ) and a significant difference in judgments between the socializing and the dating context ( $p < .01$ ). Thus, participants judged race-based decisions to be more all right in an intimate than nonintimate context. The main effect of gender revealed also that females ( $M = .71$ ) judged that it was more wrong to make a race-based decision in all contexts than did males ( $M = .52$ ).

#### **Evaluations of the Reasons for Exclusion**

To assess whether participants thought that it was a good or bad reason to use race as a factor in decision making, a 2 (gender)  $\times$  3 (story: voting, socializing, dating) ANOVA with repeated measures on the last factor was conducted. This analysis revealed a main effect for story,  $F(2, 388) = 60.71, p < .001$ , and a significant main effect for gender,  $F(1, 194) = 3.97, p < .05$ . As shown in Table 1, the vast majority of the participants viewed race as a bad reason to not vote for someone ( $M = .97$ ) and to not socialize with someone ( $M = .98$ ), and a majority of the participants viewed race as a bad reason to not date someone ( $M = .71$ ). Follow-up analyses indicated that there were no differences in evaluations between the voting and the socializing scenarios, but there was a significant difference in evaluations between these two contexts and the dating context ( $p < .01$ ). Thus, participants more often evaluated race as a bad reason on which to base a decision in a nonintimate context than in an intimate context despite the fact that a significant group of participants deemed it all right to exclude in the dating context. The gender effect revealed also that females ( $M =$

**TABLE 1**  
**Mean Proportions of Judgments,**  
**Evaluations, and Ratings of Exclusion**

<i>Scenario × Gender</i>	<i>Judgments</i>	<i>Evaluations</i>	<i>Ratings</i>
Voting			
Female	.88 (.33)	.99 (.09)	5.6 (0.94)
Male	.70 (.46)	.95 (.22)	5.2 (1.4)
Total	.80 (.40)	.97 (.16)	5.4 (1.2)
Socializing			
Female	.80 (.40)	.99 (.09)	5.6 (0.84)
Male	.61 (.49)	.95 (.22)	5.1 (1.5)
Total	.72 (.45)	.98 (.16)	5.4 (1.1)
Dating			
Female	.44 (.50)	.73 (.44)	3.9 (1.7)
Male	.24 (.43)	.66 (.48)	3.4 (2.2)
Total	.36 (.48)	.71 (.46)	3.7 (1.9)

NOTE:  $N = 200$  (120 females and 80 males). Judgment: 0 = All right; 1 = Not all right. Evaluation: 0 = A good reason; 1 = A bad reason. Rating: 0 = Not bad at all; 6 = Very bad. Standard deviations are in parentheses.

.90) evaluated the use of race to make a decision in all contexts to be more wrong than did males ( $M = .85$ ).

#### **Ratings of Using Race as a Reason for Exclusion**

A 2 (gender)  $\times$  3 (story) ANOVA on participants' ratings about using race as a reason in decision making (0 = *not bad*; 6 = *very, very bad*) revealed a significant main effect for story,  $F(2, 392) = 129.83, p < .001$ , and a significant main effect for gender,  $F(1, 196) = 8.59, p < .01$ . As shown in Table 1, participants' ratings for using race as a reason to not vote for someone and to not socialize with someone were higher ( $M_s = 5.4$ ) than participants' rating for using race as a reason to not date someone ( $M = 3.7$ ). The ratings for the dating context were significantly lower than the ratings in the voting and socializing contexts ( $p < .01$ ). Participants rated race-based decisions in nonintimate contexts as more wrong than race-based decisions in an intimate context. Again, the gender effect revealed also that females ( $M = 5.0$ ) rated the use of race to make a decision to be more wrong in all contexts than did males ( $M = 4.6$ ).

### Domain Justifications

To determine the types of justifications that participants used for each judgment, analyses were conducted to reveal whether participants used moral, social-conventional, or psychological justifications for their judgments about using race to make decisions in nonintimate and in an intimate context. A 2 (gender)  $\times$  3 (story)  $\times$  3 (justification) ANOVA with repeated measures on the last two factors revealed a significant main effect for story,  $F(2, 396) = 9.56, p < .001$ , and a significant main effect for the domain of justification used,  $F(2, 396) = 164.70, p < .001$ . The analyses also revealed a story by domain interaction,  $F(4, 792) = 80.37, p < .001$ , and a domain by gender interaction,  $F(2, 396) = 6.74, p < .01$ .

