

# Disciplined Preferences: Explaining the (Re)Production of Latino Endogamy

Jessica M. Vasquez

University of Oregon

## ABSTRACT

While racial intermarriage is heralded as the last stage in integration processes, endogamy (intragroup marriage) is the overwhelming norm in the United States. What are the familial, dating, and community processes that produce endogamy? Drawing from 70 in-depth interviews with heterosexual Latinos concerning dating and marriage, this article reports that surveillance, punishment, and self-discipline harden racial boundaries and induce endogamy. Typically construed as highly personal, romantic preferences are, in fact, socially constructed and policed through family, peer, and community-level processes. “Third parties” such as family members, friends, and community members enforce intramarriage via advice, threats, censure, and violence. In turn, outsiders’ surveillance and punishment converts into self-discipline, which constrains romantic preferences and choices. To maintain social distance, both non-Hispanic whites and Latinos discipline their kin and their kin’s cross-racial romantic interests away from those who stand lower on the racial order. Latinos enjoy racial privilege relative to African Americans and preserve privilege by excluding blacks as romantic possibilities. Latino endogamy is a disciplined response to accumulated racial messages and racial boundary policing. Results show that racial communities are invested in perpetuating endogamy to preserve relative privilege and exert social pressures that largely support the contemporary racial hierarchy.

**KEYWORDS:** Latinos/as; dating; marriage, intermarriage; endogamy; race relations; skin color.

While courtship and marriage are often thought of as products of individual agency and “mythic love” (Swidler 2001), legal and social practices circumscribe personal preferences about sexual intimacy.<sup>1</sup> Because families are seen as the foundation of the social order (Moran 2001), their regulation has been

The author thanks Christopher Wetzel, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, Eileen Otis, Jill Harrison, Jiannbin Shiao, Aaron Gullickson, C. J. Pascoe, Kemi Balogun, Patricia Gwartney, and Matthew Norton for insightful feedback on earlier drafts. Appreciation also goes to audience members of a panel at the Annual Meeting of the Pacific Sociological Association in 2014 who pushed this scholarship forward through stimulating questions and comments. This project was funded by the American Sociological Association/National Science Foundation Fund for the Advancement of the Discipline, the Ford Foundation, the Russell Sage Foundation, the University of Kansas, and the University of Oregon. Direct correspondence to: Jessica M. Vasquez, Department of Sociology, 1291 University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403-1291. E-mail: vasquezj@uoregon.edu.

1 While this article concerns heterosexual couples, it is worth noting that heterosexuality itself is highly regulated and rewarded (Schildt and Westbrook 2009) and nonconformity is punished (Pascoe 2007). A study that compares interracial heterosexual and same-sex partnerships suggests that institutional protections benefit interracial straight couples whereas a double minority status (being queer and interracial) can aid connection among cross-racial gay couples (Steinbugler 2012:125, 128).

“a primary means through which a racially divided and racist society has been maintained” (Dalmage 2000:2). Historically, the state through the legal system orchestrated the marriage and reproductive pool by excluding certain national origin groups from the country (Haney López 1996). Similarly, anti-miscegenation laws sought to prevent racial mixing and “to protect ‘whiteness’” (Root 2001:35). Although anti-miscegenation laws were struck down in 1967 (Kennedy 2003), intermarriage rates remain low, moving from “nearly nonexistent to merely atypical” (Taylor, Funk, and Craighill 2006:1). If race did not undergird societal organization, cross-racial intimacy would be far more common.

Today, race continues to organize intimate relationships. Despite a decline in racial endogamy in the twentieth century, race persists as the most powerful division in the marriage market (Rosenfeld 2008). Endogamy (intragroup relations) is commonplace, reflected by 87 percent of people in the United States marrying within their own racial category (Bean and Stevens 2003; Lee and Bean 2010). In 2008, the intermarriage rates for native-born Americans were 7.1 percent for whites, 17.4 percent for blacks, 72.5 percent for Asians, and 52.5 percent for Latinos (Lee and Bean 2010:87). Latino endogamy persists (61.1 percent in 2005 [Rosenfeld 2008:12]) despite immigrant families residing in the United States for generations (Telles and Ortiz 2008:265). In 2010, a mere 4.3 percent of married couples contained one Hispanic and one non-Hispanic, these intermarriages concentrated in Western states (Lofquist et al. 2012:17; Rosenfeld 2002).

Low incidence of intermarriage is consequential: sociologist Robert Merton ([1941] 2000) observed that endogamy “is a device which serves to maintain social prerogatives . . . within a social group. It helps prevent the diffusion of power, authority, and preferred status to persons who are not affiliated with a dominant group” (p. 483). Low intermarriage is problematic because it instantiates monoracial families as the norm, leaving racially mixed families to appear aberrant (Childs 2005; Rockquemore and Henderson 2010). Moreover, racial endogamy concentrates material and symbolic privilege or disadvantage, deepening a gulf between racial categories.

Fueled by both immigration and births, the Latino population is growing more rapidly than the white or black population (Passel, Livingston, and Cohn 2012). Hispanics account for nearly 17 percent of the U.S. population, blacks amount to 13 percent, and non-Hispanic whites stand at 63 percent (U.S. Census 2012). Beyond their demographic importance, Latinos are a significant case because of their position in the “racial middle” (O’Brien 2008), their marriage patterns portending whether they will eventually become “whites,” “honorary whites,” or part of a “collective black” category (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Haney López 1996; Lee and Bean 2010; Marrow 2011). Some argue that higher intermarriage rates between non-black racial minorities (Latinos and Asians) and whites than blacks and whites signals that the boundaries of whiteness are expanding to include formerly excluded groups (Lee and Bean 2010; Yancey 2003). However, while Latinos may see more cultural similarities between their group and whites than blacks (Lee and Bean 2010), I challenge the assumption that higher rates of Latino/white intermarriage than black/white intermarriage translates to Latinos moving up and out of the racial middle. When intermarriage is used a barometer of assimilation (Gordon 1964), a way to infer integration with the dominant racial group, scholars miss an opportunity to theorize meso-level processes that racialize Latinos as non-white and divert them away from intermarriage.

Persistently low intermarriage rates leads to these questions: Why does high racial endogamy persist in an era without legal proscription? And, how do groups constitute themselves and entrench racial divisions through interactional practices? By drawing on retrospective interviews from racially intermarried and intramarried couples that involve at least one Latino person, I demonstrate the social pressures that bear on intimacy and argue that what we conceive of as personal preferences are actually socially constructed and reinforce the racial hierarchy. My chief argument is that the selection of a marriage partner is circumscribed by what I call disciplined preferences. Disciplined preferences are internalized romantic tastes that are produced through racialized social practices—including violence, threats, censure, and advice—that condition Latinos to date and marry intraracially. Heather Dalmage (2000) uses the term “border patrolling” to denote how meso-level actors such as families, peers, and the community affect individual choices. I demonstrate how border-patrolling practices are

internalized as self-discipline and reproduce endogamy. I also use the concepts of surveillance, punishment, and self-discipline to explain the continued high level of racial endogamy in a social system where intermarriage is legal.<sup>2</sup> The mechanisms that enforce endogamy include: family surveillance, violence or threats from an in-group or out-group, group stereotypes, and notions of cultural fit.

### EXPLAINING ENDOGAMY: BORDER PATROLLING BY THIRD PARTIES

Residential segregation is strongly related to endogamy (Landale, Oropesa, and Bradatan 2006; Rosenfeld 2009; Stevens and Swicegood 1987), dividing populations by race and class, thereby limiting interracial contact and possibilities for romantic liaisons. Due to the “sheer force of propinquity” (Alba and Nee 2003:99), ethnic neighborhoods foster endogamy, whereas intermarried couples are more often located outside of ethnic neighborhoods (Alba, Jiménez, and Marrow 2014; Telles and Ortiz 2008). Spatial isolation reduces the chances of meeting and becoming intimate with outgroup members and yet socialization practices and bias may also be operative (Kalmijn 1998). How racial prejudice and informal sanctions perpetuate segregation and endogamous pairings deserves greater analytic attention (Kreager 2008).

In part due to spatial separation, Hispanic intraracial dating and marriage rates remain high, especially in regions with a large supply of Hispanics that offer both native and foreign-born mates, minority group size inversely related to out-marriage rates (Landale et al. 2006; Lichter et al. 2007; Qian and Lichter 2007, 2011). Latino interracial marriage increases with generations in the United States (Chavez 2008; Landale and Oropesa 2007; Murguía 1982; Telles and Ortiz 2008), as well as across time periods since 1970 (Rosenfeld and Kim 2005).<sup>3</sup> While this macro-level demographic argument is relevant, so too are family and community-level border patrolling practices that discipline individuals to perceive degrees of appropriateness linked to different racial groups.

