UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

Interracial Intimacy and the U.S. Racial Structure: How Interracial Marriage Challenges and Reinforces Racial Boundaries

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Sociology

by

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2019

DEDICATION

To my husband Jordan, for his unwavering support

and

to my children, Riley and Connor,
for being patient as I labored through this process.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to begin by thanking all of the couples who shared their stories with me. Without their generosity, willingness to talk about sensitive topics, and time, this dissertation would not have been possible.

I would also like to thank my advisor and dissertation committee chair, Belinda Robnett-Olsen, for supporting me in my vision for this research and always pushing me to dig deeper. Thank you to the members of my committee, Glenda Flores and Sabrina Strings – their insights helped shape and greatly improve this dissertation. I am sincerely thankful to all of them for their encouragement along the way; it has been nothing short of inspiring to be led by such a strong group of women of color.

It is safe to say I would not have survived graduate school without the love and encouragement of my dear friends. Mikaela Smith, Kelly Ward, and Mayra Munguia, thank you for being there through tears and laughter and for providing many distractions along the way. I am especially thankful to each of you for standing by me through the toughest parts of this process. To my friend Cindy, who I met at the tail end of this journey, I am lucky to call you my friend. Thank you for always checking in on me, for late night text conversations, and for coffee dates that were less productive than they should have been but always served as a source of inspiration to continue moving forward in my writing.

A special thank you to John Sommerhauser. In the midst of trying to find my path as a graduate student, I found a friend, and I am so happy that I did. There are no words to express how grateful I am to have had you on the sidelines cheering me on. You have helped not only me, but my family, and nothing you have done has gone unnoticed. Thank you.

I could not have completed this program and dissertation without the continued support of my family. To my mother, thank you for always pushing me to do better in life and for believing I can accomplish anything. I am forever grateful to have you as my guiding light. To my father, who doesn't really understand what I am doing and asks if I am done with school yet *every* time we speak, thank you for always showing an interest and for encouraging me to do what makes me happy, whatever that may be. To my sister, Stephanie, thank you for always being my shoulder, for taking time out of every day to share a little piece of home with me, and for your endless support. To my father in law, Tony, thank you for spending countless afternoons with the kids while I worked, thus making the completion of this dissertation possible.

To my husband, Jordan, thank you for your unending love, support, and faith in me. You have worked incredibly hard to provide for our family while I pursue this dream and for that I am eternally grateful. Thank you for keeping me company while I worked through the night, for watching the tv on mute as to not distract me, and for taking care of the kids when I needed space to complete my work. Your love and encouragement are a constant reminder of how lucky I am to do life with you.

Finally, to Riley and Connor. You are without a doubt the most wonderful thing that has ever happened to me. Thank you for bringing me infinite joy. This dissertation is dedicated to you.

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Race and Ethnicity; Interracial Marriage; Mixed Families; Ethnic Identity; Health Inequality

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Interracial Intimacy and the U.S. Racial Structure:
How Interracial Marriage Challenges and Reinforces Racial Boundaries

By

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Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

University of California, Irvine, 2019

Professor Belinda Robnett-Olsen, Chair

My dissertation examines how interracial couples challenge existing racial boundaries while also considering the implications the U.S. racial structure has on interracial intimacy. More specifically, I compare black-Latinx and Latinx-white interracial married couples to see how their race-based experiences vary depending on the racial composition within their union. Unlike Latinx-white couples, where one partner belongs to the dominant group and the other is a racialized minority, black-Latinx couples are composed of two racial minorities. Consequently, I am able to analyze how racial hierarchies and current race relations affect interracial couples via two lenses. To understand the different mechanisms through which the U.S. racial structure affects interracial marriage and the racial divide, I conducted interviews with 15 black-Latinx and 15 Latinx-white married couples, resulting in a total of 60 individual interviews. My research expands the current literature on interracial intimacy to include an understanding of dual-minority couples (black-Latinx), in contrast to the heavily studied white-nonwhite couples. Each chapter in this dissertation examines both theoretical and substantive issues. In the first chapter I explain the history of interracial intimacy in the U.S. to contextualize the ramifications of current and historical race relations on interracial

intimacy. I also detail my methodological approach, data analysis, research questions, and outline the organization of my dissertation. In Chapter 2, "Acceptance, Rejection, and Exceptions: Messages about Interracial Intimacy from Within," I examine how family members directly and indirectly transmit racialized messages about interracial intimacy, social position, and acceptability. These racialized messages, I find, directly affect rates of interracial intimacy and can help to reinforce racial boundaries. In Chapter 3, "Parental Racial Identification of Biracial Children: How Racial Stratification and Skin Tone Influence the Identity Process," I examine how parents racially identify their biracial children in an effort to better understand how phenotype, along with racial stratification, influence the racial identification process. I find that variations in skin tone affect whether parents choose to identify their children as monoracial, biracial, or take on a mixed family identity- all of which are tied to parents' perceptions of how their children fit into the U.S. racial structure. In my final empirical chapter, "Cognitive Dissonance and Minority Unity: How *Shared Racial Narratives* Reinforce Racial Boundaries and Challenge Classic Assimilation Theories," I use interracial marriage as a framework to challenge traditional assimilation theories. I argue that both majority-minority and dual-minority interracial couples not only challenge traditional assimilation theories but also reinforce racial boundaries, particularly when Latinx partners deny their spouses whiteness and when black-Latinx couples rely heavily on their shared marginalization as racialized minorities. While this study specifically examines Latinx-white and black-Latinx interracial couples, the implications of this study extend beyond these specific demographics. I argue that racial stratification not only continues to affect interracial intimacy but also show the various ways interracial intimacy challenges and reinforces racial boundaries.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> *It is a curious idea that in a world where racial conflicts are widespread, romantic love can be assumed to create an intimate sphere in which racial differences do not matter*. – Amy Steinbugler

Interracial marriage is often thought to be an indicator of the state of race relations in the United States (Aldridge 1978; Lee & Bean 2010; Moran 2001; Qian and Lichter 2007). Increases in interracial marriage, it is believed, are a reflection of increased acceptance among different racial and ethnic groups. The history of interracial marriage in the U.S. surely lends itself to this line of thought. Shortly after the Civil Rights Act (1964) banned segregation and employment discrimination, the Supreme Court ruled anti-miscegenation laws (laws forbidding marriage across racial lines) unconstitutional in the case of *Loving v. Virginia* (1967). Since then, the percentage of newlywed intermarried couples has increased from 3% percent in 1967 to 17% percent in 2015 (Livingston & Brown 2017). Group differences in rates of interracial marriage, however, are stark and significantly lower than one would expect to occur by chance alone (Moran 2001; Qian & Lichter 2001, 2007). In 2015, for example, the percentage of newlyweds who married someone from a different race or ethnicity was 11% for whites, 18% for blacks, 27% for Hispanics, and 29% for Asians (Livingston & Brown 2017). There are also variations in interracial marriage when we consider gender differences across racial lines. In 2013, approximately 25% of black men married someone of a different race compared to only 12% of black women. In contrast, approximately 37% of Asian women married someone of a different race compared to only 16% of Asian men (Wang 2015). While the interracial marriage rates do not vary significantly by gender for whites and Latinos, the aforementioned gender and

group differences suggest that the selection of interracial partners and formation of interracial marriages is unequal across both gender and racial groups.

Additional research shows that rates of interracial marriage are significantly lower than rates of interracial dating (Lewis Jr. & Ford-Robertson 2010), while others have shown how trends in racial and ethnic preferences result in exclusivity in online dating (Feliciano, Robnett, & Komaie 2009). Dating preferences inevitably impact actual interracial dating rates (Muro & Martinez 2016), which have been shown to unevenly translate into rates of interracial marriage. Race and ethnicity, therefore, still influence whom people choose to marry, despite what increases in interracial marriage may suggest about race relations in the United States. This leads us to question literature that cites interracial marriage as a symbol of fading group boundaries and declining racial and ethnic prejudice (Lee & Bean 2010; Perlmann 2000; Rosenfeld 2008) and forces us to ask if these boundaries fade equally across groups.

Research suggesting that interracial marriage blurs racial boundaries has focused primarily on interracial marriages of whites and their non-white (i.e. black, Asian, Latinx) spouses (Fryer 2007; Gullickson 2006; Lee & Bean 2010; Qian & Lichter 2011). As the flow of Asian and Latinx immigrants continues to increase and expand the pool of ethnic partners, however, it becomes increasingly important to examine how racialization and the U.S. racial hierarchy influence dual-minority and majority-minority couples.

That is the goal of this dissertation. More broadly, I examine how the U.S. racial structure impacts black-Latinx and white-Latinx interracial couples *lived* experiences of race as a consequence of their marriage. More specifically, I focus on the mechanisms that both challenge and reinforce racial boundaries via interracial intimacy. To better understand these

experiences, I ask the following set of research questions in three distinct empirical research papers:

1) What types of messages do individuals receive from their families regarding interracial intimacy? How do family members react to individuals dating outside of their racial group?
2) How do interracial couples negotiate their racial differences when racially identifying their biracial children? To what extent do children's phenotype and skin tone influence how parents racially identify their biracial children? To what extent does racial stratification in the U.S. influence how parents racially identify their biracial children?
3) Why do partners within interracial marriages create shared racial narratives? Do these shared racial narratives differ between Latinx-white and black-Latinx married couples? What are the implications of shared racial narratives for traditional assimilation theories? How do the implications differ for minority-majority and dual-minority interracial couples?

BACKGROUND

The complexities of interracial marriage, and therefore interracial intimacy, are rooted in the history of race relations in the United States. To ignore this history would minimize the importance of how race relations have developed over time and how they have influenced the formation of relationships across racial and ethnic lines.

Historically, the division between blacks and whites was born out of the need to exploit African slaves for labor (Bernasconi 2009). Relationships between white men and black women under slavery stood in stark opposition to that of white women and black men, despite the

conceptualization of both black men and black women as over-sexualized. As Hammonds (1999) suggests, "White women were characterized as pure, passionless, and de-sexed while Black women were the epitome of immorality, pathology, impurity, and sex itself" (pg. 96). Consequently, white men were allowed to engage in exploitative sexual relationships with their black slaves, often in the form of rape, because these women were considered their personal property. Children born out of these relationships benefitted slave owners because they expanded their source of labor, ergo signaling white male ownership of black women's fertility as property (Davis 1981).

Sexual relationships between white plantation women and black men, however, posed a threat. A primary reason why these relationships were viewed differently is because of how they impacted society. At the time, southern lawmakers had put into place statutes that maintained slavery and reinforced the racial order. When white women had sexual relationships with black men it crippled slavery in a way that relationships between white men and black women did not. This is because, by law, children received their status as slave or free from their mother (Higginbotham 1980). If a child was the outcome of sexual exploitation from a white man to a black woman, the child was born into slavery and did not pose any potential threats. Mulatto children born to white mothers and black fathers, on the other hand, were born into freedom by virtue of their mother. The birth of mulatto children into freedom eroded racial categories, but more importantly, it eroded the boundaries between slavery and freedom (Hodes 1993). To have free people who were of African ancestry challenged the racial hierarchy and made it more difficult to equate slavery to blackness. In both instances, however, racial differences were linked to black sexual stereotypes in order to sustain a white patriarchal society and justify slavery (Hammonds 1999).

The conceptualization of black males as rapists emerged in the decades following the Civil War (Hodes 2014). It was the end of slavery and the freedom of Black men and women that resulted in great fear and deadly violence. Prior to gaining freedom, both during slavery and throughout the Civil War, black men had not been accused of defiling white women nor had they been portrayed as rapists (Wells 1969). This conceptualization of black men as over-sexualized rapists who victimized white women and stripped them of their purity emerged soon after black men gained political rights. As punishment, black men accused of rape or engaging in sexual relations with white women were lynched and castrated. In these instances, "white men used their ownership of the body of the white female as a terrain on which to lynch the black male" (Carby 1985, pg. 270), an alternative means for maintaining racial order in the wake of emancipation.

The division between blacks and whites was further solidified through the implementation of anti-miscegenation laws that were used to "protect" white women, prevent the mixing of races, and curtail the birth of mulatto children (Wells 1969). This particular legal approach to preserving the racial order was sustained when the Supreme Court upheld individual state rights in regulating interracial relationships in the 1883 case of *Pace v. Alabama* (Pascoe 2009). These laws, coupled with the institutionalization of Jim Crow segregation during the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, hindered the formation of interracial relationships. It wasn't until the case of *Loving vs. Virginia* (1967) that the Supreme Court ruled it unconstitutional for individual states to maintain laws forbidding interracial marriage. While this landmark decision was followed by increases in both interracial relationships and interracial marriages, this history continues to hold implications for intimacy across racial and ethnic lines.