As shown in Table 2, as predicted, participants justified their judgments about not using race as a reason to make a decision by appealing primarily to moral considerations ( $M = .79$  for voting and  $M = .66$  for socializing) (e.g., "It's wrong and prejudiced to not vote for someone because of their race; you have to find out what they stand for and use that as a reason"; "It wouldn't be fair to not go to the game with him just because of the color of his skin"). More personal choice justifications were used for decisions about using race as a reason to not date someone ( $M = .50$ ) than to not vote ( $M = .15$ ) or to not socialize with someone ( $M = .24$ ) (for dating: "She can date whomever she wants to because it's her choice"; "Dating is a personal decision and you can use any reason that you want to not date someone"). Half ( $M = .50$ ) of the participants used personal reasons for the dating scenario, and about one third of the participants ( $M = .35$ ) used moral reasons for the dating scenario; only a small proportion used social-conventional reasons ( $M = .10$ ) ("If she dates a Black man then her parents and her family will get upset and they probably won't allow him over to their house"). Also, as shown in Table 2, female students appealed to moral considerations more often than did male students when justifying their judgments about race-based decisions, while appealing less often than male students to personal considerations.

Follow-up analyses indicated that there was a significant difference in justifications between the voting and the socializing contexts ( $p < .01$ ) and a significant difference in justifications between the socializing and the dating context ( $p < .01$ ). Participants appealed more often

**TABLE 2**  
**Mean Proportions of Domain Justification Responses**

<i>Scenario × Gender</i>	<i>Domain Justification Categories</i>		
	<i>Moral</i>	<i>Social-Conventional</i>	<i>Psychological</i>
Scenario			
Voting			
Female	.86 (.27)	.03 (.14)	.10 (.23)
Male	.68 (.43)	.05 (.18)	.22 (.37)
Total	.79 (.35)	.04 (.16)	.15 (.30)
Socializing			
Female	.69 (.37)	.05 (.16)	.21 (.32)
Male	.62 (.43)	.02 (.1)	.28 (.40)
Total	.66 (.40)	.04 (.14)	.24 (.36)
Dating			
Female	.40 (.39)	.09 (.22)	.48 (.40)
Male	.26 (.38)	.11 (.26)	.53 (.44)
Total	.35 (.39)	.10 (.23)	.50 (.41)

NOTE:  $N = 200$  (120 females and 80 males). Standard deviations are in parentheses.

to moral considerations and less often to psychological considerations in the nonrelationship context than in the nonintimate-relationship context when reasoning about race-based decisions. Participants also appealed more often to moral considerations and less often to psychological considerations in the nonintimate relationship context compared to the intimate relationship context when reasoning about race-based decisions. Thus, participants viewed race-based decisions in nonintimate relationship contexts to be primarily moral concerns, whereas a race-based decision in an intimate context was viewed in large part as a personal choice issue.

### **Coordination of Multiple Forms of Reasoning**

Analyses were conducted to determine the types of multiple domain justifications provided by participants when reasoning about race-based decisions in different relationship contexts. Preliminary analyses indicated that two coordination categories were used: (a) only one reason and (b) moral and psychological reasons. The only

one reason category was either the use of only moral justifications or the use of only psychological justifications. The remaining categories were collapsed and combined into one category labeled "other." A 2 (gender)  $\times$  3 (story)  $\times$  2 (coordination: one reason, more than one reason) ANOVA with repeated measures on the last two factors revealed a significant main effect for story,  $F(2, 396) = 9.83, p < .001$ , and a significant main effect for coordination,  $F(2, 396) = 49.95, p < .001$ . Analyses also revealed a story by coordination interaction,  $F(4, 792) = 45.78, p < .001$ .