Symbolic boundary literature shows that individuals and groups use moral discourses to maintain group worth, to position one group above others, and to guard against the erosion of advantage (Lamont and Molnar 2002; Roth 2012; Sherman 2009). Endogamy is a boundary that maintains social closure, prohibits others’ access to valuable resources, and is encoded in representations of social life that construct interracial relations as deviant (Childs 2009). If the objective of boundary work is to differentiate a group from others (Roth 2012), intraracial sexual relations are a powerful tool to enforce social closure and visibly perpetuate, through monoracial families, group cohesion. Endogamy is the ultimate symbolic boundary enforcer in that it “support[s] the social structure by helping to fix social distances . . . between groups” (Merton [1941] 2000:483). I propose that a cogent way to explain endogamy is to link the structural argument of segregation with community-level enactments of boundaries. The question then becomes: How do people enforce and internalize the social edict of intramarriage?

Expanding on the classic explanations of residential segregation and symbolic boundaries, I demonstrate how endogamy is policed through informal, interpersonal border patrolling. “Border patrolling” is a form of discrimination that stems from “the belief that people should stick to their own, taking race and racial categories for granted” (Dalmage 2000:42). Boundary surveillance perpetuates the myth of group homogeneity, punishes boundary crossers, and may be internalized to limit transgressions. In his seminal piece on intermarriage and homogamy, Matthijs Kalmijn (1998:400) theorizes “third parties,” namely family, the church, and the state, as powerful actors that discourage exogamy because of threat to group cohesion. Building on Kalmijn’s (1998) assertion that empirical

2 I use Foucault’s (1995) concepts of surveillance and discipline as a starting point, though our definitions of discipline vary significantly. Whereas Foucault theorizes that subjectivity is produced through disciplinary power, I maintain that subjects understand external disciplinary actions and restrictions as social facts and largely conform accordingly. In my usage, subjects do not necessarily *believe* in their circumscribed social power, their subjectivity more removed from the disciplinary process than Foucault theorized.

3 These generation and period findings are distinct from age; individuals are decreasingly likely to be in an interracial relationship as they age from 18 to 35 years old (Joyner and Kao 2005:536).

research on third-party control provides too little information on “what these parties in fact are doing” (p. 418, emphasis added), this article elaborates how intraracial and interracial exchanges support endogamy and preserve group positions in the racial hierarchy. Previous research has not sufficiently analyzed the mechanisms that discourage intermarriage and focuses principally on black/white couples (Childs 2005; Dalmage 2000; Root 2001; Steinbugler 2012; Twine 2010). This article addresses the limitations of prior research: it details the social processes that systematically undermine intermarriage and it moves beyond the black/white divide to examine Latinos.

My theoretical proposition is to explain racial endogamy by demonstrating how meso-level social forces, including family, peer, and community, construct individual subjectivities and actions. Borrowing from social psychologist Kay Deaux (2006:4), the meso level is “a point of focus that links the individual to the social system” where social interaction takes place. Family- and community-enforced surveillance as well as self-discipline—the internalization of societal power—help explain the continued high level of racial endogamy in a social system where intermarriage is legal. Violence and intimidation have been historically effective deterrents to intermarriage as “groups actively police each other to ensure that domination is maintained” by means of “threats of violence or actual violence” (Childs 2009; Collins 2008:267; Hodes 1997). Focusing on the interactional level of analysis is crucial because race is “performative . . . [racial and] ethnic boundaries . . . constituted by day-to-day affirmations, reinforcements, and enactments of . . . differences” (Nagel 2000:111, emphasis in original). This article fleshes out the interactional mechanisms by which third parties, such as family, peers and community, engrave racial and sexual boundaries.

Using an intersectionality framework aids in the interpretation of how interactional, meso-level border patrolling tactics vary by axes of difference such as gender, region, skin color, and generation. As Patricia Hill Collins (2008) argues, “oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type . . . [instead] oppressions work together in producing injustice” (p. 21). From this intersecting oppressions perspective, we can better understand how surveillance, policing, and regulatory and punishment techniques vary according to salient social features. In what follows I demonstrate how border-patrolling mechanisms (family surveillance and censure, violence and threats of violence, group stereotypes, and ideas about cultural fit) operating at the meso level may vary according to social location and yet produce conformity. Reacting to family and community pressures, most individuals discipline their intimacy preferences and “choose” to abide by the convention of same-race romances.

## METHODS

This article draws from 70 in-depth, life history interviews with heterosexual Latinos in endogamous and exogamous marriages and their adult children living independently. I include both partners in Latino intramarriages but only Latino partners of intermarriages for, while they married exogamously, their dating histories and counsel to their children concerning marriage is useful information. These data are drawn from a larger comparative project on dating and marriage histories among Latinos and their partners.

Of the 70 Latino interviewees, 29 are men whereas 41 are women. Sixty-five are married, four are divorced, and one is single/never married. Six adult children of married interviewees (one single/never married, three married, two divorced) were interviewed about their romantic lives, allowing me access to intergenerational family narratives of race. All interviewees self-identify as Latino; 56 are U.S. born and 14 are foreign born.

The sample is predominantly comprised of people with Mexican ancestry. Of 70 interviewees, 49 are monoethnic Mexican American, 13 are multiethnic Mexican American (10 with white parentage and 3 with Native American parentage), and 8 have other Latin American ancestry. My field sites in the Southwest and Midwest yielded a largely Mexican American set of interviewees, which reflects the Mexican-origin population’s majority share of the U.S. Latino population (63 percent in 2010) as well as their concentration in these regions (Lopez and Dockterman 2011). That most interviewees

are Mexican origin may not reflect the experiences of Latinos from other regions, and particularly those from the Caribbean who may have African ancestry. To ascertain how skin color may affect dating and partnering experiences, I created a skin color measure and coded interviewees according to a five-point scale (1 = racially white appearance; 2 = light-tan; 3 = medium-tan; 4 = dark-tan; 5 = racially black appearance). I selected one picture of a Latino celebrity from the Spanish-language *People* magazine website<sup>4</sup> as the exemplar for each skin color code. This skin color measure does not account for physical features such as facial characteristics or hair texture. I then assigned each interviewee the skin color code that corresponded to their skin tone. While the racial heritage of the Mexican-origin population is itself mixed, including European, indigenous, and African ancestry (Ortiz and Telles 2012), the interviewees are predominately light- and medium-skinned Latinos, limiting my findings to these populations (see Table A1 in the Appendix for characteristics of interviewees).

Interviewees range in socioeconomic status, as measured by education and individual income, though the bulk are middle class. Nineteen percent have a high school degree or less, about half of them have some college or a college degree, and 30 percent have a graduate degree. Individual income measures follow suit with 20 percent below \$30,000, approximately half of the interviewees in the mid-range \$30,000 to \$70,000 brackets, and 26 percent above \$70,000.<sup>5</sup> While a range of class statuses are represented, about half of the interviewees are middle class, with less representation from lower and upper class strata. Implications of this mild skew may be that prohibitions against interracial intimacy work differently for lower-class and higher-class individuals (Fu 2001).

Latino interviewees are involved in three types of partnerships: Latino/Latino intramarriage, Latino/white intermarriage, and Latino/non-Latino minority intermarriage (including Asian Americans, African Americans, and Native Americans). Forty-seven interviewees are in the Latino/Latino intraracial marriage category (3 divorced), 16 Latinos are in the Latino/white intermarriage category (2 divorced), and 6 Latinos are in Latino/non-Latino racial minority intermarriage category. I purposely oversampled intramarried Latinos because their perspectives are crucial to the topic of endogamy. There is near parity of interviewees across field sites: 36 interviewees are located in Los Angeles County, California and 34 are located in the northeast region of Kansas (Topeka, Lawrence, and Kansas City). More intramarried Latinos hail from California (32 of 47) whereas more Latinos intermarried with whites reside in Kansas (13 of 16). This unevenness likely reflects the distinct “marriage markets” that ensue from the concentration of Latinos in Los Angeles County and the predominance of whites in northeastern Kansas.

The rationale for selecting California and Kansas is to compare a traditional migration gateway that borders Mexico and boasts a racially diverse population with a predominantly white state distant from the border. California’s population is 39.4 percent non-Hispanic white, whereas Kansas’ population is 85 percent non-Hispanic white, and the nation’s population is 63 percent non-Hispanic white. The nation is comprised of 16.9 percent Hispanic persons (of any race) whereas California, at 38.2 percent Hispanic, is over double that figure and Kansas, at 11 percent Hispanic, is well below the national percentage (U.S. Census 2012). Regional comparisons can yield information concerning the importance of place, from the salience of immigration patterns to race relations (Jiménez 2010; Marrow 2011).

Initially I recruited interviewees through community institutions such as Latino organizations, high schools,<sup>6</sup> Catholic churches, and professional contacts. I also recruited interviewees using snowball sampling by asking interviewees to identify potential interviewees. These recruitment methods elicited referrals from different social networks, which diversified the pool of interviewees. Thirty-six

4 Last retrieved May 28, 2015 ([www.peopleespanol.com/](http://www.peopleespanol.com/)).

5 I did not systematically collect class background data from interviewees’ youth. To the extent I have this data, I draw on it in the empirical sections.