The implications of cultural constraints for interracial intimacy can be viewed specifically in terms of the permeability of boundaries between different racial and ethnic groups. Sanders

(2002) argues that the boundary between whites and Asians is most permeable, least permeable for blacks and whites, and somewhere in between for whites and Latinos. While scholars have shown how ethnic boundaries have changed to include new immigrant groups over time (Gans 1999; Gerstle 1999; Haney-Lopez 1996), blacks have persistently been the exception to this trend. At a time when social and ethnoracial boundaries are shifting, evidence of "black exceptionalism" continues to show that the racial boundaries for blacks are more rigid than for both Latinos and Asians (Gans 2005; Lee & Bean 2007). Historically, blacks have been critical to maintaining the status of whites, it therefore comes as no surprise that interracial marriage as a symbol of fading group boundaries and increased racial tolerance does not apply equally to blacks as it does to other non-black groups (Rosenfeld 2008).

Additional research shows that this black exceptionalism is also present in the dating market. Feliciano, Robnett, and Komaie (2009), for example, found that black women were the group most likely to be excluded by white men on an Internet dating site. Additionally, Morales (2012) conducted an exploratory study examining how Latinx adolescent's parent's disapproving messages of dating blacks reinforces social distance and racial boundaries between blacks and Latinos by influencing their children's mate selection patterns. If Latinx adolescents feel that their parents will disown them or disapprove of relationships between them and a black partner, these messages of disapproval can influence their mate selection. Such findings translate into real effects on black rates of interracial dating and marriage.

Given the history of black-white race relations, much of the research on intermarriage and interracial dating has focused on measuring the social distance between these two groups, leaving relationships between blacks and Latinos largely understudied. While recent research can be found identifying statistical trends in intermarriage among Latinos and blacks, this study aims to better

understand and detail the experiences of black-Latinx couples in the context of race relations and racial boundaries, in comparison to those of Latinx-white couples.

Latinx-white interracial relationships, while they have not been studied to the extent of black-white relationships, have not been ignored to the same degree as Latinx-black relationships. This may be in part because Latinx-white couples account for the largest share of interracial marriages (Livingston & Brown 2017) and because intermarriage is often used as a means for assessing assimilation among Latinos. Intermarriage research, for example, has shown that trends in Latinx intermarriage echo those of their European predecessors, as is the case with second generation Mexican intermarriage rates that are similar to the early to mid-twentieth century intermarriage rates of second-generation Italians (Perlmann & Waters 2004). Moreover, intermarriage for Latinos has been found to increase among subsequent generations as well as with increases in education and income (Gilbertson, Fitzpatrick, & Yang 1996; Jacobs & Labov 2002; Kalmijn 1993; Qian & Lichter 2007).

Furthermore, some research has also shown that "whiteness" is expanding to include Latinos (Warren & Twine 1997; Yancey 2003). In support of this is research showing that Latinos often self-identify racially as white and dissociate themselves from their African ancestry (Darity, Dietrich, & Hamilton 2005). In 2008, more than half of all marriages among native-born Latinos were exogamous, compared to only one out of every six marriages for blacks (Lee & Bean 2010). The rate at which Latinos marry whites is also significantly higher than the rate at which blacks marry whites, indicating not only Latinx acculturation and porous boundaries between Latinos and whites, but also that whites perceive Latinos to be more suitable marriage partners than they do blacks (Moran 2001). These findings are reiterated in current intermarriage research. A brief consideration of the history of Latinx-white couples reveals that they are likely the least taboo of

interracial relationships given that anti-miscegenation laws used to enforce the racial divide between blacks and whites did not formally outlaw Latinx-white relationships (Schueths 2015).

Current research on interracial intimacy shows an increase in favorable attitudes toward interracial marriage (Livingston & Brown 2017) but there continues to be opposition to these unions as well (Harris & Kalbfleisch 2000; Perry & Whitehead 2015; Qian 2005). Often times this resistance comes from family members (Childs 2002; Morales 2012) and is rooted in how different racial groups are stratified in the U.S., thus leading to fears of race-mixing (Dalmage 2000; Feagin 2000; Herman & Campbell 2012). How we socially construct race in the U.S. is therefore tied to social realities that make individuals who are higher on the racial hierarchy more appealing as dating and marriage partners. In support of this claim is research showing that knowledge of the racial order influences how different group members interact with one another (Jimeno-Ingrum, Berdahl, & Lucero-Wagoner 2009; McClain et al. 2006; O'Brien 2008). Such findings inevitably have implications for who people choose to date and later marry as well as for the lived experiences of intimate relationships that cross lines of racial and social stratification.

To better understand how interracial marriage challenges racial boundaries, I situate this study within two theoretical literatures: assimilation theories and racial divide theories. Theories of assimilation are relevant to interracial intimacy because intermarriage has been historically used to understand minority group acceptance in the U.S. (Gordon 1964; Kalmijn 1998; Qian & Lichter 2007). Proponents of segmented assimilation argue that the process of integration is influenced most by the unwelcome reception some immigrants receive in the U.S. (Portes & Rumbaut 2001), while classic assimilation theorists predict that increased time spent in the new country will ultimately result in convergence between immigrant and native populations (Alba & Nee 2003). Empirically examining interracial marriage will speak to the incorporative power of intimacy

across racial groups, especially because I am focusing on how experiences differ between majority-minority and dual-minority couples.

Racial divide theories are relevant to my research on interracial marriage because how couples experience intimacy across racial lines is dependent on how race relations are perceived by external members of society and individuals within these relationships. While the black-white racial divide has been historically salient in our understanding of race relations, increases in immigration, interracial intimacy, and the multiracial population have brought about new racial divide frameworks. This includes the emergence of a black/non-black racial divide whereby blacks are placed in opposition to all other racial groups; the emergence of a white/non-white racial divide whereby all racialized minorities are positioned together in opposition to whites; and the emergence of a tri-racial order which consists of whites at the top, honorary whites in the middles, and the collective black at the bottom. This research will contribute to racial divide literature because differences in experiences that vary according to the racial composition of interracial couples can help to further support or challenge these theoretical frameworks, providing insight into how flexible racial boundaries are for different racial groups.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

To answer my research questions I conducted in depth, semi-structured interviews with 15 black-Latinx married couples and 15 Latinx-white married couples living in various Southern California cities. Interviews were conducted in person at respondent homes and in coffee shops, over the phone, and via skype and lasted approximately 1.5 hours. All respondents were given a $5 gift card for their time and participation in the study. Given the nature of the questions, I conducted interviews with married partners separately, resulting in a total of 60 individual interviews. Table 1.1 below shows the number of couples interviewed by racial composition.

Table 1.1: Number of Couples Interviewed by Racial Composition

Black/Latinx Couples	**Latinx/White Couples**
Black Female-Latinx Male	*Latinx Female-White Male*
7 couples	7 couples
Latinx Female-Black Male	*White Female-Latinx Male*
8 couples	8 couples

I intentionally sought out this combination of couples because doing so allowed me to contextualize their experiences of race and ethnicity in their everyday lives while also considering the importance of gender composition.

To account for nativity differences in rates of interracial dating and marriage, all Latinx participants were U.S. born. Studying interracial relationships among Latinos is complex and can be challenging due to Latinx intra-group diversity and variation. Phenotypic difference among Latinos is one source of variation, with individuals who self-identify as Latinx at times being categorized by others as black or white (Itzigsohn 2009; Rodriguez 2000). Of particular relevance to this dissertation are Feliciano and Robnett's (2014) finding that self-identified white Latinos are less open to dating blacks and more open to dating whites, while self-identified black Latinos are less open to dating whites and more open to dating blacks. When Latinos self-identify racially as black or white, there are implications for how Latinx-white and black-Latinx couples experience their interracial status, particularly if Latinx-white couples do not view race as a matter of concern or if black-Latinx couples both self-identify as black. These are important points to consider for this research and as such I made a concerted effort to control for some of these variations by excluding Latinos who self-identify racially as black. It is also important to note that none of the Latinos interviewed self-identified as white. Including Latinos who racially identify as black or white would have required a larger subset of interracial couples (i.e. black-Latinx/black couples)

to make generalizations. For the purposes of this dissertation, I have therefore limited my respondents to Latinos who identify as Latinx or a Latinx group (i.e. Mexican American).

Sandra Baker provides a detailed explanation as to why she racially identifies as Mexican and not white:

> **Sandra Baker**
> I think others identify me as being Mexican or Latino. I don't think at any point if anyone asked me what race are you, and I said white, I don't think anyone would be satisfied with that answer. Like I get my race is white and my ethnicity is Latino but if you came up to me and asked me "what is your race?" and I said "white" you would say something like, "I mean, what is your nationality or ethnicity?" because white is not a satisfactory answer for someone who looks like me. So I just can't bring myself to self-identify as white.

This excerpt is reflective of how Latinos tend to be categorized by others as a racial group as well as why they themselves may opt out of self-identifying racially as white. For this study I therefore refer to Latinx as a racial group rather than an ethnic identification, similar to Vasquez-Tokos (2017) who argues that the "history of conquest and colonization feeds into contemporary legal definitions of Latinos as a separate group that qualifies for federal programs for disadvantaged racial minorities, further legitimizing understandings of Latinos as a racial category" (pg. 29).

I used snowball sampling to obtain my sample of 30 interracial couples, beginning with those from my personal networks and those of close friends, family, and faculty members. Interviews consisted of questions that covered 6 broad topics: (1) biography, (2) relationship with spouse, (3) relationships with family and friends, (4) influence of public spaces, (5) ethnic/racial identity, and (6) interracial partnership questions. Biography questions were used to understand respondent's former experience with other racial and ethnic groups, for example, if they grew up in diverse neighborhoods or had close friendships with children of other races. Questions also revealed how individuals personally identify, racial and ethnic categorization (how others racially perceive and categorize members of these interracial relationships), influence of ethno-racial

identifiers on ethnic identity (i.e. ethnic language proficiency; last name as ethnic marker), how family members and close friends react to partners of a different racial group (i.e. acceptance, rejection, confusion), and for those with children, the influence of interracial marriage on parenting. I audio recorded all interviews and later transcribed them.

Each respondent was also asked to complete a demographic questionnaire prior to the start of the interview. The information provided on this form was used to obtain demographic information (i.e. age, educational attainment, occupation, and income) and to determine the relevance of some interview questions (i.e. questions related to children). Table 1.2 below provides social and demographic information for all study participants.

Table 1.2 Social and Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

NAME	SELF-IDENTITY	AGE	SEX	LENGTH OF RELATIONSHIP	CHILDREN (AGE)	EDUCATION	OCCUPATION	COMBINED INCOME
Sandra Baker	Mexican	28	F	8 years	Son (2) Daughter (6)	Master's Degree	Student	100,000 - 149,000
Jason Baker	White	30	M	8 years	Son (2) Daughter (6)	Associate's Degree	Credit Card Processing	100,000 - 149,000
Isabel White	Costa Rican	46	F	21 years	Daughter (15) Daughter (12)	Bachelor's Degree	Interpreter/ Entrepreneur	150,000 +
Christopher White	White	47	M	21 year	Daughter (15) Daughter (12)	Master's Degree	Customer Experience Lead	150,000 +
Claudia Miller	Mexican American	35	F	12 years	Daughter (9) Son (8) Daughter (6)	Bachelor's Degree	Doula, Yoga Instructor	100,000 - 149,000
James Miller	White	44	M	12 years	Daughter (9) Son (8) Daughter (6)	Bachelor's Degree	Filmmaker	100,000 - 149,000
Elena Sanders	Mexican	37	F	4 years	Daughter (19) Son (12) Son (8 months)	Associate's Degree	Dental Hygienist	150,000 +
Paul Sanders	White	31	M	4 years	Son (11) Daughter (7) Son (5) Son (8 months)	Associate's Degree	Real Estate Agent	150,000 +
Gabriela Moore	Mexican	43	F	23 years	Daughter (13) Son (10)	Master's Degree	Doctor	150,000 +
Colin Moore	White (Mexican by Choice)	44	M	23 years	Daughter (13) Son (10)	Doctoral Degree	Engineer	150,000 +
Lucy Evans	Mexican	39	F	20 years	Daughter (13) Daughter (10)	Some College	Student	150,000 +
Matthew Evans	White	43	M	20 years	Daughter (13) Daughter (10)	Bachelor's Degree	Advertising Sales	150,000 +
Luna Turner	Mexican	32	F	14 years	Daughter (5)	Bachelor's Degree	Social Worker	75,000 - 99,000