As shown in Table 3, the majority of the participants used only one reason to justify their judgments of all right or not all right in the voting ( $M = .78$ ) and socializing ( $M = .68$ ) contexts. In contrast, about half of the participants used only one reason in the dating context ( $M = .54$ ) (the other half used more than one reason). Only moral justifications were used in the voting ( $M = .70$ ) context, about half of the participants used only moral justifications in the socializing ( $M = .54$ ) context, and fewer than half used only moral justifications in the dating ( $M = .20$ ) context. The use of only psychological justifications, however, differed by context (voting,  $M = .07$ ; socializing,  $M = .14$ ; dating,  $M = .34$ ). As shown in Table 3, the simultaneous coordination of moral and psychological justifications was used more often in the dating context than in the voting context (dating,  $M = .23$ ; voting,  $M = .13$ ; socializing,  $M = .19$ ).

### Attributions for Racially Based Decisions

Analyses were conducted on participants' attributions for why someone might make a race-based decision in different relationship contexts. A 2 (gender)  $\times$  3 (story)  $\times$  5 (type of attribution used) ANOVA with repeated measures on the last two factors revealed a significant main effect for type of attribution used,  $F(4, 792) = 27.64, p < .001$ , and a significant story by type of attribution used interaction,  $F(8, 1584) = 23.92, p < .001$ . As shown in Table 4, when reasoning about why someone might make a race-based decision, participants attributed the holding of prejudice and racist beliefs, on the part of the person making the race-based decision, to be more likely in the voting ( $M = .39$ ) and in the socializing ( $M = .33$ ) contexts than in the dating



**TABLE 3**  
**Mean Proportions of Coordination Responses**

<i>Coordination × Gender</i>	<i>Scenario</i>		
	<i>Voting</i>	<i>Socializing</i>	<i>Dating</i>
Moral only			
Female	.76 (.43)	.54 (.50)	.23 (.42)
Male	.61 (.49)	.53 (.50)	.16 (.37)
Total	.70 (.46)	.54 (.50)	.20 (.40)
Psychological only			
Female	.03 (.16)	.09 (.29)	.29 (.46)
Male	.15 (.36)	.20 (.40)	.41 (.50)
Total	.08 (.26)	.14 (.34)	.34 (.47)
Moral and psychological			
Female	.14 (.35)	.21 (.41)	.28 (.45)
Male	.11 (.32)	.15 (.36)	.14 (.35)
Total	.13 (.34)	.19 (.39)	.23 (.42)

NOTE:  $N = 200$  (120 females and 80 males). Standard deviations are in parentheses.

( $M = .14$ ) context. In contrast, participants attributed negative social feedback as the reason for why people would make race-based decisions in the dating context ( $M = .17$  for voting;  $M = .22$  for socializing; and  $M = .44$  for dating).

Follow-up analyses indicated that there was a significant difference in the use of prejudice and racist belief attributions, negative social feedback attributions, and psychological or physical compatibility attributions between the dating context and the other two contexts ( $p < .01$ ). Follow-up analyses also indicated that there was a significant difference in the use of negative past experience attributions between the socializing context and the other two contexts, and there was a significant difference in the use of same-race favoritism or preference attributions between the voting context and the other two contexts.

As predicted, participants were less likely to attribute racist beliefs to the individual making the race-based decision in the intimate context than to the individual making the race-based decision in the nonintimate relationship contexts. Additionally, participants more often attributed the desire to avoid negative social feedback to someone making a race-based decision in an intimate context than in a nonrelationship or a nonintimate-relationship context. Furthermore,

**TABLE 4**  
**Mean Proportions of Attribution Responses**

<i>Attribution × Gender</i>	<i>Scenario</i>		
	<i>Voting</i>	<i>Socializing</i>	<i>Dating</i>
Prejudice and racist beliefs			
Female	.40 (.42)	.34 (.42)	.13 (.27)
Male	.38 (.47)	.30 (.43)	.16 (.30)
Total	.39 (.44)	.33 (.43)	.14 (.28)
Avoidance of negative social feedback			
Female	.17 (.30)	.25 (.38)	.49 (.41)
Male	.17 (.34)	.17 (.33)	.37 (.41)
Total	.17 (.32)	.22 (.36)	.44 (.41)
Psychological or physical incompatibility			
Female	.01 (.10)	.01 (.10)	.14 (.31)
Male	.00 (.00)	.04 (.20)	.14 (.31)
Total	.08 (.08)	.03 (.15)	.14 (.31)
Negative past experience			
Female	.10 (.26)	.26 (.39)	.10 (.23)
Male	.08 (.24)	.24 (.39)	.14 (.31)
Total	.09 (.25)	.25 (.39)	.12 (.27)
Same-race preference			
Female	.18 (.36)	.03 (.17)	.10 (.25)
Male	.20 (.39)	.12 (.32)	.08 (.26)
Total	.19 (.38)	.07 (.24)	.09 (.25)
Other (noncodable or missing)			
Female	.13 (.34)	.09 (.29)	.03 (.18)
Male	.18 (.38)	.13 (.33)	.10 (.30)
Total	.15 (.36)	.11 (.31)	.06 (.24)