6 I sought out students who identified as (part) Latino and interviewed them and their parents. I excluded the high school students in this article but retained their parents.

interviewees were recruited through snowball sampling, and the rest by referral from Latino organizations (11), high schools (6), Catholic churches (2), and professional contacts (15).

Interviews were conducted in person at a location of the interviewee's choice, usually their home, workplace, or a public coffee shop. Most interviews were individual and in those instances in which I interviewed marriage partners separately, I kept information from the first partner interview confidential. I interviewed three couples jointly at their request. These interviews took on more dynamic forms as couples sometimes prodded each other's memory, asked each other to fill in details, or suggested that the spouse tell me a particular story. As a token of appreciation, I paid each interviewee \$20.00. All names have been replaced with pseudonyms that correspond to interviewees' Hispanic or Anglophone first and last names.

In-depth interviews allow for discovery, complexity, and unexpected insights that emerge from people's narratives (Chambliss and Schutt 2012) and thus were appropriate for my research. Open-ended questions allowed interviewees to reply at length on meaningful points and a semistructured interview protocol allowed me to pursue themes. I used a life history approach, inquiring about interviewees' racial background, identity claims, natal family, dating history, marital family, childrearing strategies if they were parents, and cultural practices. The interview protocol was sharpened over time, a process of "progressive focusing" (Chambliss and Schutt 2012) wherein conducting interviews provides insight into which questions are crucial and others that need to be added to access pertinent themes. This process of "discovery" and progressive focusing hones the interview schedule and leads to conceptual categories that I used during data analysis. One methodological difficulty with this type of research is asking people to retrospectively assign thoughts, feelings, or motivations to past actions. While answers may shift over time, I was interested in how people articulated the process of making marriage decisions, which I tapped into within the limitations of a cross-sectional research design.

All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Field notes written after each interview captured personal affect that gets lost in written transcripts as well as any pertinent information such as an interviewee's physical appearance, demeanor, and tone during the interview. In addition, field notes include descriptions of neighborhood, home décor, and family interactions observed during the interview.

I used an inductive approach to analyze the data (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss 1987), allowing for categories to emerge from the data upon analysis, as opposed to approaching data analysis with preconceived categories. I used Dedoose, a qualitative data analysis software program that allows researchers to code sections of interview material based on keywords and themes. During the coding process, I identified common patterns and exceptional cases as well as key quotations that illustrate prominent themes. I also wrote analytic memos on the similarities and differences across cases and searched out repeated themes as well as departures from trends. Interviews were grouped according to emergent themes.

On a reflexive note, my social position as a Latina who is half Caucasian and half Mexican American likely facilitated access to the population studied. Most interviewees were remarkably open with me, yet the topic of sexuality was treated differently by gender: women spoke more liberally and explicitly about sexuality, in particular sex acts or sexual assault, whereas men were more reserved in discussing sexuality, sometimes chuckling uncomfortably. I suspect the difference in demeanor and topics covered was due to my gender and presumed heterosexuality.

### THE (RE)PRODUCTION OF ENDOGAMY

Analysis of the data yielded four main findings that collectively demonstrate the production of endogamous partnerships. First, I show how residential segregation limits dating options and shapes preferences by restricting the field of possibilities. Second, I show how Latinos discipline their preferences away from whites by internalizing punishment and interpreting whites as "incompatible" mates. Third, I examine how white parents discourage their children's interracial relationships with Latinos. Finally, I illustrate how Latinos deploy anti-black prejudice to safeguard their position in an intermediate position in the racial hierarchy. I argue that disciplined preference is the result of racialized and

gendered treatment of Latinos that punishes interracial intimacy and encourages racial endogamy. Just as this preference is disciplined, so too is it disciplining: this acquired preference shapes the self while simultaneously marginalizing subordinated racial out-groups.

### Segregation and Socioeconomic Status

Endogamy is associated with both segregation and socioeconomic status: underclass Mexican Americans who do not attend college—and do not experience expanded marriage pools—but continue to live in segregated ethnic enclaves are unlikely to intermarry (Landale et al. 2006). Due to spatial isolation, neighborhood public schools concentrate racially homogenous communities, delimiting dating options (Alba and Nee 2003; Lichter et al. 2007; Massey and Denton 1993; Rosenfeld 2009). Julia and Lisandro Quinonez, both Mexican American, agree that living in predominantly Latino East LA made endogamous romance seem inevitable. Julia remarked, “our high school was like 90 percent Latino. . . my [dating] options were pretty limited [laughing]. . . Everybody was Mexican.” Lisandro concurred, “Because everybody was Chicano or Latino in high school, it wasn’t really a question.” Residential segregation is not exclusively a California issue, as 46-year-old Cynthia Herrera-Redgrave from Kansas made clear: “When I was [in] high school I. . . [thought] I was gonna marry somebody who was Mexican. . . That’s what I mostly [saw] around me.” Neighborhood segregation naturalizes endogamous partnerships, shaping fields of vision in both a practical and cognitive sense. As Cynthia stated, “You wouldn’t even think about it.”

Thirty-six-year-old Vincent Venegas, who arrived in the United States from Mexico at age seven, lived amongst poor Mexican Americans and African Americans in Los Angeles in his youth. Residential propinquity shaped Vincent’s understanding of racial boundaries and attractiveness: “I had several crushes on African Americans and Latinas. . . I didn’t perceive the other races to find my race or myself attractive. . . I dated Latina and African American. . . We were close [in social] class.” His gang affiliation limited his social circle and disciplined his preferences to include similarly lower-class non-white groups: “Since I was a gang member. . . the possibilities are even smaller. You encircle yourself in a little bubble of. . . gang life: the gang members and the gang girls. I built myself a smaller bubble and it contained me.”

One of the poorer interviewees in his youth, who stopped his education at high school, Vincent’s segregated adolescence was his “little bubble” that naturalized dating within his socioeconomic stratum. In a social environment that “contained” him, segregation supplanted the need for active discipline and shaped his notions of attractiveness and his marital outcome (he married a local Mexican American “party girl”). Residential segregation curtails dating options, this structural characteristic eradicating the need for meso-level discipline by making endogamous partnerships seem inevitable.

The least geographically mobile groups are endogamously married and, inversely, intermarriage is most common among the more educated classes (Alba et al. 2014; Kalmijn 1998, 2010; Spickard 1991; Telles and Ortiz 2008). Slightly more than half of my interviewees earned a college degree or higher, this higher educational and class status assuaging third parties’ concerns around downward class mobility. College-educated individuals who dated interracially faced less discipline than their lower-educated counterparts. Not only did the college-educated experience expanded dating pools, they were usually removed from their family’s sphere of influence, this independence tempering criticism (Rosenfeld 2009). In contrast, interviewees without college education led more segregated lives with fewer opportunities for cross-racial dating. If the less educated crossed the color line, they faced harsher forms of discipline than their higher-educated peers because if dating “up,” their low class status multiplied their disadvantage and unsuitability and if dating “down,” they faced tighter social control by spatially proximate kin and peers.

### Learned Incompatibility: Racialized Rebuffs, Failed Romance, and Familial Pressure

Outside of segregated spaces, which structurally limit choice, repeated racializing and disciplining encounters teach Latinos to curtail their romantic options. These racist social forces meant to preserve

white privilege accumulate to a *learned incompatibility* with whites, which Latinos nonetheless reinterpret as a “choice” to preserve their agency.<sup>7</sup> Repeated rejection taught Latino men and women to discipline their preferences in socially acceptable ways, and interviewees used a language of defeat (“it’ll never work out”) to explain their dim prospects with whites.

Latinos’ learned incompatibility with whites results from displeasing interracial dating experiences. Omar Zelaya, a 48-year-old U.S.-born son of immigrants, internalized repeated racial messages from women who declined to date him:

I got along with white women fine. I had no problem with them. But, I used to shy away from them a little bit more . . . We couldn’t be as readily acceptable to each other . . . Some of these white girls . . . didn’t really pay attention to you . . . [they were] stuck up or arrogant . . . Maybe my accent gave me away . . . Some of them were . . . unfriendly [and] had the tendency to . . . brush you off.

Disregard from white women disciplined Omar to avoid situations that would likely incur rejection. Externally imposed discipline converted to internally imposed self-discipline when he withdrew from white potential dates to avoid shame. Mentioning his Spanish accent that may be misinterpreted to indicate foreign-born status (Jiménez 2010), Omar comprehended white women’s insouciance as based on race or (incorrect) assumptions about his nativity. Since he “got along fine” with white women, he placed the onus on them for failed romance. When white women rejected him and status contamination in one move, Omar learned that they are not “readily acceptable to each other.” After repeated interactions, Omar internalized the racial order, “shying away” from white women. He ultimately married a less educated Mexican national over whom *he* holds the power advantage.