Phillip Turner	White	34	M	14 years	Daughter (5)	Bachelor's Degree	Teacher	75,000 - 99,000
Elizabeth Rios	White	31	F	14 years		Bachelor's Degree	Project Coordinator	150,000 +
Thomas Rios	Mexican American	31	M	14 years		Master's Degree	Real Estate Analyst	150,000 +
Lauren Ochoa	White	35	F	13 years	Son (8) Daughter (4)	Bachelor's Degree	Human Resources Director	75,000 - 99,
Francisco Ochoa	Mexican	39	M	13 years	Son (8) Daughter (4)	Some College	Stay at Home Dad	75,000 - 99,999
Natalie Garcia	White	31	F	10 years	Son (1)	Associate's Degree	Stay at Home Mom	75,000 - 99,999
Mateo Garcia	Salvadoran	43	M	10 years	Son (1)	Some College	Currently Unemployed	75,000 - 99,999
Samantha Flores	White	38	F	7 years	Son (16) Son (13) Daughter (1)	Some College	Stay at Home Mom	75,000 - 99,999
Angel Flores	Mexican American	34	M	7 years	Son (16) Son (13) Daughter (1)	Some College	Chauffeur	75,000 - 99,999
Lindsey Serrano	White	32	F	12 years	Daughter (7) Son (3)	Some College	Stay at Home Mom	100,000 - 149,000
Isaiah Serrano	Mexican	34	M	12 years	Daughter (7) Son (3)	Some College	Terminal 6 Site Manager	100,000 - 149,000
Megan Morales	White	37	F	10 years	Son (6) Son (3)	High School	Sales Manager	150,000 +
Armando Morales	Hispanic	31	M	10 years	Son (6) Son (3)	High School	Assistant Director of Sales	150,000 +
Holly Gomez	White	36	F	16 years	Daughter (6) Son (1)	Bachelor's Degree	AV Production Manager	150,000 +
Isaac Gomez	Mexican American	39	M	16 years	Daughter (6) Son (1)	Master's Degree	Financial Advisor	150,000 +
Hannah Molina	White	40	F	14 years	Daughter (7) Daughter (3)	Master's Degree	Marketing	100,000 - 149,000
Alex Molina	Mexican	43	M	14 years	Daughter (7) Daughter (3)	High School	Construction Management	100,000 - 149,000
Bianca Williams	Mexican American	42	F	19 years	Daughter (6)	Some College	Baggage at United Airlines	75,000 - 99,999
Jeffrey Williams	African American	43	M	19 years	Daughter (6)	Bachelor's Degree	Baggage at United Airlines	75,000 - 99,999
Julia Coleman	Mexican	33	F	8 years	Son (7) Son (5)	Bachelor's Degree	Nurse	150,000 +
Wesley Coleman	Black	35	M	8 years	Son (7) Son (5)	Bachelor's Degree	Analyst	150,000 +
Stephanie Thompson	Mexican	42	F	16 years	Daughter (7) Daughter (2) Son (2)	Master's Degree	Teacher	150,000 +
Marcus Thompson	Black	43	M	16 years	Daughter (7) Daughter (2) Son (2)	Bachelor's Degree	Company Owner	150,000 +
Clara Porter	Mexican	28	F	6 years		Some College	Paralegal	75,000 - 99,999
Brandon Porter	Black	32	M	6 years		Bachelor's Degree	Property Management	75,000 - 99,999
Maria Elmore	Mexican	28	F	5 years	Step-daughter (16)	Bachelor's Degree	Student	100,000 - 149,000
Patrick Elmore	African American	34	M	5 years	Daughter (16)	Bachelor's Degree	House Flipper	100,000 - 149,000
Elsa Hall	Mexican	41	F	15 years		High School	Human Resources	75,000 - 99,999
Justin Hall	African American	37	M	15 years		Some College	Software Implementation Specialist	75,000 - 99,999

Teresa Mason	Mexican	36	F	10 years	Step-daughter (16)	Bachelor's Degree	Interior Designer	75,000 - 99,999
Edward Mason	Black	38	M	10 years	Daughter (16)	High School	Sales	75,000 - 99,999
Monsserat Vega	Chicana Mexican American	35	F	10 years		Doctoral Degree	College Professor	100,000 - 149,000
Aaron Hughes	Black	34	M	10 years		Doctoral Degree	College Professor	100,000 - 149,000
Bethany Mejia	Black	36	F	12 years	Son (5) Daughter (3) Daughter (1)	Bachelor's Degree	Teacher	75,000 - 99,000
Arturo Mejia	Mexican	37	M	12 years	Son (5) Daughter (3) Daughter (1)	Bachelor's Degree	High School Counselor	75,000 - 99,000
Amber Rojas	African American	28	F	4 years		Bachelor's Degree	HR Administrator	75,000 - 99,999
Noah Rojas	Columbian	28	M	4 years		Bachelor's Degree	Physical Therapy Aid & Marketing Lead	75,000 - 99,999
Brianna Rivas	Black	35	F	9 years	Son (4)	Master's Degree	Engineer	150,000 +
Ernesto Rivas	Mexican	37	M	9 years	Son (4)	Bachelor's Degree	CEO, personal business	150,000 +
Jasmine Parker	Black	39	F	7 years	Son (4)	Master's Degree	Graduate Student Researcher	75,000 - 99,999
Daniel Diaz	Latino	41	M	7 years	Son (4)	Bachelor's Degree	Assistant Director of Community Affairs	75,000 - 99,999
Charlotte Zapata	Black	32	F	11 years	Daughter (8) Daughter (6) Daughter (4) Son (1)	Bachelor's Degree	Administrative Assistant	100,000 - 149,000
Sergio Zapata	Mexican	33	M	11 years	Daughter (8) Daughter (6) Daughter (4) Son (1)	Bachelor's Degree	Content Producer	100,000 - 149,000
Alexis Bryant	Black	35	F	10 years	Daughter (7) Son (4)	Master's Degree	Social Worker	100,000 - 149,000
Mateo Santana	Mexican	36	M	10 years	Daughter (7) Son (4)	Bachelor's Degree	Real Estate Agent	100,000 - 149,000
Ashley Melendez	Black	27	F	3 years		Bachelor's Degree	Wedding Coordinator	150,000 +
Nick Melendez	Latino	29	M	3 years		Master's Degree	Camera Hardware Engineering	150,000 +

I purposely elected to sample only from California because it is currently one of only four majority-minority states in the United States. Current Census Data suggests that we will have a majority-minority nation by 2044, with a projected 220 percent increase in the multiracial population between 2014 and 2060 (Frey 2018). Conducting this research within California, given its advanced state in this regard, can presumably yield results that will provide context for the growth in interracial relationships and be relevant for the future of race relations in the United States. This approach, however, is not without its limitations. Since California residents have been

found to be more open to interracial dating and is more progressive in terms of accepting interracial intimacy (Feliciano, Robnett, & Komaie 2009), the generalizability of the results will be limited. Nevertheless, California is a harbinger of race and class relations especially as the Latinx population settles in new immigrant destinations.

Given the small study sample for this dissertation (15 black-Latino couples and 15 Latino-white couples), it is difficult to generalize the findings to all interracial unions in the U.S. The purpose of this study is therefore to contribute to existing literature on interracial intimacy that utilizes interview data with relatively small samples to reveal the nuances of peoples lived experiences (Childs 2005; McNamara, Tempenis, & Walton 1999; Rosenblatt, Karis, & Powell 1995). For anonymity purposes, all participants names have been changed to pseudonyms and city names have been altered.

Analysis

Drawing from the grounded theory approach of analyzing qualitative data, I engaged in theoretical sampling and the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin 1997). Theoretical sampling requires subsequent sampling that is based on the emerging theories in the data, while the constant comparative method involves writing reflective memos as data is collected in order to form interpretations early on. I therefore began by conducting open coding, using interview memos as a starting point and then expanding the coding scheme as I continued conducting interviews and analyzing the data. This allowed me to cultivate a more defined coding rubric.

In the final section of the introduction I detail the organization of my dissertation, discussing each specific chapter and highlighting the overall contribution of each to scholarship on interracial intimacy, racial hierarchies, and racial boundaries.

ORGANIZATION OF THE DISSERTATION

Throughout this dissertation I seek to better understand how racialization and the U.S. racial structure affect interracial couples as a result of their marriage. The three chapters are therefore based on the premises that how couples experience intimacy across lines of racial and social stratification is dependent on how race relations are perceived in the U.S., both by the individuals within these unions and external members of society. In the first of my three empirical chapters, "Acceptance, Rejection, and Exceptions: Messages about Interracial Intimacy from Within," I begin by examining how parents and family members directly and indirectly transmit racialized messages about interracial intimacy, social position, and acceptability. I find that internalization of the U.S. racial structure can lead to messages of disapproval that promote black exceptionalism and reinforce racial hierarchies. Additionally, I find that parent messages regarding interracial intimacy are more positive if they expect their children to gain upward social mobility through intermarriage. Lastly, I find that acceptance of interracial intimacy within one's own family does not always lead to shifts in existing racial ideologies or boundary blurring given the tendency of respondent's family members to view their partners as exceptions to their race when finally accepting them.

In Chapter 3, "Parental Racial Identification of Biracial Children: How Racial Stratification and Skin Tone Influence the Identity Process," I examine how parents racially identify their mixed-race children in an effort to better understand how racial stratification and phenotype shape racial identification processes. I find that skin tone variations within families directly influence the parental identification process. Some parents with monoracial looking children, for example, chose to monoracially identify their biracial children. White parents did so in an effort to protect their children's whiteness while minority parents did so because they didn't believe their children would have a choice as a result of their monoracial phenotype. In families where siblings had considerable

skin tone differences, I found that some parents were willing to take on a mixed family identity in an effort to protect their children from racialized experiences and to create a sense of cohesiveness despite difference. This mixed-race identity, however was only taken on by the spouse more highly positioned on the U.S. racial hierarchy.

In my final empirical chapter, "Cognitive Dissonance and Minority Unity: How *Shared Racial Narratives* Reinforce Racial Boundaries and Challenge Classic Assimilation Theories," I use interracial marriage as a framework to challenge traditional assimilation theories and demonstrate how interracial marriage can serve to further reinforce racial boundaries. I find that Latinx-white couples create shared racial narratives in response to feelings of cognitive dissonance. By exceptionalizing their spouses, individuals from these relationships can maintain negative racial stereotypes and perceptions about their partners racial group while being married to them, thus reinforcing racial boundaries. Black-Latinx couples, in contrast, used their shared marginalization as racialized minorities to create a *dual-minority shared racial narrative*. In many instances the need for this shared racial narrative was so strong that partners, both black and Latinx, discussed being unable to marry a white person who would not understand their race-based experiences. The dual-minority shared racial narrative, along with the theme of white exceptionalism that emerged, also reinforce racial boundaries

My dissertation examines the various ways the U.S. racial structure affects interracial couples. Utilizing a qualitative approach to better understand this relationship provides insight into the mechanisms that, despite increases in interracial marriage, continue to reinforce racial boundaries and racial hierarchies. While this study focuses specifically on Latinx-white and black-Latinx married couples, the findings can be extended beyond this specific population and used to better understand interracial couples as a whole. Examining interracial unions in this regard

broadens our understandings of the continued implications of the U.S. racial structure on interracial intimacy and existing color line discourse.

CHAPTER 2

Acceptance, Rejection, and Exceptions: Messages about Interracial Intimacy from Within

> **Julia Coleman**: When I told my mom I was dating a white guy in college she laughed about it. She said early on it wouldn't last because we were so different.
>
> **Interviewer**: what was her reaction when you told her about Wes [Julia's black husband]?
>
> **Julia Coleman**: she said I should have stayed with the white guy.
>
> -Julia Coleman, Mexican American woman

For the majority of interracial couples, racial divides and racial hierarchies continue to be reinforced. Despite some couples' concerted effort to not see color within their marriage, there wasn't a single couple interviewed for this study who was unable to reflect on *at least* one experience that was centered around race and their relationship. For several respondents, conversations regarding the acceptability of interracial intimacy had occurred before they even entered an interracial relationship, while for others entering an interracial relationship marked the start of such messages. The excerpt above from Julia Coleman's interview, for example, shows how parents directly and indirectly transmit racialized messages about interracial intimacy, social position, and acceptability to their children. In this dissertation chapter I examine the types of

messages respondents received from their parents and the corresponding implications by addressing the following research questions:

1) What types of messages do individuals receive from their families regarding interracial intimacy?
2) How do family members react to individual's dating and marrying outside of their racial group?