NOTE:  $N = 200$  (120 females and 80 males). Standard deviations in parentheses.

participants more often attributed psychological or physical incompatibility in the intimate relationship context as a reason for the decision in contrast to the individual making the decision in the nonrelationship and the nonintimate-relationship contexts. Participants also more often attributed negative past experiences as a reason to make a race-based decision in a nonintimate relationship context than in a nonrelationship or an intimate relationship context. Finally, same race preference was attributed to the person making the race-based decision in the nonrelationship context more often than in the nonintimate and intimate relationship contexts.

## DISCUSSION

The findings from Study 1 indicate that participants evaluated racial exclusion very differently in three interpersonal contexts: dating, socializing, and voting. Using race as a decision-making criterion in the voting and socializing contexts was viewed as wrong from a moral viewpoint. However, using race as a criterion in the dating context was viewed as legitimate, even if it was also viewed as a bad reason for not dating someone; this was because it was viewed as a personal decision, one that is up to the individual to decide. When asked why someone might use race as a criterion, participants stated that this was often because of the fear of negative social consequences. This suggests that there is still substantial negative social feedback about dating someone of a different race and that this is differentiated from nonintimate relationships such as socializing or voting for someone. Negative feedback or social disapproval were not viewed as the bases by which participants themselves judged it as okay but in terms of why someone might not date someone of a different race. Instead, participants' decisions were based on a view that dating is a personal decision. Furthermore, we found gender of participant differences for all dependent measures. Women were more likely than men to evaluate the use of race as a criterion for exclusion as wrong in all three interpersonal contexts; they were also more likely to use moral reasons than personal or psychological reasons for their decisions.

## STUDY 2

The findings of Study 1 indicated that young adults evaluated race-based decisions about intimate relationships as different from race-based decisions about nonintimate relationships. We designed Study 2 to determine the features of intimate relationships that may contribute to race-conscious judgments using a modified version of the components identified by Sternberg (1986). In Sternberg's work on interpersonal relationships, he outlined a taxonomy that includes three underlying components of intimate relationships: physical contact, emotional interdependence, and long-term commitment. We investi-

gated which of these components would be salient for participants when making judgments that involved same-race and cross-race protagonists. We created eight situations that depicted high/low combinations of each of three dimensions, physical contact (high or low), emotional commitment (high or low) and long-term commitment (high or low) (see Appendix B for all eight scenarios). Thus, a decision to “get engaged” reflected a high physical, high emotional, and high long-term commitment, whereas a decision to work with someone in an office on a project was a low physical, low emotional, high long-term commitment (see Appendix B).

For each situation, participants were asked whether it was all right or not all right to refrain from engaging in the relationship. For one set of scenarios, the relationship was characterized as same-race and for the second set of scenarios the relationship was characterized as cross-race. We predicted that participants would judge it more all right to refrain from an intimate relationship in a cross-race than in a same-race situation based on the findings that this is an aspect of social relationships that continues to experience a racial barrier. Additionally, of the three dimensions of intimate relationships—physical contact, emotional commitment, and long-term commitment—we expected that the physical component of relationships would bear on judgments about cross-race intimate relationships more so than for judgments about same-race relationships.

## METHOD

### Participants

Participants were 196 college students, 137 females and 59 males, at the same university as in Study 1 (mean age = 20.8, range 18-28;  $SD = 1.9$  years). The sample included 151 European American (77%), 25 Asian American (13%), and 20 African American students (13%), reflecting the demographics of the school. Participants completed the questionnaires during their scheduled class periods, were told that their participation was strictly voluntary, and were assured that their responses would be confidential and anonymous.