Awareness of mainstream racism and sexism can inspire preference for intraracial romance (Nemoto 2009), and yet racialized rebuffs from whites function differently for men and women. Varying forms of gendered racialization play out in the dating realm: men are taught to view themselves as unattractive, menacing, and excluded, whereas women’s dating encounters consign them to a sexualized, othered, and borderline-acceptable position (Vasquez 2010). Xochitl Velasco, a 39-year-old Mexican American from Kansas who is married to a Bolivian national, asserted that in-marriage avoids racialized and gendered stereotypes that she confronted in interracial romances with white men.<sup>8</sup> Xochitl desired to escape a problematic set of stereotypes white men held about Latinas, this learned incompatibility resulting from failed interracial romances. She found Latino men to be more suitable for her because they offer refuge from disconcerting stereotypes:

I always . . . knew I wanted to be married to a Latino. I always was partial to Latinos, boyfriends and everything . . . [In] college [I] started dating a white guy . . . [and saw] differences between him and I . . . Some white men that are married to my Latina girlfriends . . . like the “Latina spice” . . . They make fun of her accent. They think it’s cute . . . They like that exoticness . . . I didn’t ever like that. I don’t want to be treated as an “other” in my relationship. I knew with Latinos there was never that “other” factor . . . I was just Xochitl Borges and there was nothing particularly Latina about me—I [did not] have to put on this Latina-ness or take it off . . .

Experience with racialized and gendered stereotypes disciplined Xochitl to conclude that whites were a mismatch and to desire Latinos. She learned from personal experience and observation that white men’s exoticization of her would be alienating, her conclusion of incompatibility an acquired

7 In discussion of spouse selection, most interviewees used the language of “choice.” Although this terminology sounds like a rational choice—as if people weigh potential costs and benefits of romantic partnerships—many said they “just fell in love.”

8 By contrast, Asian American women view intermarriage with white men as a way to repudiate negative stereotypes from their own racial community (Nemoto 2009).

perspective. With Latinos, she reasoned, she could avoid being “treated as an ‘other’” in an intimate relationship.

Similar to Xochitl, Lydia Duarte, a Mexican American married to a Peruvian, excluded white men from her dating pool. Her preference for Latinos was based on her belief that white men seek a stereotype that she does not fit: “I’ve never . . . had a serious relationship with a white guy . . . I don’t fit the bill.” Lydia nevertheless had encounters with white men that unveiled their imagery of Latinas: “Some [white] men have said, ‘Oh yeah, we love Mexican girls. You . . . are hot and spicy . . .’ I’m probably just too strong . . .” Given their perceptions of white men’s imagery of Latinas, both Xochitl and Lydia determined white men to be incompatible mates and resisted their racialized understandings of Latina womanhood. They sought comprehension from Latinos who, while not free from their own perceptions of Latina femininity, are unlikely to hold the same brand of alienating stereotypes as white men.

Both white men’s stereotypes and Latinas’ reactions involve what social psychology refers to as a “category-based response,” that is, “[reactions] to another person as an interchangeable member of a social group,” most often occurring among groups in which one is not a member (Fiske 2004:398). In other words, a reaction to a specific individual is generalized to an entire group. In order to escape category-based responses from white men, some Latinas insulate themselves within their own in-group, marrying Latinos. Just as white men prejudge them on the basis of their gender and race, so too do they prejudge white men. These Latina women employ group-based logic not only to create precautionary distance from white men but also to envision closeness with Latino men whom they presume possess compatible qualities based on racial similarity.

Disciplined preference does not rob individuals of agency. Instead, disciplined preference (whites as incompatible and Latinos as preferable) is self-protective, stemming from the need to preserve racial dignity and avoid misapprehension. Rob Esposito, married to a Mexican American/Native American woman, stated:

I knew I wasn’t going to marry a white girl. I knew I was going to marry a Mexican or Indian girl . . . You . . . dated white girls for one reason and then you had the [Mexican American and Native American] girls you were going to marry (Laugh).

Holding different standards for dating and marriage is notable; some interviewees were adventurous in dating yet restrictive relative to marital prospects (Blackwell and Lichter 2004). Oscar Cota, a 44-year-old Kansan, used similar imagery to explain his dating patterns:

My [Mexican American] wife says, “you always wanted to go with the white girls because you knew they were easier.” I . . . knew that I would marry a Mexican woman. Because when you think of family, being able to raise families, being good wives . . . and maybe [that is] stereotypical—good wives, good cooks—[but] . . . I always knew I would marry a Mexican woman.

“Heteronormative sexual stereotypes” such as these tap into ethnic cultures’ “gender regimes” and are used to evaluate moral value (Nagel 2000:113). Stereotypes about white women as “easy” and Mexican women as “wifely” shape Latino men’s marital preferences: these men pursue interracial sexual liaisons before engaging in a “winnowing” process (Blackwell and Lichter 2004) and selecting proper, endogamous marriage partners.

This dichotomous thinking about Mexican and white women is a sexualized way for Latino men to recuperate agency. Use of value-laden ascriptions of “family oriented” and “marriageable” valorize Latina women, denigrate white women who are off-limits, and rationalize the “choice” of endogamy. While dating and marriage are not entirely agent-centered processes, claiming the “choice” of endogamy rhetorically resists the confines of a socially constricted marriage market. Repeated encounters with whites coach Latinos to believe that they are only suitable for other Latinos, reproducing endogamy and maintaining the racial hierarchy.

### Preserving White Privilege: Anti-Latino Surveillance and Violence

White parents discriminate against Latinos through violence, threats, and exclusionary tactics in order to preserve their family's white privilege. Racialized and gendered stereotypes mark Latino men as agents of racial taint and white parents attempt to protect their daughters from becoming "unwhitened" (Frankenberg 1993; Twine 2010) whereas they view relations with Latina women as more acceptable (Vasquez 2010, 2011). Accordingly, Latino men are punished more harshly than Latina women when dating whites. White parents' prejudicial (sometimes violent) messages about their children's Latino romantic interests encourage endogamy, this disciplining during adolescence having repercussions in adulthood. For example, in high school, Nathan Lucero, a Mexican American from Lawrence, Kansas who is now 51 years old, faced threats of bodily harm from his white girlfriend's father:

[She] was a brunette with green eyes . . . Her dad hated me. He didn't give me a chance 'cuz I was Mexican . . . I only met [her dad] once . . . She came out [when I arrived to pick her up] and said, "My dad wants to know if your car can outrun a bullet."

Such threats are an aggressive way to police the symbolic boundary between whites and Latinos. Nathan noted that he was driving a "decent car," preemptively asserting his financial stability and ruling out class status as the reason for the father's extreme measures. Coming from a similar class status, this interaction highlights the centrality of race, class status not serving as a protection against racism (Feagin and Sikes 1994). While younger cohorts are more racially tolerant than older cohorts (Taylor et al. 2006), white parents vigilantly police racial boundaries through surveillance and violence.

Historically, white women have been vigilantly guarded, their whiteness, reproductive capacity, and symbolic role as mothers of the nation at stake in intimate encounters (Collins 1991; Hodes 1997; Kennedy 2003; Root 2001; Yuval-Davis 1997). In keeping with this gendered rationale, among interviewees, most reported incidents of violence were directed against minority men, mainly by relatives of white women reacting violently to cross-racial intimacy. Fifty-two-year-old Mexican American, Rob Esposito, also from Kansas, told a tale similar to Nathan's of white parents' prohibition against interracial dating. In this situation, both the girl and her brother who defended her were injured:

We were going to go to prom together . . . [but] her dad wouldn't let us date . . . She was pretty adamant about wanting to date me . . . Her dad [threw] her down the stairs . . . when they were fighting about it. [Her brother] intervened and . . . his dad pushed his head through a glass bookcase. All over me—because [her] dad was no way going to let [her] date a Mexican.

While the violence was not directed at a minority male, the action served to discipline romantic tastes and oversee white women's sexuality. Rob did not address whether this violence forced a breakup. In general, he stated, "[the girls] wanted to date me, their fathers were the problem." Given the categorical rejection coming from white girls' parents, he retrospectively called white girls "prohibited fruit."

White parents considered Rob a threat to their daughters—a source of hypermasculinity and status contamination—yet they lauded him as a star athlete. Collins (2004) argues that the same minority masculinity that is deemed physically and sexually menacing is cheered when displayed as athletic prowess. White girls' parents approved of Rob in sports:

After a ball game . . . and scoring 25 points . . . I'd go into the local steakhouse . . . [and] parents . . . would order up a hamburger and fries and . . . paid for it . . . Even the parents that didn't want me going out with their daughters were like, "Great game!" Yeah, but when it came down to dating their daughter, it was . . . "we're not going to let you touch our daughters."

Although praised for sports achievement, Rob encountered disapproval when dating white girls. These conflicting reactions—personal discouragement and public congratulations—show how white parents respond to Latino masculinity: they regulate it in the private domain that contains a white daughter’s sexuality but applaud it in a public arena that requires sports skill. Especially in the Kansas context where whites drastically outnumber Latinos, border patrolling to prohibit whites from crossing the racial line is marked by threats and violence.