BACKGROUND

Most social scientists agree that *race* is a social construct. In other words, what we perceive to be racial categories are arbitrary human creations rather than strict biological categories of people (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Goodman 2000; Harris & Sim 2002; Zack 1995). This view is largely accepted due to research showing less variation in traits between racial groups than within racial groups (Harris & Sim 2002). Additionally, research has shown that because race is socially constructed, racial categories are subject to change over time. Evidence of such changes can be seen when we consider how certain immigrant ethnic groups have been able to successfully attain white (i.e. Irish immigrants) or almost white (i.e. Chinese immigrants) status, while black immigrants have been unable to do so (Loewen 1971; Roediger 1991; Ignatiev 1995). This is because members of non-black groups face fewer barriers toward assimilation than do blacks (Lewis & Ford-Robertson 2010).

Scholars argue that the emergence of a racial hierarchy in the United States, one that keeps blacks at the bottom even as other racial groups adjust their position on the hierarchy, is rooted in the history of slavery (Collins 2001; Dawson 1994). Feagin (2000) states that one of the primary reasons blacks continue to stay at the bottom of the racial hierarchy is because white Americans do not put as much effort into oppressing other groups as they do blacks (i.e. Latino and Asian

Americans). The history of racial subordination and intentional acts of oppression, such as the implementation of Jim Crow laws after emancipation, have had lasting effects. Such implications can be seen in the vast racial differences between blacks and whites on indicators such as mortality, educational attainment, occupation, income, and wealth (Goldsmith 2009; Oliver & Shapiro 2007; Pager 2003; Stewart, Cobb, & Keith 2018). These differences indicate that despite being socially constructed, racial categories result in differences in *social realities* depending on where individuals fall within the racial hierarchy (Haslanger & Haslanger 2012). Thus, when we create these racial categories, they produce very really effects on those who are racialized as white, black, or anything in between.

The Racial Divide

Increases in immigration, interracial intimacy, and the multi-racial and multi-ethnic populations have markedly changed the ethnic and racial composition of the United States and brought about new perspectives in color line discourse. Historically, the black-white divide has been salient in understanding race relations, however, research suggests that the color line may be shifting in new directions. As a result, scholars have proposed differing frameworks that aim to describe the color line as it currently stands in the U.S., these include: the black/non-black divide, the white/non-white divide, and the tri-racial order.

Research on intermarriage and racial identity has shown that Latino and Asian group boundaries are fading more rapidly than black group boundaries, a trend attributed to black exceptionalism (Lee & Bean 2010). While the experiences of post 1965 immigrants are considered to be more similar to those of blacks than of European immigrants, scholars have found that Latino and Asian immigrant experiences more closely reflect patterns of European immigrant assimilation (Bean & Stevens 2003; Kasinitz et al. 2008; Lee 2005; Smith 2003, 2006). Lee and Bean (2010)

therefore propose the emergence of a black/non-black color line that continues to place blacks in opposition to whites, much like the original black-white divide did, but that also places Asians and Latinos closer to whites than blacks. This new color line, they argue, maintains patterns of black exceptionalism by continuing to place blacks at a disadvantage.

Some scholars oppose the black/non-black racial divide and instead point to the emergence of a white/non-white racial divide. Under this theoretical framework, Latinos, Asians and blacks are positioned together in opposition to whites. Supporters of this color line point to the shared experiences of de jure and de facto discrimination of these three groups in the United States Examples of their shared experiences of discrimination include forced slavery for blacks followed by the implementation of Jim Crow segregation (Crenshaw 2009), the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (Calavita 2000), the internment of Japanese Americans in the 1940s (Kashima 1997), and the forced deportation of Mexicans during Operation Wetback in 1954 (Portes 1974). The racialization of blacks, Asians, and Latinos in these instances served to specifically maintain a divide between whites and non-whites. Similarly, the historical process of "racial triangulation" allows whites to dominate multiple racial minority groups by valorizing one subordinate group (Asian Americans in this particular research) relative to a second subordinate group (Kim 1999). The continued racialization of these groups influences race relations by reinforcing the exclusivity of whiteness and its privileges. When race is thought of in terms of group position, racial prejudice is used to maintain social position (Bobo, Kluegel, & Smith 1997). Thus, whites maintain their dominant position, protect white privilege, and keep non-whites on the other side of the color divide.

There is a line of research that shifts completely away from a biracial color divide and instead proposes the emergence of a tri-racial system that reflects the racial order of many

Caribbean and Latin American Countries. Bonilla-Silva (2004, 2006), the leading proponent of this theoretical framework, believes that the emerging tri-racial stratification system would consist of whites at the top, "honorary whites" in the middle, and the "collective black" at the bottom, with Latinos, blacks, and Asians found in any of the three loose strata. Bonilla-Silva (2006) notes the increased importance of skin tone in identifying where individuals would fall under this new racial order. He points to the "darkening of America" as a reason for the shift from a binary racial divide toward a tri-racial order and argues that the emergence of an intermediate racial group, the honorary whites, will protect and maintain white supremacy while also helping to buffer racial conflict. Additionally, Bonilla-Silva (2004) points to the use of institutional, covert, and non-racial practices that systematically maintain white privilege, claiming that the emergence of a tri-racial order would help to develop an internal racial structure at a time when *race-blind* ideology is prevalent. This race-blind ideology, often referred to as colorblindness, argues that we live in a post-racial society where we see people and not color. Colorblindness is therefore an attempt to promote racial equality by focusing primarily on individuals and ignoring group membership (Rosenthal & Levy 2010; Sasaki & Vorauer 2013). Critics such as Bonilla-Silva (2006), however, suggest that this racial colorblindness is instead a means of replacing overt racism with structured racism.

The three racial-divide frameworks are relevant to this work on interracial intimacy because how couples experience intimacy across lines of racial, ethnic, and social stratification is dependent on how race relations are perceived in the U.S., both by the individuals within these unions and external members of society. Moreover, if experiences vary by the couples' racial composition, the patterns can help to further support or challenge these theoretical frameworks by

connecting parents' messages regarding interracial intimacy to these racialized processes and the U.S. racial structure.

Racial Hierarchies and Interracial Intimacy

When we consider racial hierarchies and colorblind ideology simultaneously, we put two very different ideas in direct contention with one another. The first acknowledging the existence of a racial order within the U.S. and the second denying the relevance of race to one's experiences and position in society. While for some the colorblind approach may seem ideal as it would imply that we live in a society that is void of discrimination and prejudice, research has consistently shown that interactions between individuals of different racial and ethnic groups are often filled with tension and distrust (Goff, Steele, & Davies 2008; Johnson, Olson, & Fazio 2009).

Indeed, interracial dating and marriage patterns show that while we have certainly made progress, we certainly do not live in a colorblind society. Yes, the percentage of interracial marriages has steadily increased since the Supreme Court struck down anti-miscegenation laws in *Loving v. Virginia* (1967), but there continue to be substantial group differences in rates of interracial marriage (Livingston & Brown 2017). In 2015, for example, the percentage of newlyweds marrying outside of their racial or ethnic group was 11% for whites, 18% for blacks, 27% for Latinos, and 29% for Asians (Livingston & Brown 2017). These differences suggest that race and ethnicity continue to influence marital partner decision. Additionally, research has shown that individuals are more likely to date outside of their racial group than they are to marry outside of their racial group (Joyner & Kao 2005; Lewis Jr. & Ford-Robertson 2010; Qian 2005; Yancey 2002), while other research has shown how trends in racial and ethnic preferences result in exclusivity in online dating (Feliciano, Robnett, & Komaie 2009). Such exclusion shapes interracial relationship outcomes because dating preferences inevitably impact actual interracial

dating rates, which have been shown to unevenly translate into rates of interracial marriage. Increases in interracial marriage therefore do not accurately represent fading group boundaries given that the preceding statistics suggest boundaries are fading unevenly across groups.

Research has also shown an overall increase in favorable attitudes toward interracial marriage. The share of adults who said interracial marriage is good for society increased from 24% in 2010 to 39% in 2017, while the share of adults who said interracial marriage is bad for society decreased from 13% in 2010 to 9% in 2017 (Livingston & Brown 2017). Despite the respective increases and decreases in attitudes about interracial marriage, it is clear that there continues to be opposition to these unions (Harris & Kalbfleisch 2000; Perry & Whitehead 2015; Qian 2005). Often times this resistance comes from the couple's families (Childs 2002, Morales 2012) and is rooted in how different groups are racialized in the U.S. There is an extensive literature, for example, that exposes fear of race mixing as one of the primary reasons people oppose black-white intermarriage (Dalmage 2000; Feagin 2000; Herman & Campbell 2012). Additional research shows that whites feel interracial relationships with Asians and Latinos are more acceptable than with blacks (Davis 1991; Feagin 2000; Herman and Campbell 2012). Again, this is because how we socially construct race in the U.S. is tied to social realities that make individuals who are higher on the racial hierarchy more appealing as dating and marriage partners.

Moreover, differences in how Latinos racialize whites and blacks indicate that knowledge of the racial order influences how different group members interact with one another. In 2015, for example, 42% of newlyweds were Latinx-white couples compared to the significantly smaller 5% share of newlywed black-Latinx couples (Livingston & Brown 2017). Such a stark difference can in part be explained by the emergence of black exceptionalism and the black/non-black racial divide. For instance, research shows that Latino's racialization of other groups corresponds to the

U.S. racial structure. In other words, Latinos have been found to hold more positive perceptions of whites (who hold the highest position on the racial hierarchy) than they do of Latinos (Jimeno-Ingrum, Berdahl, & Lucero-Wagoner 2009), and also of holding strong anti-black sentiments rooted in stereotypes about racial inferiority (McClain et al. 2006; O'Brien 2008; Telles & Ortiz 2008). Consequently, Latinos intentionally distance themselves from blacks in an effort to advance their proximity to whites on the racial hierarchy (Guglielmo 2006; Marrow 2009). Such findings provide insight to research that has found Latinos to be more receptive and accepting of Latinx-white couples than black-Latinx couples (Garcia et al. 2012; Morales 2012). One way Latinx families reinforce these boundaries is by giving their children disapproving messages toward dating blacks (Morales 2012).

Opposition of interracial intimacy, however, goes beyond black-Latinx romantic relationships. Research has also shown disapproval and opposition to black-white relationships (Bell & Hastings 2011; Childs 2002). Moreover, individuals who are unwilling to participate in interracial relationships often do so because they don't believe their family would approve (Harris & Kalbfleisch 2000). Once in a committed relationship, interracial couples sometimes struggle to receive family approval (Bell & Hastings 2012; Wilson 2008). The messages used to convey disapproval of interracial relationships are often framed around various concerns such as those regarding multiracial children (Childs 2002; McNamara, Tempenis, & Walton 1999; Root 2001), cultural differences (Mindiola, Niemann, & Rodriguez 2002; Root 2001), and societal opposition (Childs 2002). These racialized messages of family disapproval serve to reinforce the U.S. racial hierarchy and maintain racial and ethnic boundaries by influencing who people choose to date and later marry.

This chapter thus contributes to the literature on parent and family messages about interracial intimacy while also providing further evidence of how internalization of the U.S. racial hierarchy has potential implications for rates of interracial dating and marriage. Moreover, this research shows how acceptance of interracial intimacy within one's own family does not always lead to shifts in racial ideologies or acceptance of other racial groups.

DATA AND METHODS

This dissertation chapter draws from 60 in depth, semi-structured interviews with 15 black-Latinx married couples and 15 Latinx-white married couples living in various Southern California cities. Interviews were conducted in person at respondent homes and in coffee shops, over the phone, and via skype and lasted approximately 1.5 hours. All respondents were given a $5 gift card for their time and participation in the study. Given the nature of the questions, I conducted interviews with married partners separately, resulting in a total of 60 individual interviews. Table 1 below shows the number of couples interviewed by racial composition.

Table 1.1: Number of Couples Interviewed by Racial Composition

Black/Latinx Couples	**Latinx/White Couples**
Black Female-Latinx Male	*Latinx Female-White Male*
7 couples	7 couples
Latinx Female-Black Male	*White Female-Latinx Male*
8 couples	8 couples

I intentionally sought out this combination of couples because doing so allowed me to contextualize their experiences of race and ethnicity in their everyday lives while also considering the importance of gender composition.