### Stimulus Materials and Procedure

As shown in Appendix B, scenarios were developed to depict each of eight social relationships (engaged to be married, spring break affair, long-term affair, one-night stand, best friend, coffee shop encounter, office coworker, metro co-rider). One half of the scenarios involved high physical (sexual) contact, whereas the other half involved low physical contact. Similarly, one half of the scenarios involved high emotional commitment, whereas the other half involved low emotional commitment. Furthermore, one half of the scenarios involved short-term relationships, whereas the other half involved long-term relationships. A fourth factor, race of the male protagonist, was also fully crossed with the other three variables. For half of the participants, the behavior was said to have occurred within race (a White woman and White man), and for the other half of the participants the behavior was said to have occurred across race (a White woman and a Black man). Each participant was randomly assigned to read one of the 16 scenarios.

Each of the scenarios indicated that another White woman supposedly heard about a friend who had performed the behavior depicted in the scenario and subsequently indicated that she herself would never engage in it. For the within-race scenarios, the White woman simply stated that she could never engage in the behavior (e.g., "I could never have an affair during spring break"), whereas in the cross-race scenarios she indicated that her decision was also based on the race of the man (e.g., "I could never have an affair with a Black man during spring break"). As a measure of the perceived personal choice in the decision, participants were asked to rate whether it was all right or not all right for the woman to hold the belief that she had expressed by assigning a numerical rating ranging from 1 (*all right*) to 6 (*not all right*).

### RESULTS

Preliminary analyses revealed no significant effects due to gender or race of participants, and the data were thus analyzed using a 2 (physical involvement: high vs. low)  $\times$  2 (emotional commitment: high vs. low)  $\times$  2 (time course of the relationship: long vs. short)  $\times$  2

(race of the protagonists: same race, opposite race) ANOVA. Only two main effects and no interactions were significant. Participants indicated that it was more all right to hold the belief (to never engage in the behavior) about a same-race interaction ( $M = 2.27$ ) than about a cross-race interaction ( $M = 3.34$ ),  $F(1, 180) = 14.53$ ,  $p < .001$ . This finding indicates that participants viewed a decision to refrain from a cross-race relationship as more wrong than to refrain from the same relationship with a member of the same race. It was also perceived as more acceptable for the woman to hold her beliefs when the relationship in question was high ( $M = 2.40$ ) versus low ( $M = 3.38$ ) in physical contact,  $F(1, 180) = 9.88$ ,  $p < .002$ . Neither the main effect of emotional commitment ( $M_s = 3.01$  and  $2.78$  for low and high, respectively) nor of time course of the relationship was significant ( $M_s = 2.96$  and  $2.83$  for low and high, respectively) (both  $F_s < 1.00$ ). The main effect of the physical nature of the relationship was significant for both cross-race,  $F(1, 99) = 4.96$ ,  $p < .05$ , as well as same-race,  $F(1, 94) = 4.75$ ,  $p < .05$ , behaviors.

These results suggest that the amount of physical contact within a relationship leads it to be perceived as an issue of personal choice regardless of whether the relationship is same-race or cross-race. Participants rated it as more all right for a woman to indicate that she would not engage in a particular type of relationship when that relationship was high, versus low, in physical contact. Neither the race or gender of the participant, the degree of emotional involvement, nor the expected length of the commitment to the relationship mattered, and relationships that were high in physical contact were seen as issues of personal choice regardless of whether the relationship was within-race or cross-race.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

We predicted that participants would show significantly different judgments regarding the appropriateness of excluding others on the basis of their race in intimate versus nonintimate contexts. Supporting this hypothesis, Study 1 showed that racial exclusion was seen as inappropriate in nonintimate contexts because it was perceived as unfair. Furthermore, those who excluded others in these contexts were

perceived to do so because of racist beliefs. This was true even for a behavior—voting for one's preferred candidate—that might have been *a priori* considered to be an issue of personal choice (see Nucci, 1996). That is, individuals typically evaluate voting as a personal choice; yet when race enters the decision, this is viewed as wrong from a moral viewpoint. This type of reasoning, however, was not applied to the dating scenario. Participants viewed dating as a personal choice even when race entered into the decision. Decisions about intimate relationships were viewed to a large extent as a matter of personal choice and were justified primarily in terms of issues of personal incompatibility and (to a lesser degree) the goal of avoiding negative social sanctions. Furthermore, the findings from Study 2 suggest that what causes intimate relationships to be perceived as an issue of personal choice is the physical contact that accompanies them, rather than the emotional or long-term nature of the relationship.