Region matters less for women than for men: while Latino men were victimized by physical, verbal, and symbolic violence in Kansas, women faced milder forms of rejection in California and Kansas. Latina women were subject to surveillance and racial slights by white parents of romantic interests. Forty-one-year-old Californian Corrina Nuñez’s Hispanic identity cost her a boyfriend:

A [white] young man [I was dating] came to school one day and completely avoided me . . . His brother had gotten mad at him . . . told his father that he was dating a Hispanic girl and his dad beat him up.

Parents who police the color line when their children were open to romantic boundary crossing show how age, time period, and generation play a role in boundary maintenance (Taylor et al. 2006).

Similarly, confronting white parents’ prohibition against their white sons dating a Latina, 41-year-old Kansan Noelle Puente was affronted by her prom date’s parents who refused to meet her. Noelle related her white prom date’s parents’ rejection:

You know how it’s customary that you meet the parents and you take pictures? His parents didn’t want to meet me because I was Mexican . . . I think that that’s a pretty important one [life lesson] . . . When you talk about good enough . . . I do think a person associates . . . that with worth . . . I met his sister . . . I never met his parents . . . I know that he really thought a lot of me . . . But, it wasn’t gonna work . . . The parents didn’t even meet me. I’m a second-class citizen.

Prior to the “age of independence” when young adults move away from home and parental authority is diminished, adolescents are subject to family control (Rosenfeld 2009), parents surveilling their children’s whereabouts and judging their companions. Particularly during ritualized dating moments, these are lasting racialized messages. Using politicized language likely acquired in college that may have sensitized her to experiences of racialization (Ortiz and Telles 2012), Noelle summed up her prom date’s parents’ actions as reducing her to a “second-class citizen.” This third party punishment was successful; Noelle opted out of the relationship.

Region affects attitudes on interracial intimacy: whites resisted Latinos more vigorously in Kansas than in California. Group size impinges upon racial attitudes: families and communities judge whites’ interracial dating practices in a largely white context to be a more glaring and punishable offense than in a locale with a limited white dating pool. Racial heterogeneity both increases the chances for interracial romance and decreases the likelihood of sanctions (Kreager 2008). In diverse California, cross-racial dating was perceived as less unlikely and therefore less transgressive.

Two caveats concerning region and generation in the United States deserve mention. First, while Latino families in both sites encouraged endogamy, exogamy with whites was perceived as a reasonable option in Kansas. Because of the small number of Hispanics in the area and because of the value of whiteness, Latinos condoned cross-racial intimacy with whites. Twenty-eight-year-old Liz Downing explained the impact of living in a majority-white town: “It’d kind of be a joke that I couldn’t date any people that were Mexican in Lawrence, because we were related to most of the Mexican people in Lawrence [laughs]!” Orlando Puente, from Topeka, explained that he dated white

women “mainly because there wasn’t [sic] very many Mexican girls to date . . .” Because of supply-side demographics, Latino and white intermarriage was understood as a probable outcome in Kansas.

Second, generational status is influential: immigrants favor endogamy whereas the U.S. born are more open to exogamy. These attitudes follow the noted trend of immigrants marrying co-nationals and later-generation Latinos more likely to marry outside of their racial group (Alba et al. 2014; Chavez 2008; Landale and Oropesa 2007; Murguía 1982; Telles and Ortiz 2008). One woman’s immigrant father was “shocked and appalled” when a white boy came to the house: “What was I doing having a [white] boy come to the door and ask for me? [My father thought] . . . I must be doing something [sexually] loose.” By depicting minority women as morally superior to dominant culture, immigrant parents reaffirm minority self-worth within a context of subordination (Espiritu 2000; Nagel 2000) and encourage endogamy on cultural grounds.

While both Latino men and women underwent racialized processes of learned incompatibility relative to whites, their experiences varied by gender. Men cited cultural mismatch as the chief reason why white women disregarded them. They disciplined their preferences away from white women and used a cultural explanation of Latina women as suitable and family oriented to legitimate their same-race relations. Women engaged in self-discipline by circumventing objectifying stereotypes white men may have by withdrawing from them. These same women, however, in their turn to Latino men, faced different racialized and gendered preconceptions. The critical difference, however, is that imagery Latino men have of Latina women resonated more with these in-married women’s beliefs about themselves. Unlike their intermarried counterparts, in-married Latina women did not complain of domineering fathers or submissive mothers. Instead, endogamously married Latinas had pleasing home lives in their youth and were comfortable with their parents’ displays of femininity, masculinity, and culture.

#### Preserving Relative Group Privilege: Anti-Black Prejudice and Staying in the Racial Middle

Non-dominant classes can also protect their relative privilege. Racial discourses influence romantic preferences (Shiao and Tuan 2008), contributing to Latinos’ preference to date Latinos or whites more so than blacks (Feliciano, Lee, and Robnett 2011). The aim of anti-black prejudice is to avoid slipping down the racial ladder. Anti-black prejudice among Latinos is expressed in axioms such as, “chickens go with chickens,” “stick to your own,” or direction not to “marry down.” As an exertion of power, anti-black prejudice calcifies the boundary between Latinos and blacks and preserves Latinos’ relative group privilege.

Less than a quarter of the Latino interviewees dated blacks (two were currently married to biracial blacks) and, of those, women reported more surveillance by family and peer groups than men. The majority of those who dated blacks were darker skinned (skin color code #3 or above), no light-skinned individuals (skin color code #1) reported interracial intimacy with blacks. While black/non-black relationships elicit strong negative reactions generally (Kreager 2008), nearly all of the interviewees who reported surveillance or punishment regarding romance with blacks were Latinas from Kansas. Region and gender intersect such that families in Kansas guarded Latinas against “downward” racial mixing; cross-racial dating with blacks was viewed as an avoidable norm violation in a locale with a large non-black population.

Latinas in Kansas who dated black men did so against family counsel. Adriana Guthrie, age 41, recalled lateral surveillance by her cousins: “I did date a black guy. . . My cousins kept saying, ‘You’re brown and you should be with brown people.’” Forty-three-year-old Lorena Cota dated a black man covertly: “I [wasn’t] able to tell my family that I was dating an African American. . . My dad. . . wouldn’t have approved. . . Social pressures [were] to date Caucasian and Hispanic. . . only.”

Such “social pressures” include peer surveillance from African American women who treated her as if she was “trying to take away their men.” These slights by black women are likely based on black women’s expectation of their own endogamy and the lack of “marriageable” black men due to the disappearance of well-paid jobs for black men (Cherlin 2009; Collins 2008) and high rates of

incarceration (Pettit 2012; Western 2006). Cassie Hoffman, age 46, who was previously married to a black man, was “a little nervous” to inform her parents of her engagement because, she confessed, “he was black and I didn’t know . . . if they would approve or not.”

Immigrant parents’ expectations of endogamy and anti-black bias compelled 34-year-old Mario Bermudez to conceal his cross-racial romances. Mario, who eventually married a woman with Mexican American and white heritage, likened interracial intimacy to homosexuality to underscore the transgressive quality of such a pairing. Growing up in an ethnic enclave where “everything was Mexican,” Mario explained his self-surveillance when dating non-Mexicans:

When I used to bring home . . . a black girl . . . I would never bring her around . . . my whole family . . . Just, say a few *tías* [aunts] who I thought were cool, you know? It’s almost like you’re gay, kinda. Like . . . you’re “coming out” . . . The same thing happened with Ana [his half Mexican American, half white wife]: I would only bring her around my three cool *tías* [aunts]. That’s not the way it’s supposed to be.

For his Mexican immigrant relatives, it was “a big deal” for Mario to date non-Mexicans and he believed that a black woman would never have gained acceptance. While dating a black woman was taboo, marrying a woman with Mexican American descent ensured his “racial authenticity” (Vasquez and Wetzel 2009) within his immigrant family.

Even in non-immigrant families, Latinos in the “racial middle” (O’Brien 2008) of a three-tiered hierarchy execute anti-black prejudice to safeguard relative privilege and attempt to achieve “honorary white” status (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Haney López 1996). According to Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2004), “honorary whites may be . . . believing they are better than the ‘collective black,’” which would require the development of “white-like racial attitudes befitting their new social position and differentiating (distancing) themselves from the ‘collective black’” (p. 937). Noelle Puente’s father enacted social distancing by transferring her to a Catholic high school to remove her from African Americans and prohibited her to date black men. Noelle recounted:

I knew that dating somebody black wasn’t gonna . . . go anywhere . . . I ended up at a bar [on a date with a black man] that my uncle . . . showed up [at] . . . My uncle actually followed us [out]. Then, he tried . . . to beat him up. Then, I was confronted by my dad: “You have a choice. You either choose your family or you choose him.”