To account for nativity differences in rates of interracial dating and marriage, all Latinx participants were U.S. born. Studying interracial relationships among Latinos is complex and can be challenging due to Latinx intra-group diversity and variation. Phenotypic difference among

Latinos is one source of variation, with individuals who self-identify as Latinx at times being categorized by others as black or white (Itzigsohn 2009; Rodriguez 2000). Of particular relevance to this dissertation are Feliciano and Robnett's (2014) finding that self-identified white Latinos are less open to dating blacks and more open to dating whites, while self-identified black Latinos are less open to dating whites and more open to dating blacks. When Latinos self-identify racially as black or white, there are implications for how Latinx-white and black-Latinx couples experience their ethnoracial status, particularly if Latinx-white couples do not view race as a matter of concern or if black-Latinx couples both self-identify as black. These are important points to consider for this research and as such I make a concerted effort to control for some of these variations by excluding Latinos who self-identify racially as black. It is also important to note that none of the Latinos interviewed self-identified as white. Including Latinos who racially identify as black or white would have required a larger subset of interracial couples (i.e. black-Latinx/black couples) to make generalizations. For the purposes of this dissertation, I have therefore limited my respondents to Latinos who identify as Latinx or a Latinx group (i.e. Mexican American).

Sandra Baker provides a detailed explanation as to why she racially identifies as Mexican and not white:

> **Sandra Baker**
> I think others identify me as being Mexican or Latino. I don't think at any point if anyone asked me what race are you, and I said white, I don't think anyone would be satisfied with that answer. Like I get my race is white and my ethnicity is Latino but if you came up to me and asked me "what is your race?" and I said "white" you would say something like, "I mean, what is your nationality or ethnicity?" because white is not a satisfactory answer for someone who looks like me. So I just can't bring myself to self-identify as white.

This excerpt is reflective of how Latinos tend to be categorized by others as a racial group as well as why they themselves may opt out of self-identifying racially as white. For this study I therefore refer to Latinx as a racial group rather than an ethnic identification, similar to Vasquez-Tokos

(2017) who argues that the "history of conquest and colonization feeds into contemporary legal definitions of Latinos as a separate group that qualifies for federal programs for disadvantaged racial minorities, further legitimizing understandings of Latinos as a racial category" (pg. 29).

I used snowball sampling to obtain my sample of 30 interracial couples, beginning with those from my personal networks and those of close friends, family, and faculty members. Each respondent was asked to complete a demographic sheet prior to the start of the interview. The information provided on this form was used to obtain demographic information (i.e. age, educational attainment, occupation, and income) and to determine the relevance of some interview questions (i.e. questions related to children). Refer to Table 1.2 to review social and demographic characteristics of study participants.

Interviews consisted of questions that covered 6 broad topics: (1) biography, (2) relationship with spouse, (3) relationships with family and friends, (4) influence of public spaces, (5) ethnic/racial identity, and (6) interracial partnership questions. Biography questions were used to understand respondent's former experience with other racial and ethnic groups, for example, if they grew up in diverse neighborhoods or had close friendships with children of other races. Questions also revealed how individuals personally identify, racial and ethnic categorization (how others racially perceive and categorize members of these interracial relationships), influence of ethno-racial identifiers on ethnic identity (i.e. ethnic language proficiency; last name as ethnic marker), how family members and close friends react to partners of a different racial group (i.e. acceptance, rejection, confusion), and for those with children, the influence of interracial marriage on parenting. I audio recorded all interviews and later transcribed them.

I purposely elected to sample only from California because it is currently one of only four majority-minority states in the United States. Current Census Data suggests that we will have a

majority-minority nation by 2044, with a projected 220 percent increase in the multiracial population between 2014 and 2060 (Frey 2018). Conducting this research within California, given its advanced state in this regard, can presumably yield results that will provide context for the growth in interracial relationships and be relevant for the future of race relations in the United States. This approach, however, is not without its limitations. Since California residents have been found to be more open to interracial dating and is more progressive in terms of accepting interracial intimacy (Feliciano, Robnett, & Komaie 2009), the generalizability of the results will be limited. Nevertheless, California is a harbinger of race and class relations especially as the Latinx population settles in new immigrant destinations.

Given the small study sample for this dissertation (15 black-Latinx couples and 15 Latinx-white couples), it is difficult to generalize the findings to all interracial unions in the U.S. The purpose of this study is therefore to contribute to existing literature on interracial intimacy that utilizes interview data with relatively small samples to reveal the nuances of peoples lived experiences (Childs 2005; McNamara, Tempenis, & Walton 1999; Rosenblatt, Karis, & Powell 1995). For anonymity purposes, all participants names have been changed to pseudonyms and city names have been altered.

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a starting point and then expanding the coding scheme as I continued conducting interviews and analyzing the data. This allowed me to cultivate a more defined coding rubric.

RESULTS

One key area discussed in the interracial intimacy literature focuses on family approval and disapproval of relationships that cross racial and ethnic lines (Bell & Hastings 2015; Childs 2002; Harris & Kalbfleisch 2000; Morales 2012). For many respondents, messages of approval and disapproval had been conveyed to them before they had even dated or married outside of their racial group. The examples below, for instance, come from respondent's whose parents encouraged them to focus on individual level attributes instead of racial group membership. To show that an openness to interracial intimacy was present for both genders across racial groups, a quote from each combined composition is included (i.e. black man married to Latinx woman, Latinx man married to black woman, etc.).

Lucy Evans, a Latinx woman married to a white man, stated that her parents were easy going and were primarily concerned that her dating and marriage prospects be "nice and respectful with goals and aspirations." Similarly, Phillip Turner, a white man married to a Latinx woman, stated that his parents encouraged him to focus on the "individual person" and whether or not she was a "good hearted woman." As a result of their parents focus on personal attributes that were untied to racial categories, Lucy and Phillip both felt comfortable dating outside of their racial group. In fact, both revealed having been involved in multiple interracial relationships before settling down with their respective spouses. This supports previous research showing that parent's attitudes toward interracial dating affects personal dating choices.

For Aaron Hughes' mother, concerns over dating inter-religiously were more significant than those related to interracial dating. When probed about his mother's position on interracial

intimacy, Aaron, a black man married to a Mexican American woman, shared the following:

> **Aaron Hughes**
> Not to say that race wasn't a concern at all, but I don't think my mom had any hard and fast expectations that I would settle down with someone black. She doesn't have any kind of hesitance or qualms about interracial relationships. I think inter-religious relationships is the biggest concern of all of hers.

Like Lucy and Phillip, Aaron had been in multiple interracial relationships before settling down with his wife Monsserat Vega. Being told that there were other factors that mattered more than race allowed him to freely select his partners without worrying about the consequences of such differences. As such, both Monsse and Aaron viewed their racial differences as a positive contribution to their union.

Amber Rojas' experience presents a similar message. When asked if her parents ever discouraged her from dating outside of her racial group, Amber (a black woman married to a Colombian American man) stated that her parents "really gave [me and my sister] the freedom to pick who we would pick." She herself had anticipated that because both of her parents were black, they would have wanted her to date and marry a black man but that was not the case. Both Amber and her sister ended up marrying Latinx men, a testament to their parent's openness to interracial intimacy.

Despite the messages of approval relayed by some parents, many respondents received messages disapproving of interracial intimacy as opposed to colorblind-type messages that focused on individual level attributes.

Black Exceptionalism and the Racial Hierarchy

The disapproval of interracial relationships can be related to concerns about maintaining ethnic and racial boundaries (Mindiola, Niemann, & Rodriguez 2002) as well as protecting one's position within the racial hierarchy (Morales 2012). Although there were some disapproving

messages regarding interracial intimacy between whites and Latinos, the most prominent objections came from Latinx and white parents who disapproved of their children (the interview respondents) dating or marrying black individuals. Evidence of this black exceptionalism was particularly evident among female Latinx respondents, although Latinx males and white men and women were not excluded from receiving such messages.

Sandra Baker, a Mexican American woman married to Jason Baker, a white man, shared the messages she received from her father regarding interracial dating.

> **Sandra Baker**
> My dad was adamant that I needed to marry a Mexican man. I dated all types of people and they were never well received unless they were Mexican guys who spoke Spanish. He would say it's too difficult to maintain a relationship with someone who is so different because they wouldn't understand me or my family, and I mean understand in the literal sense because of the language barrier. If I dated white guys he would make jokes about it but he absolutely hated it when I dated black guys. I had a long-term black boyfriend when I was in high school and he wasn't allowed to come to any of my dad's family events. The first time he tried to pick me up from my dad's he wasn't even allowed in the door, it was seriously appalling and really showed me how against me dating a black guy my dad was.

The excerpt above provides multiple insights into Sandra's father's stance on interracial relationships. First, he identifies cultural similarities as an important factor in selecting one's life partner. Second, there is a discomfort with the idea of his daughter dating white men that causes him to make jokes. And finally, he is very intentional about letting Sandra know that he disapproves of her relationship with black men, so much so that he created a physical barrier between her and her previous black boyfriend not allowing him to partake in family events or enter his home.

The message Ernesto Rivas, a Latinx man married to a black woman, received regarding interracial dating was similar to that of Sandra Baker. When asked if his parents ever discouraged him from dating outside of his racial group, he responded:

Ernesto Rivas

Well my family is very traditional so my dad would have conversations with me about marrying a woman who would stay home and raise the kids. He never specifically said that it needed to be a Latina woman or that it couldn't be a white woman but they did make it clear they didn't want me to date black women.

Again, the importance of having that cultural foundation is used as an argument against interracial dating. In this example there isn't a direct message about not dating whites the way there is about it being unacceptable to date blacks. In both of these families, parents are creating a rigid boundary between black-Latinx romantic relationships, deeming these relationships as unacceptable, while maintaining a looser position on Latinx-white relationships. This difference further solidifies the persistence of black exceptionalism by making it clear that although a same race partner is preferred, marriage with a white person is favorable to marriage with a black person. This highlights the important role the racial hierarchy has in parent's disapproving messages of interracial intimacy while also lending support to the emergence of a black/non-black racial divide.

While some families were very direct in their disapproving messages of interracial dating, other respondents discussed black exceptionalism in terms of an unspoken rule. In other words, their parents never told them outright that they disapproved of interracial relationships with blacks, but it was something they knew would not be accepted. Luna Turner's parents, for example, encouraged her to focus on potential partner's morals, work ethic, and educational attainment. Regardless of never being told directly, Luna, a Mexican American woman married to a white man, knew not to bring home black partners.

Luna Turner

[My parents] never told us don't date black people, but we knew we weren't allowed to date African American people because one of my older cousins, she was the first cousin from my mom's side who dated an African American man and has a child with him and after they split up, everyone was so happy. I saw how much everyone frowned upon it. They didn't treat him bad but then you would hear the family talk about them behind their back, like she was so pretty and he's so ugly and her poor children are going to be so dark. It was a little bit of that and it was just like the

> Latino – African American, that whole dynamic. As much as I wouldn't consider my family racist at all, I always felt like that was something my dad or mom wouldn't be okay with if I brought home a black guy. But it was never said directly to me.

Luna, despite never being told not to date black men, understood that it was something her family would not approve of. Drawing from her family's conversations, it is evident that there is a concern over race mixing and the potential that black-Latinx relationships have for producing darker skinned children. The implied disapproval here and fear of mixed-race children, especially darker skinned children, is indirectly signaling to Luna her parent's perceptions of the racial order. Through their comments it is clear that monoracial relationships that produce brown skinned children are better than interracial black-Latinx relationships that might produce black children. This may be rooted in Latinos' awareness of blacks' position on the racial hierarchy. For example, Morales (2012) found that Latinx parents feared that mixed race black-Latinx children would not only "taint" the Latinx heritage, but also revoke physical (i.e. fairer skin) and non-physical privileges (i.e. access to resources and opportunities).

A final excerpt from Claudia Miller's interview provides further evidence of the racialized messages Latinx women sometimes received from their parents while also highlighting the embedded messages that reinforce the racial hierarchy. Claudia, a Mexican American woman with a white husband, shared her experience:

> **Claudia Miller**
> [My parents] never said anything actually. I had a lot of aunts and uncles who married non-Mexicans, like some married whites or Filipinos, so it was kind of accepted in general to marry someone outside of our group. Although in my family, I mean, who knows, but my sister and I always talk about the differences. I brought home a white man to marry, I didn't bring home a black man. Traditionally a lot of people would say that in Mexican culture, I think it has changed, but when I was growing up a lot of people would not have been okay with me dating a black person. Like maybe it wasn't acceptable. It was never like a factor for me. I didn't tend to date black men because I wasn't really around them anyway but if I had they probably wouldn't have been accepted the way [my white husband] was.

Even though Claudia was never specifically told, she did not think her parents would be equally accepting of her bringing home a black man as they would of her bringing home a white man. She mentioned that whites and Asians were okay, but it probably wouldn't have been acceptable to marry a black man. This response demonstrates how parents send racialized messages to their children about who to date. Sometimes these messages reinforce the racial hierarchy by granting different levels of acceptance to different groups, which in turn influence rates of interracial dating and marriage.