Our findings support Laursen and Collin's (1994) assertion that intimate relationships are "voluntary." The participants in this study viewed choice of a dating partner as a personal choice, even in the context of a decision to use race as a criterion. Although our participants upheld the notion of personal choice as most important in intimate relationships, they did not necessarily condone using race as a factor, even in this context. A decision to not date someone on the basis of race was viewed as a bad decision, and many participants used moral reasoning in their justifications despite their overall assessment that a dating partner is a personal choice.

The results provided support for our expectation that multiple forms of reasoning are brought to bear on decisions about cross-race intimate relationships. This is because these types of decisions are viewed as complex and not unidimensional or straightforward (see Killen, Lee-Kim, et al., 2002). From a developmental viewpoint, it is of interest to understand the origins of these types of judgments. How early do individuals begin to view intimate relationships as a personal decision, and when does race enter this type of decision making? Research on intimate relationships in adolescence has shown that adolescents begin to weigh many factors when deciding whom to date (Laursen & Williams, 1997). Little research has been conducted on whether race is used as a factor; however, observational research suggests that cross-race dating is still quite infrequent. Fortunately,

About et al.'s (2003) findings suggest that cross-race friendships, although infrequent, reflect the same characteristics as same-race friendships. One difference between cross-race and same-race friendships had to do with perceived intimacy. This suggests that there are negative associations with engaging in cross-race intimate relationships that begin in adolescence. More research on this issue is clearly warranted.

Although it was not a primary focus of our research, we were able to make comparisons in how the vignettes were interpreted across the ethnic and gender makeup of our sample. We did not find any ethnicity of participant differences on any measures in either study. It is not impossible that these null effects were due to the relatively small sample sizes we obtained, but the fact that there were no significant effects in either study is probably more consistent with the expectation that the perceptions of social relationships are similar for majority and minority group members. It is likely that members of a given community (for instance, college students at a given university) come to agreement about the appropriateness of social behaviors, and thus this agreement is not unexpected. Nevertheless, it might be useful in future research to replicate these studies using larger and more ethnically diverse samples to investigate how the ethnicity of the participant might play a role in these types of judgments.

In terms of gender, women viewed race-based decisions as more wrong than did men. This supports prior findings that females evaluate exclusion based on group membership (gender, race, reference groups) as more wrong than do males (Horn, 2003; Horn, Killen, & Stangor, 1999; Killen & Stangor, 2001) as well as prior reports that females are more prosocial and less prejudiced than are males (Wentzel & Erdley, 1993). It is possible that females' experiences with exclusion (for instance in sports or other activities) lead them to be more empathic about the wrongfulness of exclusion, especially in a complex situation involving personal decisions, social feedback, and unfairness.

Our sample only included college students. Although we selected this group because they are highly focused on dating and were expected to be willing to accurately portray their views on this topic, it is possible that other individuals may have different opinions. For instance, whether young adults who have not attended college would



differ from those we studied is not known, and it would be important in future research to collect data from community samples.

Finally, we should consider whether the results may have been influenced by demand characteristics that were used in this vignette methodology. Although it is possible that participants were not giving us their true opinions, we did make the questionnaires completely anonymous. Furthermore, the substantial differences in judgments across vignettes suggests that the students were not simply giving socially desirable answers but were rather responding to the characteristics of the vignettes.

It would be useful to extend this work with the goal of better understanding the factors that enable individuals to judge that it is wrong to use race as a criterion when voting for someone but not when deciding whom to date. Granted, participants judged that dating is a personal choice and that using race is not a good reason. Nevertheless, some participants were willing to condone an individual's decision to refrain from dating someone because of the color of their skin. This suggests that race continues to be a salient factor in the decision making of many individuals, despite extensive research in the scientific literature, which has indicated that race, as a dichotomous category (e.g., White vs. Black), has little validity (see Gould, 1981; Graves, 2001). Furthermore, extensive research on aversive racism (or implicit biases) indicates that race is pervasive in unconscious attitudes (see Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986). Although we identified a context in which individuals use race as a reason for decision making about social relationships, there is much more work to be done on how and why race continues to be pervasive in psychological judgments and attitudes.