Noelle never dated the black man again. This formative family experience lies behind Noelle’s assertion that “I knew that I would not marry somebody African American.” Yet “knowing” that she would not marry a black man did not occur in a vacuum. “Emotions can inspire discipline” (Moon 2013:264), and emotionally powerful moments can exert disciplinary power at later points in time. It was the threat of being ostracized from her family that silenced dissent and produced conformity, both at the moment of Noelle’s father’s ultimatum and in her years-later marital choice. Her uncle and father performed disciplinary work to police racial boundaries. By lording over Noelle the threat of symbolic exclusion, they piqued fear and submission in Noelle, “fear serv[ing] as the conduit for social power” (Moon 2013:290).

Latinos’ racial middle status gives rise to racial insecurity, and, in reaction, Latinos use anti-black prejudice to shore up relative privilege. Intramarriage is an escape from marrying into a less privileged racial category. The three-generation Lucero family, headed by Joaquin and Magda, ages 76 and 73, respectively, illustrates how one Mexican-origin family protected their relative racial status position by espousing anti-black prejudice:

*Joaquin:* I didn’t want [my kids] to run around with just blacks because if there’s more than one or two you’ll get in trouble . . .

*Magda:* He teaches Haley [granddaughter]: “I don’t want you to run around with them or date them [blacks].” But . . . [I think] if the kids want to that’s okay . . .

*Joaquin:* It’s just trouble for them when they marry blacks . . . Because [their] kids are black and then they’ve got to go with black because other races won’t mix so easy.

*Magda:* They [non-blacks] still don’t treat them very good . . . On TV they’re beating them up and they’re shooting them.

Joaquin firmly discouraged romantic ties with African Americans. He refused to relinquish his relative status position privilege through racial mixing: multiracial kids “are black” and therefore “they’ve got to go with black” as an identity and peer group. The “one-drop rule” that reduces multiraciality to blackness makes interracial dating, marriage, and procreation anathema to Joaquin (Omi and Winant 1994). He distinguished his family from blacks in the hopes of, at best, becoming honorary white and, at least, guarding against slipping down the racial hierarchy. More permissive on interracial dating, Magda’s assertion that blacks are not treated well suggests that she was wary of how racial discrimination against blacks could affect her offspring.

In this family we see uninterrupted anti-black prejudice in two generations yet challenges in the youngest (third) generation. Joaquin adamantly opposed his offspring dating blacks, a view untempered by socioeconomic status: “My personal view is that I wouldn’t want them [granddaughters] to marry a black even if he was a millionaire or a multi-millionaire because he would still be black.” Race clearly trumps class in this judgment. Nathan Lucero, the 51-year-old son of Joaquin and Magda who intermarried with a white woman, received anti-black admonitions from his father. He recalled, “My dad [is] really old-school. He goes, ‘There are no beautiful black people . . .’ I’m sure if I would have brought home a black girl, Dad would have been upset.” Nathan’s 49-year-old sister Myra, who married and divorced a white man, recollected the racial rule setting in her home: “We knew that we were not going to date a black. . . Indians were. . . seen as drunks. Asians weren’t even around. So it was pretty much you were just going to marry brown or white.” Unlike the Latino/white boundary that can be eased by class homogamy (Gans 2012; Lee and Bean 2010; Rosenfeld 2005; Spickard 1991), even class ascendancy does not penetrate the Latino/black boundary, leading to black exceptionalism in the marriage market (Cherlin 2009; Lee and Bean 2010; Rockquemore and Henderson 2010).

Continuing anti-black racism grounded in his belief that Latinos are more culturally similar to whites than blacks (Lee and Bean 2010), Nathan urged his daughter Haley away from black men: “I said, ‘You’ve got this wide range . . . Asian, Indian, and white . . . You’re telling me you can’t find anyone in between this range?’ . . . I prefer anywhere between Mexican and white . . .” In outlining the acceptable “range,” Nathan’s fatherly surveillance forbid straying into blackness. He delimited the dating options for his daughters (as did his high school girlfriend’s white father, ironically), promoting the middle and upper ranks of the racial hierarchy. Yet 17-year-old Haley was attracted to men who are half black, showing how tolerance for intermarriage is strongly correlated with age (Passel, Wang, and Taylor 2010). Upon learning her penchant for mixed-race black men, her father cautioned: “I don’t know what that’s gonna look like! Just remember the genetics.” Nathan’s worry over the phenotypic appearance of mixed-race children is a common way to thinly veil racist feelings (Childs 2005; Lee and Bean 2010; Morales 2012; Twine 2010). This anxiety over mixed-race grandchildren perpetuates racism by deepening the black/non-black divide (Lee and Bean 2010; Warren and Twine 1997).

Skin color is an important dimension to endogamy, as intensity of disciplined preferences varies by skin tone. The darker skinned are more committed to endogamy than the lighter skinned, this stance providing those who are least likely to intermarry with whites (taking a cue from low black/white intermarriage rates [Lee and Bean 2010; Qian 2002; Qian and Lichter 2011]) with a strategy to

preserve relative privilege. Darker-skinned parents advocated endogamy for their children, despite their recognition of the social value of whiteness. Oscar Cota, bearing medium-tan skin, counseled his three pre-teen children on intragroup relations: “Would race play a role? Unfortunately, it would. . . I would [prefer] to have my kids marry a Hispanic, a Latina, or a Mexican. . . I would push to keep. . . a pure bloodline. . . That’s. . . a prejudice.” Experiencing “daily racisms,” Oscar may have viewed endogamy as a protective device that would shield his children from more integrated social spaces that would make them vulnerable to racial discrimination (Ortiz and Telles 2012). Looking both “up” and “down” from the racial middle, by favoring endogamy, Oscar also guarded against status loss that threatens to accompany interracial intimacy with blacks.

Marriage advice encouraging racial endogamy among darker-skinned Latinos is not gender specific. Noelle Puente, who has medium-tan skin, remarked: “Would I like to have a minority walk through my household? Sure, I would. I can’t help that. I do want [my children] to bring somebody home that’s Mexican. . . Honestly, I think it’s [about] family.” This logic hints at not only a racial and color mismatch but also a cultural one, positioning Mexican culture as more family oriented than other racial groups. Similarly, 53-year-old Mexican immigrant Rosalinda Ornales, who also has medium-tan skin and lives in California, remarked: “I would like to see [my children] with somebody Latino. That’s my opinion. . . My dad used to say: ‘*Gallinas se juntan con gallinas.*’ Chickens go with chickens. . . You look for your own kind.” Coming from darker-skinned Latinos who intramarried, this marital advice suggests prior racializing experiences that disciplined them into abiding by the color line and shaped the disciplining counsel they give to the next generation. Emphasis here is on racial, color, and cultural commensurability. This racialized advice that stresses parity attempts to balance positions of power, disciplinary moves that illuminate how most marriages come to involve partners of relatively equal status (Kalmijn 1998; Rosenfeld 2005; Spickard 1991).

Complementing the finding that darker-skinned Latinos were more committed to endogamy, families pushed lighter-skinned Latinos toward exogamy in order to “whiten” the race. While Xochitl Velasco, discussed above, ultimately married a Bolivian for cultural compatibility and racial/gender comfort reasons, her family communicated that she, as a light-tan-skinned woman, could improve her racial standing through intermarriage with a white person. A perceptible grade lighter than the aforementioned interviewees who practiced and advocated endogamy, Xochitl’s family telegraphed a clear message about the racial hierarchy and the potential achievement of higher racial status through intimacy:

When [my cousins] brought white boyfriends home it was kind of. . . like, “Congratulations!” . . . The white men were considered. . . moving up, successful. . . [It] would never be appreciated to bring an African American man. . . [or] woman home as a boyfriend/girlfriend. . . And the Mexican men were looked. . . on as. . . status quo and not doing anything really great.

Like commitment to endogamy, familial pressure varies by skin color: darker-skinned Latinos were steered toward endogamy whereas lighter-skinned Latinos were directed toward exogamy with whites. These intrafamily, intergenerational messages are laced with implications about who is consigned to racialization versus who is best positioned to escape it. Skin color is an important factor in the construction of disciplined preferences, family counsel pivoting the lighter skinned toward whites, the darker skinned toward Latinos, and all away from blacks.

Intergenerational family advice about the acceptability of other racial groups, a form of surveillance and discipline, extends our understanding of endogamy. “What about the kids” rhetoric is a powerful tool of intrafamilial discipline aimed to contain sexual desire within acceptable, endogamous limits. Pressure not to “marry down” is intended to entrench symbolic boundaries and preserve relative group privilege. Anti-black prejudice is the means by which Latinos protect their racial status that, while subordinate to whites, is superior to blacks, an even less privileged group.