Parent's intentional efforts to draw distinct lines between suitable marriage partners comes as no surprise given the racialized nature of our society. The opposition that Latinx parents gave in regards to intimate relationships with black partners, that isn't as strongly felt against whites and Asians, indicates that Latinos believe they are more closely positioned to whites than they are to blacks on the racial hierarchy, a pattern noted by previous scholars as well. The social construction of race and the assumed racial hierarchy therefore play a role in family's messages about interracial intimacy and suitable life partners. According to Lee and Bean (2010), black exceptionalism occurs because the "black category appears to carry more social significance and greater social stigma than the Asian and Latino categories" (pg. 93). The emergence of these boundaries and the subsequent choices of respondents in their marriages indicate that life partner selection does not rely solely on the notion that love is blind (Moran 2001) nor do we live in a colorblind society that views these racial categories as inconsequential.

The implications of parental messages of disapproval can be seen in Sandra's decision to end her long-term relationship with her black boyfriend and Lindsey Serrano's (a white woman married to a Mexican American man) conscious decision to completely avoid relationships with black men.

Sandra Baker
I chose not to proceed in my relationship with my ex who was black because there was so much negative reception from my family. I didn't feel like I would want to be in a relationship where my partner wasn't welcome or accepted, that just didn't feel like it would go well.

Lindsey Serrano
I would probably see them a lot less if I was in a relationship with a black man. I feel like with Mexican they feel like it's a little more similar to their own culture that it's not too big of a difference but my family is unfortunately racist against black. I wouldn't find myself in a relationship with them because I do care what my family thinks and it would be too difficult to overcome, those differences would be too great.

For Sandra and Lindsey, knowing they would not have their family's approval if they dated black men was motive enough not to do so. In Sandra's case, family disapproval meant ending a long-term relationship before it could lead to marriage. Being socially distanced, or forced to choose between their family and their partner, were not viable options for either of these women.

Lindsey stated that her family is more accepting of her being with a Mexican man because their culture is more similar to that of whites. However, during her interview she also mentioned that her father views Latinos as being racially inferior to whites. She shared, "my dad wasn't, or isn't, a very open person. I think he definitely feels like [Mexicans] are at a disadvantage compared to white people." While Lindsey views her dad as being racist against blacks, she describes his feelings toward Latinos as being less harsh. Moreover, his views on Latinos were not strong enough to prevent Lindsey from marrying a Mexican American man. Similarly, Sandra perceived her father's disapproval of Latinx-white relationships to be less rigid than his disapproval of black-white relationships and therefore ended up marrying her white husband.

Perceptions of Social Mobility within the Racial Hierarchy

Parent's positive and negative messages regarding interracial intimacy were also tied to their *perceived* implications of interracial marriage on one's position within the racial hierarchy.

The perceived social mobility of couples varied depending on the combined racial composition of the couples. Latinos with white spouses, specifically Latinx women, for example, were expected to gain upward social mobility through intermarriage with someone of the dominant group. In contrast, messages of black exceptionalism showed parent's concerns regarding downward mobility.

Sandra's response to how her father feels about her marriage with a white man provides context for these perceived implications:

> **Sandra Baker**
> My dad is like grateful that my husband is white. Like I've achieved something wonderful because I've married this white man. We go down to San Diego to visit him and he always thanks him for coming to visit, or like thanks him for bringing me and the kids. It's so weird. Or like, we just went to Cabo and my dad called to see how it was and when he spoke to my husband my dad was like "congratulations!" and I was just like, why are you congratulating him? He didn't congratulate me. He is just always overwhelmingly thankful. It's funny. I do think it has to do with him being white.

Sandra's father, who initially expressed jovial disapproval of her white boyfriends, is now "overwhelmingly thankful" that his daughter married a white man. While his original preference was that she marry a Mexican man who shares their culture, she knew he would be more accepting of her marrying a white man than marrying a black man. He not only approved of his white son in law, but expressed persistent gratitude and continuously made comments to his daughter about how she was *"mejorando la raza"* [improving the Latino race] by marrying a white man and having white children with blonde hair and blue eyes. This comment is an acknowledgement of how skin color, specifically white skin, helps to improve social status and position within the racial hierarchy. Additionally, it serves as an important contrast to Luna's family's fears regarding darker skinned black-Latinx biracial children.

Colin Moore, a white man with a Mexican American wife, discussed a similar observation regarding the perceived implications of a Latinx woman marrying someone from the dominant group. In his interview he stated:

> **Colin Moore**
> Well Mexicans can be the worst racists sometimes, as I've come to find. Her extended family all really loved me because Gabriela was marrying a white persona and that meant her kid would be white, and that was something they thought would be a beneficial trait. There seems to be an Anglo-sizing by minorities and immigrants when they come here. When you're a generation out most kids don't even speak the native language anymore, that tends to be something that happens a lot. So, her extended family took to me immediately. If I was African American, they probably would have flipped a gasket. It's just the way they were.

Unlike the fears surrounding mixed-race Latinx-black children, children born to Latinx-white couples are expected to benefit from having a white parent and hopefully white skin. For both Gabriela and Sandra's families, marrying a white man is expected to result in upward social mobility for them, their children, and, according to Sandra's father, for the Latinx race as a whole. Colin also mentions that Gabriela's family would have "flipped a gasket" if he were African American. Thus, even Colin, as a white man, is cognizant of the implications the racial hierarchy has on varying levels of acceptance of interracial intimacy depending on the racial combination of the couple.

The emergence of black exceptionalism and the strong disapproval of Latinos dating blacks is in part rooted in fears of downward mobility. Latinos recognize that despite also being a marginalized group, they are not positioned at the bottom of the U.S. racial hierarchy because blacks have historically held that position and continue to in present day. Because Latinos fall somewhere between whites and blacks within this hierarchy, marrying a black person is believed to jeopardize their "in-between" status and pose a threat toward downward mobility. These circumstances provide context as to why black exceptionalism and fears of downward mobility

extend into fears about intermarriage.

As an example, consider the case of Ernesto Rivas, a Mexican man married to Brianna Rivas, a black woman. When asked why his parents discouraged him from dating interracially, he responded with:

> **Ernesto Rivas**
> I think [my parents] view blacks as being inferior to Mexicans even though we are both part of minority groups. Both of my parents came here from Mexico and they talk a lot about the American dream and how we have all of the opportunities to be successful here. I guess they think me dating or being married to a black woman threatens those opportunities. There might be some fears there that marrying a black woman would hold me back in a way.

Ernesto's parents, who are both first generation immigrants from Mexico, are concerned that marrying Brianna will make it difficult for him to successfully achieve the American dream. Their fears regarding mobility barriers are rooted in the idea that blacks are racially inferior to Latinos and therefore marrying a black woman is believed to create an obstacle toward upward mobility. Even though Ernesto's parents emigrated to the U.S., they have internalized the importance of the U.S. racial structure enough to enforce racial boundaries and encourage social closure toward blacks.

Mateo Santana, also a Mexican man with a black wife, shared a similar sentiment regarding his parent's fear of downward mobility as a consequence of his marriage to Alexis Bryant. He stated:

> **Mateo Santana**
> [My parents] just don't like black people. They think me marrying a black woman has brought us down in some way, like we as a people would have been better off if I didn't marry her. I get it, that whole black-brown divide, I know there's a history there, but it shouldn't matter anymore.

Mateo references the history of the "black-brown" divide as the reason his parents disapprove of him marrying Alexis and also acknowledges their fear of being "brought down" as a result of his

marriage. In contrast to Sandra's father who views her interracial marriage with a white man as an improvement for the Latinx race, Mateo's parents view his marriage to a black woman as a disadvantage to "their people". For both Ernesto and Mateo's parents, awareness of the racial hierarchy creates fear that marriage with a black person will result in downward social mobility and thus influences how they feel and speak to their children about interracial intimacy. While Mateo and Ernesto chose to marry black women despite their parents' messages of disapproval, parental messages of black exceptionalism do impact interracial dating and marriage rates. In some cases, such as Lindsey and Sandra's, the racialization of blacks as inferior directly impacted their marital decisions. These excerpts serve as indicators of how parents "socialize their children to exclude blacks from their pool of suitable marriage partners" (Lee & Bean 2010 pg. 94).

Accepting "The Exception"

For some couples, what started as disdain and disapproval from family members later turned to acceptance. However, family acceptance was conditional in the sense that parents categorized respondent's spouses as exceptions to their racial group. Fears of downward mobility and threats to opportunities could therefore be disregarded because family members essentially pardoned the spouse from belonging to a racially inferior group.

Colin Moore, a white man married to a Mexican woman, provides an example by explaining why his grandparents were willing to accept Gabriela despite their negative views of Latinos. He shared:

> **Colin Moore**
> For the most part I think my family gets along well with Gabriela. We always make this joke. With my grandparents on my dad's side, the really religious ones… You know, Gabriela is very professional, she's a Latina, so she was always the exception. "All those other Mexicans, they're lazy, but you, you're a hard worker." So, they view her as the exception and that's how they have always treated her.

For Colin's grandparents, it is important that Gabriela is a hard worker because it means she does not fit their stereotype of Mexicans being lazy. Because Gabriela is a doctor, they are able to validate their feelings that she is an exceptional Latina and therefore accept, love, and treat her well. By accepting Gabriela, his grandparent's perceptions about Latinos has not changed. They have not reassessed their view of Latinos as lazy or racially inferior even though their granddaughter in law is a Latina doctor. Instead they have categorized her as being a different kind of Latina, an exception, one who is worthy of marrying a white man, one who does not pose a threat to their family's privilege or status.

James Miller, a white man married to Claudia Miller, a Mexican American woman, also stated that his family has accepted Claudia as his wife because they too view her as an exception to her racial group. In his interview, James shared that he comes from a racist family that he knows would have had a problem with him marrying a black woman, but that there was never any reaction to Claudia not being white. According to James, it is probably because "She doesn't introduce herself as *Claudia* [said with a Latinx accent], it's Claudia, and that says where she comes from too." Claudia, however, knows that their approval runs deeper than the way she speaks. In her interview she stated:

> **Claudia Miller**
> I think part of the reason I was accepted quite easily is partly class based. I mentioned I grew up in middle class and I was college educated. I think that was kind of why. I wasn't like this Mexican girl with only a high school education, I think that would have been a problem. So, I guess I wasn't viewed as like a typical Mexican. And it's funny because his mom actually said something like that to me. She said I am pretty much white, I guess because I don't speak Spanish. I don't know. I mean, I can only imagine that was like a negative comment. But my sister in law also made a comment about me not really being Mexican.

Claudia believes she was accepted by James' family because she earned a bachelor's degree and came from a middle-class family. Being less educated and having an accent would have more

prominently signaled her otherness and she may not have been equally as welcomed into the family. Moreover, Claudia's mother in law and sister in law's comments suggesting that Claudia is essentially white because she doesn't speak Spanish further solidifies that they view her as an exception and therefore, despite being a racist family, are capable of accepting her.

There were similar shifts in acceptance for black-Latinx couples. Julia Coleman, for example, is a Mexican American woman married to a black man, Wesley Coleman. Because Julia grew up in a primarily Latinx neighborhood and only dated Mexican boys throughout her high school years, her parents never discouraged her from dating outside of her racial group. It wasn't until she started dating a white man in college and later Wesley, that her parent's disapproval became evident. Julia shared:

> **Julia Coleman**
> My parents had reservations about Wes because he was black. Well, they had way more than reservations about Wes. They really weren't happy about it…. I think about 2 years in is when they really started to accept him. Now they have a good relationship with him. But sometimes my parents make weird comments about him not being like other black people they know. It's somewhat like they've accepted him because they view him as an exception, like he's black but not like black people.

When asked why her parent's viewed Wes as an exception, Julia continued:

> My dad says he's not like other black people he knows because he has a good job and makes good money. But when we first started dating, it didn't matter to my mom or my dad that we were in college together. At that time, they didn't care that he was educated, they still didn't like the fact that he was black. But now, now they talk about his job and how we are able to live in a nicer neighborhood than I lived in growing up, and they know that has to do with him and the money he makes. But for some reason he can't be educated with a good job that pays good money *and* be black. All of those positives things they see in him for some reason make him different.

To accept Wesley as a well off, educated black man goes against her parents racialized views and negative stereotypes about black people. Thus, rather than completely change their personal opinions and perceptions about blacks as a group, it is easier to simply classify Wesley as an

exception. Because he is educated, he is different; because he has a good job, he is different; because he gets paid well, he is different. Their acceptance of Wesley is conditional on their perception of him being different than other blacks. Additionally, Julia revealed that their acceptance was not immediate. Simply knowing that he was educated was insufficient for him to gain immediate acceptance from her parents. Instead, it took them two years to put their personal feelings aside. And yet, the acceptance is only extended to Wesley, not to blacks as a group. The boundaries are therefore not being blurred in these instances to create togetherness and celebrate difference. Instead, accepting the exception reinforces the racial hierarchy by allowing families to maintain their negative perceptions of racial minorities, while also maintaining a loving relationship with someone from that group.