## APPENDIX A

### Coding Categories

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#### A. Justification Categories: Reasons for Decision to Exclude

1. Moral: appeals to the maintenance of fairness and equality in the treatment of persons (e.g., "It wouldn't be fair to not vote for him"; "Everyone should be treated the same"), to the rights of individuals (e.g., "He has a right to run for president if he wants"), to the wrongfulness of discrimination based on race (e.g., "You shouldn't discriminate against someone just because of their color"), and to prejudice and racism is wrong (e.g., "It's wrong to be prejudiced").

2. Social-conventional: appeals to social-conventional expectations of the group (e.g., "She might be afraid of what others will think if she dates a Black person"), customs (e.g., "It's not polite to decline an invitation"), cultural norms of a society (e.g., "People are supposed to date within their race. White people aren't supposed to date Black people"), and disapproval from peers, parents, or society (e.g., "Her parents might not approve of her dating a Black person").
3. Psychological: appeals to personal choice (e.g., "She can date whomever she wants"), psychological incompatibility (e.g., "Maybe she doesn't have anything in common with him"), and personal preference for certain features or traits of physical attractiveness (e.g., "Maybe she isn't attracted to Black men").
4. Other (noncodable, missing)

**B. Coordination Coding: Weighing Different Considerations When Evaluating an Event**

1. One reason: only one category is used to make a decision: moral (e.g., "She's a racist"), social-conventional (e.g., "Society wouldn't accept them"), or psychological (e.g., "She can date whomever she wants").
2. Two reasons: moral and social-conventional (e.g., "Everyone should be treated equally, but society still will not understand"), or moral and psychological (e.g., "She isn't really being fair, but I guess she can date whomever she wants"), social-conventional and psychological (e.g., "Even though society might frown on her, it's still her personal choice").
3. Noncodable

**C. Attributions: Reasons Used for Why Someone Might Exclude Someone on the Basis of Race**

1. Prejudice, racist beliefs: holds negative stereotypes about Black people (e.g., "She's probably prejudiced against him because he's Black"; "She's just ignorant").
  2. Avoidance of negative social feedback from peers, family, or society (e.g., "Her friends wouldn't accept her"; "Her mom or dad probably taught her that different races shouldn't mix"; "Society looks down on that type of behavior").
  3. Psychological and/or physical incompatibility (e.g., "Maybe she doesn't think they will get along"; "Maybe they have different interests"; "She's probably not attracted to him").
  4. Negative feelings and general affect statements (e.g., "She probably dated a Black person before and didn't like it"; "She may feel weird or scared").
  5. Same-race preference (e.g., "She doesn't want to date someone of a different race").
  6. Noncodable
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**APPENDIX B**  
**Scenarios Used in Study 2**

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1. High physical commitment, high emotional commitment, high long-term commitment:

Jenny heard about a woman who is engaged to be married to a man. The man and woman are emotionally very close and have lived together for a year. They plan to get married and stay together for the rest of their lives.

2. High physical commitment, high emotional commitment, low long-term commitment:

Jenny heard about a woman who had a spring break affair with a man. The man and woman felt very emotionally close to one another. Even though they had just met, they spent the entire week of their spring break together in the same hotel room. On the last day they said good-bye to each other knowing they would never see each other again.

3. High physical commitment, low emotional commitment, high long-term commitment:

Jenny heard about a woman who has been having an affair with a man for over a year. The man and woman don't have much in common and are not very close emotionally. They sleep together one or two nights a week and plan on keeping their relationship this way indefinitely.

4. High physical commitment, low emotional commitment, low long-term commitment:

Jenny heard about a woman who met a man in a bar and had a one-night stand with him. The man and woman were instantly physically attracted to each other but had very little in common beyond that and were not emotionally involved. In the morning they said good-bye to each other knowing they would never see each other again.

5. Low physical commitment, high emotional commitment, high long-term commitment:

Jenny heard about a woman whose best friend is a man. The two are not physically attracted to each other, but they share a strong emotional bond and will always be best friends.