### CONCLUSION: RACIAL BORDER PATROLLING AND DISCIPLINED PREFERENCES ENFORCE ENDOGAMY

Even as rates of intermarriage modestly increase—approximately 13 percent of American marriages involve persons of different races (Bean and Stevens 2003; Lee and Bean 2004:228)—interracial intimacy remains rare. Studying endogamy brings to light enduring social dynamics that undergird this pattern. Racial endogamy results from macro-structural, family, and community pressures that discipline individuals to prefer specific mates. This article makes three interventions. First, it identifies the practices through which third parties regulate interracial sexuality, biased interactions that demographic studies simply assume are operant. Second, it utilizes intersectionality to reveal how pressures toward endogamy vary by gender, skin color, and region. Third, it moves beyond the literature's focus on black/white couples and examines Latino experiences. This study reveals that what we customarily think of as "personal preferences" are, in fact, socially constructed. Family- and peer-disciplining processes consolidate group position and maintain symbolic boundaries. Surveillance, physical and symbolic violence, and notions of cultural (in)compatibility are all mechanisms of power that support endogamy.

Answering Kalmijn's (1998) question about what "third parties" are actually *doing* to entrench racial homogamy, I find that surveillance and punishment (violence, threats, censure, and advice) imposed from inside and outside of one's racial community that transform into self-discipline are the chief mechanisms enforcing same-race romance. Endogamous pairings do not occur by accident; they are constructed by a racialized social structure whose members police racial boundaries and punish transgressors. Surveillance, punishment, and self-discipline are the regulatory techniques that define acceptability, discipline preferences, and perpetuate endogamy.

Third parties use multiple techniques to advance the "racial project" (Omi and Winant 1994) of intramarriage, yet attitudes and behaviors supporting endogamy differ along the lines of region, gender, skin color, and generation. Latino interviewees viewed interracial dating with whites a real potentiality in Kansas where there were fewer Latinos than in California. Further, white kin of Latinos' romantic interests patrolled boundaries in a gendered fashion, punishing Latino men more severely for racial transgressions than women because of the greater perceived acceptability of Latina women and the instinct to protect white womanhood. Skin color also influences the experience of self-discipline: the darker skinned more rigorously practice and advocate same-race romantic partnerships than their lighter-skinned counterparts who are closer to whiteness and more likely to intermarry with whites (Qian 2002). Generational status in the United States also informs attitudes about interracial relations, later generations (which coincides with younger age, in this case) more tolerant of cross-racial romance.

This study extends our knowledge about racial endogamy and exogamy beyond blacks and whites by concentrating on Latinos. Yet this research is limited in that the interviewees are overwhelmingly Mexican American, the Latino subgroup with the highest level of ethnic endogamy (Landale et al. 2006:166). While interviewees range in skin color, no phenotypically black Latinos were represented, calling into question the relevance of these findings for other Latino subcategories. The validity and reliability of these findings beyond this qualitative study can be tested in future research that compares different national origin groups and more regions of the country. These limitations notwithstanding, this study underscores how race fundamentally structures dating and marriage. Even in an age touted as "post-racial," consistent racializing experiences from within and beyond one's racial community discourage "tripping on the color line" (Dalmage 2000), promote intraracial relations, and portend continuing entrenched racial divides.

By examining a group in the racial middle and showing how race is foundational to how whites evaluate Latinos as romantic prospects, this research challenges the notion that increasing Latino/white intermarriage equates to Latinos becoming honorary whites (Yancey 2003). That whites leverage racialized practices to maintain social distance from Latinos undercuts the contention that intermarriage

signals the expansion of whiteness to include Latinos. Focusing on intermarriage and reading it as an indicator of greater group acceptance—and overlooking that it may include racism (Nemoto 2009)—obscures the forces that support endogamy. A complex of social processes conspires to make intramarriage appear “natural” and consequently holds racial groups in their respective positions.

This article argues that racialized meso-level processes constrain mate selection and reinforce the racial order, a finding with implications for future race relations. The prospects for radical social change are grim absent greater awareness of the processes by which people learn, internalize, refashion, or resist disciplining forces. While self-discipline is an effective way to maintain social boundaries, not all racialized dating exchanges produce conformity. Points of resistance are worthy of investigation, as is the question of whether intermarriage constitutes defiance or shores up other forms of privilege such as class status. As people are both subjects and executors of racist action, we see how social inequality is reproduced; people can be seduced to subordinate other groups as well as be complicit in their own subjection to social mores.

Pursuing the question of how endogamy is perpetuated by extra-familial third parties such as the church, the state, educational systems, and voluntary organizations are interesting avenues for future research. Systematically assessing whether forms of policing vary by class status is another possible extension of this research. Flipping my research question is also stimulating: Given the strong enforcement of endogamy, how might we theorize those who escape discipline and intermarry? Examining how class homogamy among the higher class may ameliorate racial imbalance and facilitate intermarriage also deserves attention.

This article contributes to our understanding of how meso-level racist interests are interpolated by individuals and reproduce endogamy. Families and communities, as third parties, enforce symbolic boundaries that become internalized as disciplined preferences and subsequently generate socially sanctioned intraracial marital families. As people are coached to maintain social distance from less-privileged racial strata, they discipline their romantic choices in ways that (re)produce racial endogamy and leave the racial hierarchy relatively unchallenged.

## APPENDIX

**Table A1. Characteristics of Interviewees**

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Percent (n)</i>
Ethnic origin	
Mexican American—monoethnic	70 (49)
Mexican American—multiethnic with white	14 (10)
Mexican American—multiethnic with Native American	4 (3)
Other Latin American	11 (8)
Gender	
Men	41 (29)
Women	59 (41)
Age	
20s	11 (8)
30s	20 (14)
40s	34 (24)
50s	14 (10)
60s	14 (10)
70s	6 (4)
Region	
California	51 (36)
Kansas	49 (34)
Skin color	
1 (racially white appearance)	33 (13)
2 (light-tan)	27 (19)
3 (medium-tan)	37 (26)
4 (dark-tan)	17 (12)
5 (racially black appearance)	0
Interracial or intraracial marriage <sup>a</sup>	
Intraracial: Latino/Latino	68 (47)
Interracial: Latino/white	23 (16)
Interracial: Latino/non-Latino minority	9 (6)
Education	
Less than high school	3 (2)
High school degree/GED	16 (11)
Some college	29 (20)
College degree	23 (16)
Master's/professional degree	24 (17)
Doctoral degree	6 (4)
Individual income	
Under \$30,000	20 (14)
\$30,001 –\$50,000	31 (22)
\$50,001 –\$70,000	20 (14)
\$70,001 – \$150,000+	26 (18)
Not reported	3 (2)

Note:  $N = 70$

<sup>a</sup>These counts include current and dissolved marriages (four interviewees are divorced). One single/never married adult is excluded.

## REFERENCES

- Alba, Richard, Tomás R. Jiménez, and Helen B. Marrow. 2014. "Mexican Americans as a Paradigm for Contemporary Intra-Group Heterogeneity." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37(3):446–66.
- Alba, Richard D. and Victor Nee. 2003. *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bean, Frank D. and Gillian Stevens. 2003. *America's Newcomers and the Dynamics of Diversity*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Blackwell, Debra L. and Daniel T. Lichter. 2004. "Homogamy among Dating, Cohabiting, and Married Couples." *The Sociological Quarterly* 45(4):719–37.
- Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2003. *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- . 2004. "From Bi-Racial to Tri-Racial: Towards a New System of Racial Stratification in the USA." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 27(6):931–50.
- Chambliss, Daniel F. and Russell K. Schutt. 2012. *Making Sense of the Social World: Methods of Investigation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Chavez, Leo R. 2008. *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Cherlin, Andrew J. 2009. *The Marriage-Go-Round: The State of Marriage and the Family in America Today*. New York: Vintage.
- Childs, Erica Chito. 2005. *Navigating Interracial Borders: Black-White Couples and their Social Worlds*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- . 2009. *Fade to Black and White: Interracial Images in Popular Culture*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. 1991. *Black Feminist Thought*. New York: Routledge.
- . 2004. *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*. New York: Routledge.
- . 2008. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge.
- Dalmage, Heather M. 2000. *Tripping on the Color Line: Black-White Multiracial Families in a Racially Divided World*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Deaux, Kay. 2006. *To Be an Immigrant*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Espiritu, Yen Le. 2000. "We Don't Sleep Around Like White Girls Do." *Signs* 26(2):415–40.
- Feagin, Joe R. and Melvin P. Sikes. 1994. *Living with Racism: The Black Middle-Class Experience*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Feliciano, Cynthia, Rennie Lee, and Belinda Robnett. 2011. "Racial Boundaries among Latinos: Evidence from Internet Daters' Racial Preferences." *Social Problems* 58(2):189–212.
- Fiske, Susan T. 2004. *Social Beings: A Core Motives Approach to Social Psychology*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Foucault, Michel. 1995. *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Random House.
- Frankenberg, Ruth. 1993. *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Fu, Vincent Kang. 2001. "Racial Intermarriage Pairings." *Demography* 38(2):147–59.
- Gans, Herbert J. 2012. "'Whitening' and the Changing American Racial Hierarchy." *Du Bois Review* 9(2):267–79.
- Glaser, Barney G. and Anselm L. Strauss. 1967. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Gordon, Milton Myron. 1964. *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Haney López, Ian. 1996. *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race*. New York: New York University Press.
- Hodes, Martha Elizabeth. 1997. *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Jiménez, Tomás R. 2010. *Replenished Ethnicity: Mexican Americans, Immigration, and Identity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Joyner, Kara and Grace Kao. 2005. "Interracial Relationships and the Transition to Adulthood." *American Sociological Review* 70(4):563–82.
- Kalmijn, Matthijs. 1998. "Intermarriage and Homogamy: Causes, Patterns, Trends." *Annual Review of Sociology* 24:395–421.
- . 2010. "Consequences of Racial Intermarriage for Children's Social Integration." *Sociological Perspectives* 53(2):271–86.
- Kennedy, Randall. 2003. *Interracial Intimacies: Sex, Marriage, Identity, and Adoption*. New York: Pantheon.
- Kreager, Derek A. 2008. "Guarded Borders: Adolescent Interracial Romance and Peer Trouble at School." *Social Forces* 87(2):887–910.
- Lamont, Michele and Virag Molnar. 2002. "The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences." *Annual Review of Sociology* (28):167–95.