Jasmine Parker, a black woman with a Latino husband, puts these implications into perspective:

> **Jasmine Parker**
> I look out in the world and I see the disparity and I think that there's disparity in terms of poverty and education and police violence. The rhetoric around immigrants. I just don't believe that if more white people married Latinos then that rhetoric would go away. That's where I'm coming to this from. Because I think that what we tend to do is we make exceptions for the people in our lives as exceptional if that makes sense right? So, we say, "well this one is a good one because of X, Y and Z, but the rest of them are still like this." I feel like there has to be other kinds of things besides some interracial marriage to break down some of those barriers.

According to Jasmine, the disparities that reinforce and maintain the differences between racial groups are so deeply embedded in our society that interracial marriage is not enough to blur the boundaries between different groups. So instead we make exceptions to minimize the difference between us and others. But doing so only serves to maintain the racial hierarchy and solidify the racial divide by really only accepting them because they are “different”.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this chapter I examine how parent and family messages about interracial intimacy influence individual's relationship choices. I argue that such messages not only have implications for rates of interracial dating and marriage but also serve to reinforce the U.S. racial structure, specifically black exceptionalism, which may also be perceived as anti-blackness. There were respondents who revealed that their parents took a colorblind approach to love and therefore encouraged them to look beyond race and instead focus on individual level attributes. For others, however, parents used messages about interracial intimacy to draw distinct boundaries between different racial groups, with some lines more rigid than others. Specifically, black exceptionalism emerged as a key theme whereby parents discouraged respondents, in both direct and indirect ways, from dating or marrying blacks due to fears of downward mobility. Meanwhile marriage with those of the dominant group was expected to result in upward social mobility. The messages and the willingness to accept interracial intimacy across some racial lines but not others reinforce the existing racial hierarchy and also lends further support to the emergence of a black/non-black racial divide and helps to explain variations in interracial marriage rates across racial groups.

Moreover, these findings show that we are not moving toward a colorblind society given the tendency of respondent's family members to view their children's partners as exceptions to their race when finally accepting them. Acceptance in these particular cases doesn't mean that racism within families is diminished and racial boundaries are blurred. Instead, making them an exception creates an othered category whereby one specific person from a racially inferior group is deemed acceptable because they are categorized as being unlike others within that racial group. In truth, the goal is not to achieve a fully colorblind society. Instead, it is to equally accept people of all colors and racial groups while celebrating their differences. While increases in interracial marriage over time indicate that we are moving in the right direction, the narrative of people as

"exceptions" to their racial group shows that racial boundaries might not be blurring the way we would expect them to as a result of interracial intimacy.

CHAPTER 3

Parental Racial Identification of Biracial Children: How Racial Stratification and Skin Tone Influence the Identity Process

> Well because he hasn't started school yet and we haven't started, we haven't had to necessarily answer [identity] questions really in a formal way. It's hard because I strongly identify as African-American and I would assume that my child would also have that. But he could pass as not black easily. He could pass as just a Latino kid, like a Mexican kid, especially here in Southern California where there are so many Latinos. So it's hard because I know that when people look at him they wouldn't be like, "oh, there's a black kid."
>
> -Jasmine Parker
> Black woman with black/Latino son

When individuals of different racial backgrounds reproduce, there is no way of knowing how a child's physical appearance will exhibit the genetic combination. The prenatal guessing game moves beyond that of "whose nose will the baby have?" to more meaningful and significant questions that inquire about skin color and hair texture- questions that are rooted in the weight that racial categories carry in the U.S. For these parents, children are not only a representation of their love for one another, they are also a permanent record of an intimate interracial relationship (Root

2001). The physical appearance of their offspring therefore becomes a critical marker for how parents racially identity their children, how they racially socialize them, and how they racially self-identify. This chapter therefore examines the different approaches parents take when racially identifying their mixed-race children by addressing the following research questions:

1) How do parents from interracial marriages negotiate their racial differences when racially identifying their biracial children?
2) To what extent do children's phenotype and skin tone influence how parents racially identity their biracial children?
3) To what extent does racial stratification in the U.S. influence how parents racially identify their biracial children?

Although there is an extensive literature that focuses on black-white interracial families and their children, this research contributes to the scholarship by examining the experiences of dual-minority black-Latinx families in addition to Latinx-white families. Furthermore, research that focuses on multiracial identity tends to do so from the individual's perspective as opposed to examining parental racial identification of their mixed-race children. However, doing so provides insight into the complex process of identity development, and in this particular chapter, examines how phenotype and skin tone, along with the U.S. racial hierarchy, help to shape these processes.

BACKGROUND

When the Supreme Court banned anti-miscegenation laws in *Loving v Virginia* (1967), the result was a swift change in U.S. demographics (Bratter & Zuberi 2001). The subsequent increase in interracial marriage and partnerships has resulted in a substantial growth of the multiracial population in the United States (Lee & Bean 2010; Qian & Lichter 2011). Childbearing among interracial couples inevitably creates new forms of racial diversity, and as children from these unions move on to begin families of their own, this racial and ethnic diversity continues to grow

(Lichter & Qian 2018). Evidence of changes in the multiracial population can be seen by the sheer number of births of multiracial children in a given year. In 2013, for example, 10% of babies (living with both parents and under the age of one) were multiracial, compared to only 1% in 1970 (Pew Research Center 2015). This growth in the multiracial population, coupled with the continued growth of interracial marriages, is expected to fuel an even quicker rise in the number of mixed-race individuals.

Consequently, the growth in the mixed-race population has created new discussions regarding the role of race in America. When the U.S. Census allowed individuals to select all racial categories that apply in 2000, for example, public discourse on multiraciality and the newly emerging racial terrain brought forth debates regarding the potential end of racial categories (D'Souza 1996; Graves 2004) and the emergence of a colorblind society (Bonilla-Silva 2001; Herring, Keith, & Horton 2004). But research continues to show how racially divided and unequal the U.S. remains (Blau 2004; Feagin 2000; Winant 2002). This is particularly relevant for mixed-race individuals who have increased flexibility in how they racially identify (Kilson 2001; Renn 2004; Root 1996) but who are not protected from having their racial identity externally ascribed to them (Lichter & Qian 2018).

Cultural norms such as the rule of hypodescent linger to this day (Ho, Sidanius, Levin, & Banaji 2011) and we continue to live in a society that racially categorizes people based on their appearance (Feliciano 2016; Roth 2012). In theory, multiracial children from interracial marriages reveal the true nature of race as a social construct given their ability to permeate racial boundaries, but these families are nonetheless required to navigate "the symbolic, institutional, and interpersonal aspects of race" (Rollins & Hunter 2013, pg. 140). Taking the time to examine the complexities of how interracial parents racially identify their biracial children therefore provides

insight into the racial identification process while also highlighting the role of racial stratification in helping to shape these processes.

Racial Socialization

Within most families, parents serve as a primary source of racial socialization. Racial socialization, a term originally coined to describe a process between monoracial parents and their minority children (Peters 1985), is a process that helps prepare children for a racialized society that stratifies people based on their race (Rockquemore & Laszloffy 2005; Song 2010). This process, while central to the development of racial-ethnic minority children, is not equally prominent among monoracial white families (Ortiz 2017) who have the privilege of being part of the dominant group. How parents racially socialize their children sets the stage for their racial consciousness as well as how they understand racism and racial privilege (Hughes et al. 2006).

Racial socialization within interracial families, however, differs from that of monoracial families. The unique interracial composition in interracial families requires that parents reflect on racial socialization in a way that same race parents don't have to (Root 2001). Unlike monoracial children from same race parents, biracial children are situated between two racial groups that hold different positions in the U.S. racial hierarchy (Rollins & Hunter 2013), and are unlikely to share a multiracial identity with either of their parents (Ortiz 2017). The lived experiences of race within interracial families can therefore vary drastically from one generation to the next (Song 2010). How parents racially socialize their mixed-race children can thus vary depending on the parent's racial background as well as the respective interracial combination (Lichter & Qian 2018).

Research has shown that how parents of mixed-race children racially socialize their children is informed by how they themselves were socialized as children (Hughes & Chen 1999; Rockquemore & Laszloffy 2005). Minority parents from interracial relationships focus on the

minority experience in an attempt to teach their children how to cope with the realities of racial stratification and prepare them for real life experiences that may be based on their physical appearance (Rockquemore & Laszloffy 2005). Ortiz (2017), for example, found that multiracial families with a black parent prioritize racially socializing their children as black because of the prevalence of racial discrimination and prejudice against blacks in the U.S. In some cases, then, the racial socialization process for these children more closely reflects that of monoracial black children than multiracial white children because in monoracial black families children are prepared for discrimination and negative life experiences that are rooted in their skin tone, physical appearance, and social position (Lesane-Brown 2006).

White parents of mixed-race children, in contrast, may not have the same level of racial consciousness as their minority spouse counterparts. Research has consistently shown that being part of the majority group means white children are socialized in a way that centers race around people of color while ignoring the benefits of being white (Hughes & Johnson 2001). White parents of multiracial children are therefore more likely to focus on teaching their children about equality and having a reactionary response when their children are confronted with race-based experiences (Marbury 2006; Samuels 2009) rather than preparing them for such experiences. Moreover, when mixed race children can pass as white, white parents are able to spend less time racially socializing their children (Hamm 2001). Clearly, parents of mixed-race children take different approaches toward racial socialization. Even within a single family the differing experiences of each parent can result in various racial socialization methods, all of which can influence how children internalize racial and ethnic categories and how they self-identify as both children and adults.

Finally, parents can take a colorblind approach whereby racially socializing their children focuses on the shared experiences of the human race and emphasizes self-development over the

importance of racial categories. This "mainstream socialization" (Thornton 1997) is intended to prepare children to be successful within the dominant American society and is implemented when parents do not believe that racial boundaries will matter for their mixed-race children (Lee & Bean 2010). Embracing a colorblind approach when research continues to show the persistence of racial stratification, however, only helps to maintain institutional racial oppression (Johnston & Nadal 2010). And, as previously mentioned, doesn't protect multiracial children from the consequences of being ascribed to a racial minority, specifically if their skin tone and physical appearance does not align with how they are being racially socialized.

Racial Identification of Mixed-Race Individuals

How multiracial individuals choose to racially identify is a result of a long-term process shaped by various factors including social networks (Herman 2004; Brunsma and Rockquemore 2001), socioeconomic status (Daniel 2002; Yancey 2003), racial socialization (Csizmadia, Rollins & Kaneakua 2014; Ortiz 2017), and physical appearance (Brunsma and Rockquemore 2001; Dalmage 2000; Herman 2004; Rockquemore & Laszloffy 2005; Song 2010). The majority of these studies, however, focus on how individuals themselves racially identify as opposed to their parent's racial identification of them.

The role of physical appearance and phenotype in shaping racial identification is important because we primarily use skin tone and physical appearance as indicators of racial group membership (Feliciano 2016; Rockquemore & Laszloffy 2005). Mixed-race children, even siblings born to the same interracial family, can vary drastically in their physical appearance. While some multiracial children may look racially ambiguous as a result of their genetic combination, others may simply present as monoracial, ergo creating complexities in the identity process. Moreover, racial identification does not always directly correspond with physical appearance

(Rockquemore & Laszloffy 2005). A mixed-race child who looks black can identify as white and a mixed-race child who looks white can identify as black. But the flexibility of identity "choice" is more accessible to mixed race individuals who look phenotypically white than those who look phenotypically black (Brunsma 2005), particularly because people of color are more likely to be racialized based on others racial projections and perceptions (Cornell & Hartmann 1998; Rodriguez 2000; Roth 2012).

Research that focuses on parental racial identification of mixed-race children has found that parents are more likely to identify minority-majority mixed race children with their minority side (Brunsma 2005) particularly when the minority spouse is male or listed as head of household (Lichter & Qian 2018). Moreover, parents are more likely to identify their Latinx-white girls as Latinx and their mixed Latinx-white sons as white. In upper class families, however, parents of Asian-white and Latinx-white children were more likely to identify their children as either "white" or "multiracial" (Brunsma 2005), thus engaging in a process of reverse hypodescent.