6. Low physical commitment, high emotional commitment, low long-term commitment:

Jenny heard about a woman who, while on vacation, met a man at the local coffee shop. The two were not physically attracted to each other but had a lot in common and became very emotionally close to each other. They shared a very special few hours together. After their conversation they said good-bye to each other knowing they would never see each other again.

7. Low physical commitment, low emotional commitment, high long-term commitment:

Jenny heard about a woman who works in the same office as a man. The two are not physically attracted to each other and are not emotionally very close. They work together on a regular basis and both plan on being with the company for at least 1 year.

8. Low physical commitment, low emotional commitment, low long-term commitment:

Jenny heard about a woman who sat next to a man one day on the Metro. The two were not physically attracted to each other nor did they speak to each other during their commute. When they got off the train they knew they would never see each other again.

## NOTE

1. To assess the generalization of the phenomenon, we conducted a preliminary study and varied both the race and gender of the individuals who were excluded. Four different versions of each scenario were created in which (a) a Black male excluded a White female, (b) a White male excluded a Black female, (c) a Black female excluded a White male, and (d) a White female excluded a Black male. Initial analyses assessed the effect of variation in the race of the two actors in the scenarios (White male excludes Black female; Black female excludes White male; Black male excludes White female; White female excludes Black male) as well as race of participant. Because there were no significant effects of either of these variables in any of the analyses to be reported, we used only one version of the interview in this report, that of a White woman who makes a decision based on race pertaining to a Black man. However, our power was low due to the number of conditions that we had to administer to conduct this comparison. Because the focus of this study was on a contrast of a minority being excluded, and because women are typically in the position of accepting or rejecting an offer to date, however, we chose to focus on a White female excluding a Black male rather than to increase our sample size solely to conduct all possible comparisons. A study of all possible relationship comparisons is a study in and of itself and did not constitute the main focus of this research. We recommend, based on this study, that future work be conducted to compare all different types of relationship conditions.

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*Melanie Killen, Ph.D. (1985 from University of California, Berkeley), is a developmental psychologist and professor of human development at the University of Maryland, as well as the associate director for the Center for Children, Relationships, and Culture. She is the associate editor for the journal Human Development and has received funding from the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation for her research on children's and adolescents' social reasoning about exclusion and rights. She has coedited four books and published over 50 journal articles and book chapters. Her research interests are social development, moral development, and specifically how children, adolescents, and adults evaluate exclusion on the basis of group membership, such as gender, race, and ethnicity.*

*Charles Stangor is a professor of psychology in the social psychology area at the University of Maryland and has also taught at the University of Tübingen in Germany. He received his B.A. from Beloit College in 1973 and his Ph.D. from New York University in 1986. He is the recipient of research grants from the National Institute of Mental Health and from the National Science Foundation. He has published seven books and over 50 research articles and book chapters and has served as an associate editor of the European Journal of Social Psychology. His research interests concern the development of stereotypes and prejudice and their influences on individuals who are potential targets. He is a charter fellow of the American Psychological Society and currently serves as a member of the executive committee of the Society for Experimental Social Psychology. He won a distinguished teaching award from the University of Maryland.*

*B. Sefton Price, M.Ed. (University of Maryland), runs a nonprofit organization designed to disseminate information to families and individuals deemed worthy of social assistance programs. His research interests are social development and family development.*

*Stacey Horn, Ph.D. (2000, University of Maryland), is an assistant professor of educational psychology at the University of Illinois, Chicago. She has served as an ad hoc reviewer for a number of developmental journals, including Journal of Early Education and Development and the Journal for Research on Adolescence. She won the APA (Division 7) Dissertation award for her dissertation project on how adolescents evaluate exclusion from peer groups and cliques. Her research areas include peer harassment in adolescence, specifically based on peer group membership, gender identity, and sexual orientation, as well as the relationships between adolescents' beliefs about sexual orientation and their reasoning about intergroup relationships.*

*Gretchen B. Sechrist, Ph.D. (2000, University of Maryland), is an assistant professor of psychology at the University at Buffalo, The State University of New York. She received a National Research Service Award from the National Institute of Mental Health for her project investigating the determinants and consequences of denying discrimination. Her research interests are in the general domains of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination and their applications in everyday life.*