- Landale, N. S., R. S. Oropesa, and C. Bradatan. 2006. "Hispanic Families in the United States: Family Structure and Process in an Era of Family Change." Pp. 138-78 in *Hispanics and the Future of America*, edited by M. Tienda and F. Mitchell. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.
- Landale, Nancy S. and R. S. Oropesa. 2007. "Hispanic Families: Stability and Change." *Annual Review of Sociology* 33: 381-405.
- Lee, Jennifer and Frank D. Bean. 2004. "America's Changing Color Lines: Immigration, Race/Ethnicity, and Multiracial Identification." *Annual Review of Sociology* 30:221-42.
- . 2010. *The Diversity Paradox: Immigration and the Color Line in Twenty-First Century America*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Lichter, Daniel, J. Brian Brown, Qian Zhenchao, and Julie Carmalt. 2007. "Marital Assimilation among Hispanics: Evidence of Declining Cultural and Economic Incorporation?" *Social Science Quarterly* 88(3):745-65.
- Lofquist, Daphne, T. Lugaila, M. O'Connell, and S. Feliz. 2012. "Households and Families: 2010." Pp. 1-21 in *2010 Census Briefs*. Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau.
- Lopez, Mark Hugo and Daniel Dockterman. 2011. "U.S. Hispanic Country-of-Origin Counts for Nation, Top 30 Metropolitan Areas." Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center.
- Marrow, Helen B. 2011. *New Destination Dreaming: Immigration, Race, and Legal Status in the Rural American South*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Massey, Douglas S. and Nancy A. Denton. 1993. *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Merton, Robert K. [1941] 2000. "Intermarriage and the Social Structure: Fact and Theory." Pp. 473-92 in *Interracialism: Black-White Intermarriage in American History, Literature, and Law*, edited by Werner Sollors. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Moon, Dawne. 2013. "Powerful Emotions: Symbolic Power and the (Productive and Punitive) Force of Collective Feeling." *Theory and Society* 42:261-94.
- Morales, Erica 2012. "Parental Messages Concerning Latino/Black Interracial Dating: An Exploratory Study among Latina/o Young Adults." *Latino Studies* 10(3):314-33.
- Moran, Rachel F. 2001. *Interracial Intimacy: The Regulation of Race & Romance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Murguia, Edward. 1982. *Chicano Intermarriage: A Theoretical and Empirical Study*. San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press.
- Nagel, Joane. 2000. "Ethnicity and Sexuality." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26:107-33.
- Nemoto, Kumiko. 2009. *Racing Romance: Love, Power, and Desire among Asian American/White Couples*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- O'Brien, Eileen. 2008. *The Racial Middle: Latinos and Asian Americans Living Beyond the Racial Divide*. New York: New York University Press.
- Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. 1994. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*. New York: Routledge.
- Ortiz, Vilma and Edward Telles. 2012. "Racial Identity and Racial Treatment of Mexican Americans." *Race and Social Problems* 4(1):41-56.
- Pascoe, C. J. 2007. *Dude, You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Passel, Jeffrey, Gretchen Livingston, and D'Vera Cohn. 2012. "Explaining Why Minority Births Now Outnumber White Births." Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.
- Passel, Jeffrey S., Wendy Wang, and Paul Taylor. 2010. "Marrying Out: One-in-Seven New U.S. Marriages is Interracial or Interethnic." Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.
- Pettit, Becky. 2012. *Invisible Men: Mass Incarceration and the Myth of Black Progress*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Qian, Zhenchao. 2002. "Race and Social Distance: Intermarriage with Non-Latino Whites." *Race & Society* 5(1):33-47.
- Qian, Zhenchao and Daniel T. Lichter. 2007. "Social Boundaries and Marital Assimilation: Interpreting Trends in Racial and Ethnic Intermarriage." *American Sociological Review* 72(1):68-94.
- . 2011. "Changing Patterns of Interracial Marriage in a Multiracial Society." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 73(5): 1065-84.
- Rockquemore, Kerry Ann and Loren Henderson. 2010. "Interracial Families in Post-Civil Rights America." Pp. 99-111 in *Families as They Really Are*, edited by Barbara J. Risman. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Root, Maria P. P. 2001. *Love's Revolution: Interracial Marriage*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Rosenfeld, Michael. 2002. "Measures of Assimilation in the Marriage Market: Mexican Americans 1970-1990." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 64(1):152-62.

- Rosenfeld, Michael J. 2005. "A Critique of Exchange Theory in Mate Selection." *American Journal of Sociology* 110(5): 1284–325.
- . 2008. "Racial, Educational, and Religious Endogamy in the United States: A Comparative Historical Perspective." *Social Forces* 87(1):1–31.
- . 2009. *The Age of Independence: Interracial Unions, Same-Sex Unions, and the Changing American Family*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Rosenfeld, Michael J. and Byung-Soo Kim. 2005 "The Independence of Young Adults and the Rise of Interracial and Same-Sex Unions." *American Sociological Review* 70(4):541–62.
- Roth, Wendy D. 2012. *Race Migrations: Latinos and the Cultural Transformation of Race*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Schilt, Kristen and Laurel Westbrook. 2009. "Doing Gender, Doing Heteronormativity: 'Gender Normals,' Transgender People, and the Social Maintenance of Heterosexuality." *Gender & Society* 23(4):440–64.
- Sherman, Jennifer. 2009. *Those Who Work, Those Who Don't: Poverty, Morality, and Family in Rural America*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Shiao, Jiannbin Lee and Mia H. Tuan. 2008. "'Some Asian Men are Attractive to Me, but for a Husband . . .': Korean Adoptees and the Salience of Race in Romance." *Du Bois Review* 5(2):259–85.
- Spickard, Paul R. 1991. *Mixed Blood: Intermarriage and Ethnic Identity In Twentieth-Century America*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Steinbugler, Amy C. 2012. *Beyond Loving: Intimate Racework in Lesbian, Gay, and Straight Interracial Relationships*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Stevens, Gillian and Gray Swicegood. 1987. "The Linguistic Context of Ethnic Endogamy." *American Sociological Review* 52(1):73–82.
- Strauss, Anselm L. 1987. *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Swidler, Ann. 2001. *Talk of Love: How Culture Matters*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Taylor, Paul, Cary Funk, and Peyton Craighill. 2006. "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner: 22% of Americans Have a Relative in a Mixed-Race Marriage." Pew Research Center, Washington, DC.
- Telles, Edward and Vilma Ortiz. 2008. *Generations of Exclusion: Mexican Americans, Assimilation, and Race*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Twine, France Winddance. 2010. *A White Side of Black Britain: Interracial Intimacy and Racial Literacy*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- U.S. Census Bureau. 2012. "2012 Population Estimate." Retrieved July 21, 2014 (<http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>).
- Vasquez, Jessica M. 2010. "Blurred Borders for Some but not 'Others': Racialization, 'Flexible Ethnicity,' Gender, and Third Generation Mexican American Identity." *Sociological Perspectives* 53(1):45–71.
- . 2011. *Mexican Americans Across Generations: Immigrant Families, Racial Realities*. New York: New York University Press.
- Vasquez, Jessica M. and Christopher Wetzel. 2009. "Tradition and the Invention of Racial Selves: Symbolic Boundaries, Collective Authenticity, and Contemporary Struggles for Racial Equality." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 32(9):1557–75.
- Warren, Jonathan W. and France Winddance Twine. 1997. "White Americans, the New Minority?: Non-Blacks and the Ever-Expanding Boundaries of Whiteness." *Journal of Black Studies* 28(2):200–18.
- Western, Bruce. 2006. *Punishment and Inequality in America*. New York: Russell Sage.
- Yancey, George A. 2003. *Who is White?: Latinos, Asians, and the New Black/Nonblack Divide*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.
- Yuval-Davis, Nira. 1997. *Gender & Nation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.