Colorism and Interracial Families

There is also something to be said about the role of colorism within mixed race families. Colorism refers to the preference of lighter skinned individuals over darker skinned individuals within the same racial group (Walker 1982). Social scientists have been able to document this phenomenon through studies showing that lighter skinned individuals complete more years of education and earn more money than their darker skinned counterparts (Espino & Franz 2002; Hill 2000; Hunter 2005; Monk 2014) because those with darker skin experience higher levels of discrimination. Additional research shows that notions of colorism are both reinforced and challenged within monoracial families. Latina, black, and Asian American darker skinned women, for example, are warned to stay out of the sun, encouraged to use bleaching products that help

lighten skin color, and discouraged from dating darker skinned men (Hunter 2005; Rondilla & Spickard 2007; Wilder & Cain 2010). However, some families work hard to resist the U.S. color hierarchy and instead promote messages of black being beautiful (Wilder & Cain 2010). Hordge-Freeman (2013), in constrast, argues that racial socialization does not have to be one or the other and claims that messages of resistance and reinforcement can exist in conjunction with one another.

If these differences in skin color matter intra-racially, than there are surely implications for interracial families where variations in skin tone highlight interracial differences that both challenge and reinforce racial hierarchies. Differences in skin color within interracial families can impact parents and children in several ways. As Tharps (2016) notes, these differences can be as small as purchasing different sunscreen SPF levels for different family members or as big as having their light skinned children treated better than their dark skinned children by family members or in public settings. When siblings differ in appearance from one another parents might feel obligated to racially socialize their children differently depending on how their appearance might affect their experiences (Root 1998). Alternatively, families can try to minimize the phenotype differences between themselves and their children, or the differences between siblings, by pushing for a unified family culture (Song 2010). But if the differences are significant enough to create varying social experiences, then embracing a family culture can still result in mixed race children who racially identify differently than their siblings (Song 2010).

The identity process is therefore nuanced and complex. However, parental racial identification of their biracial children helps better understand race relations in the U.S. by examining how skin tone and race-based positionality directly influences the process of identity development.

DATA AND METHODS

This dissertation chapter draws from 48 in depth, semi-structured interviews with 10 black-Latino married couples and 14 Latino-white married couples living in various Southern California cities. Interviews were conducted in person at respondent homes and in coffee shops, over the phone, and via skype and lasted approximately 1.5 hours. Given the nature of the questions, I conducted interviews with married partners separately, resulting in a total of 48 individual interviews. Table 1 below shows the number of couples interviewed by racial composition. The number of couples interviewed is not equal across all categories because the 24 couples interviewed are a subset of a larger study whereby having children was not a requirement to participate.

Table 3.1: Number of Couples with Children Interviewed by Racial Composition

Black/Latinx Couples	**Latinx/White Couples**
Black Mother-Latino Father	*Latina Mother-White Father*
5 couples	7 couples
Latina Mother-Black Father	*White Mother-Latino Father*
5 couples	7 couples

To account for nativity differences in rates of interracial dating and marriage, all Latinx participants were U.S. born. Studying interracial relationships among Latinos is complex and can be challenging due to Latinx intra-group diversity and variation. Phenotypic difference among Latinos is one source of variation, with individuals who self-identify as Latinx at times being categorized by others as black or white (Itzigsohn 2009; Rodriguez 2000). Of particular relevance to this dissertation are Feliciano and Robnett's (2014) finding that self-identified white Latinos are less open to dating blacks and more open to dating whites, while self-identified black Latinos are less open to dating whites and more open to dating blacks. When Latinos self-identify racially as black or white, there are implications for how Latinx-white and black-Latinx couples experience

their interracial status, particularly if Latinx-white couples do not view race as a matter of concern or if black-Latinx couples both self-identify as black. These are important points to consider for this research and as such I made a concerted effort to control for some of these variations by excluding Latinos who self-identify racially as black. It is also important to note that none of the Latinos interviewed self-identified as white. Including Latinos who racially identify as black or white would have required a larger subset of interracial couples (i.e. black-Latinx/black couples) to make generalizations. For the purposes of this dissertation, I have therefore limited my respondents to Latinos who identify as Latinx or a Latinx group (i.e. Mexican American).

Sandra Baker provides a detailed explanation as to why she racially identifies as Mexican and not white:

> **Sandra Baker**
> I think others identify me as being Mexican or Latino. I don't think at any point if anyone asked me what race are you, and I said white, I don't think anyone would be satisfied with that answer. Like I get my race is white and my ethnicity is Latino but if you came up to me and asked me "what is your race?" and I said "white" you would say something like, "I mean, what is your nationality or ethnicity?" because white is not a satisfactory answer for someone who looks like me. So I just can't bring myself to self-identify as white.

This excerpt is reflective of how Latinos tend to be categorized by others as a racial group as well as why they themselves may opt out of self-identifying racially as white. For this study I therefore refer to Latinx as a racial group rather than an ethnic identification, similar to Vasquez-Tokos (2017) who argues that the "history of conquest and colonization feeds into contemporary legal definitions of Latinos as a separate group that qualifies for federal programs for disadvantaged racial minorities, further legitimizing understandings of Latinos as a racial category" (pg. 29).

I used snowball sampling to obtain my sample of 30 interracial couples, beginning with those from my personal networks and those of close friends, family, and faculty members. Each

respondent was asked to complete a demographic sheet prior to the start of the interview. The information provided on this form was used to obtain demographic information (i.e. age, educational attainment, occupation, and income) and to determine the relevance of some interview questions (i.e. questions related to children). Refer to Table 1.2 to review social and demographic characteristics of study participants.

Interviews consisted of questions that covered 6 broad topics: (1) biography, (2) relationship with spouse, (3) relationships with family and friends, (4) influence of public spaces, (5) ethnic/racial identity, and (6) interracial partnership questions. Biography questions were used to understand respondent's former experience with other racial and ethnic groups, for example, if they grew up in diverse neighborhoods or had close friendships with children of other races. Questions also revealed how individuals personally identify, racial and ethnic categorization (how others racially perceive and categorize members of these interracial relationships), influence of ethno-racial identifiers on ethnic identity (i.e. ethnic language proficiency; last name as ethnic marker), how family members and close friends react to partners of a different racial group (i.e. acceptance, rejection, confusion), and for those with children, the influence of interracial marriage on parenting. I audio recorded all interviews and later transcribed them.

I purposely elected to sample only from California because it is currently one of only four majority-minority states in the United States. Current Census Data suggests that we will have a majority-minority nation by 2044, with a projected 220 percent increase in the multiracial population between 2014 and 2060 (Frey 2018). Conducting this research within California, given its advanced state in this regard, can presumably yield results that will provide context for the growth in interracial relationships and be relevant for the future of race relations in the United States. This approach, however, is not without its limitations. Since California residents have been

found to be more open to interracial dating and is more progressive in terms of accepting interracial intimacy (Feliciano, Robnett, & Komaie 2009), the generalizability of the results will be limited. Nevertheless, California is a harbinger of race and class relations especially as the Latinx population settles in new immigrant destinations.

Given the small study sample for this dissertation, it is difficult to generalize the findings to all interracial unions in the U.S. The purpose of this study is therefore to contribute to existing literature on interracial intimacy that utilizes interview data with relatively small samples to reveal the nuances of peoples lived experiences (Childs 2005; McNamara, Tempenis, & Walton 1999; Rosenblatt, Karis, & Powell 1995). For anonymity purposes, all participants names have been changed to pseudonyms and city names have been altered.

Analysis

Drawing from the grounded theory approach of analyzing qualitative data, I engaged in theoretical sampling and the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin 1997). Theoretical sampling requires subsequent sampling that is based on the emerging theories in the data, while the constant comparative method involves writing reflective memos as data is collected in order to form interpretations early on. I therefore began by conducting open coding, using interview memos as a starting point and then expanding the coding scheme as I continued conducting interviews and analyzing the data. This allowed me to cultivate a more defined coding rubric.

RESULTS

Within the majority of the interviewed families, parents acknowledged, encouraged, and celebrated their children's multiraciality regardless of their physical appearance. Parents celebrated cultural holidays, incorporated ethnic food and family traditions, and taught their children how to speak their family's native language in an effort to encourage positive biracial

identity development. Rather than explore why parent's agree to identify their children as biracial, the focus will be on the exceptions to this more general theme. Doing so provides an in-depth analysis of how parents navigate the parental identification process when there are differences in parental racial identification with a specific focus on how skin tone and social positions influence this process.

When Biracial looks Monoracial & Disagreements Emerge

For some parents it was difficult to fully integrate a child's monoracial appearance with a multi-racial identity. Brianna Rivas, for example, is a black woman married to Ernesto Rivas, a Mexican man. Together they have a 4-year-old son named Ezekiel who others racialize as being monoracially black because, as Ernesto described him, he "looks like a light skinned black kid. He doesn't look Mexican really." Brianna agrees that Ezekial looks primarily black and therefore struggles with the idea of identifying her son as Blaxican the way Ernesto identifies him. In her interview she shared:

> Brianna Rivas
> Ernie likes to say Ezekiel is Blaxican, but I don't. He is, I know he is, he is black and he is Mexican but I usually just say he's black because he looks black and he's going to live his life as a black male. Saying he is Mexican isn't going to change his experiences in any way, his life is always going to be centered around the fact that he is black. I want him to embrace his Mexican side and continue on with the traditions that Ernie and his family are passing down to him, but to me Zeeky is black.

Brianna acknowledges and embraces her son's Mexican side but believes his experiences will be centered around his physical appearance as a black child, and later in life, a black man. Thus, she finds it challenging to identify him as a mixed-race child.

When asked if her and Ernesto ever have conversations regarding race and ethnicity, she shared the following:

> Brianna Rivas

> We have a son who is black and we have conversations about that all the time, like what will we tell him about how he needs to interact with the police, or how he shouldn't wear certain clothing because it could mean something different on black skin.

Conversations of this nature further reinforce why Brianna chooses to identify her son as monoracially black rather than Blaxican. These race-based conversations highlight the ramifications of being a male with black skin and expose how much weight racial categories really carry in the U.S. These ramifications are perceived to be so central to one's social realities that the parent of a biracial Latinx-black child is unwilling to identify him as mixed-race. Although Ezekiel technically falls between the two stratified groups, his physical appearance as a black child directly influences how she racially identifies him. Furthermore, her justification for identifying Ezekiel as monoracially black underscores the salience of positionality within the racial hierarchy.

Hannah and Alex Molina present a similar example of parents who disagree on how to racially identify their monoracial looking children. As a white woman with a darker skinned Mexican husband, Hannah and Alex believed their children would be born with brown skin. According to Hannah, however, their daughters Eva (7 years old) and Lydia (3 years old) have "very white" and "pale white" skin. Hannah therefore identifies both of her daughters as white rather than half white and half Mexican. When asked about her children, she stated:

> Hannah Molina
> Well, when Eva was born, I always said she was mixed but as she got older and since she is so white, I have just started to say they are white. They are half Mexican and I am not ashamed of that but their white side is just so much more dominant. They look white, they go to a white school, the people they hang out with are mostly white. I guess I identify them as white because that's how I think they will identify themselves as they get older.

For Hannah, being white is something she believes is central to her daughter's lives. She describes not only their appearance but their schools and white friends as reasons for identifying them as white. Alex, however, identifies both Eva and Lydia as half Mexican and half white, especially

because both of them speak Spanish, are regularly exposed to Mexican culture, and are very close to his family. For him, Hannah's refusal to acknowledge their daughter's Mexican side is upsetting because of her family's disposition on the racial hierarchy. Hannah comes from wealthy parents who are avid Donald Trump supporters and who do not accept her relationship with Alex because he is Mexican. Thus, when Hannah rejects their daughter's Mexican side, he views it as being rooted in her parent's racial ideologies. When asked how he feels about Hannah identifying their children as only white, Alex shared:

> Alex Molina
> To tell you the truth, it makes me really mad. She is basically denying their Mexican side and that's shitty because her parents are really racist against basically anyone that's not white. She should be showing the girls that she embraces that part of them so they don't one day think she is racist like their grandparents.

He also shared:

> I'm sure [Hannah's parents are] happy their grandkids look white, who knows how they would have reacted if we had little brown girls. Instead they get to talk about the girl's blonde hair and the blue eyes that come from "their side".

For Alex, the process of identifying Eva and Lydia goes beyond their surface level appearance. He recognizes that Hannah and her parent's views reinforce the racial hierarchy within their family and he therefore does not want their Mexican side to go unnoticed. And although he mentioned it makes him feel both proud and happy when Eva talks about her Mexican side, he also expressed an element of gratitude that his daughters have white skin because he knows they will not have to encounter some of the discrimination that he has as a person of color. Thus, it is important for Alex that his children are cognizant of their biraciality but he is also aware of the privilege that comes with their daughter's white skin.

Jason and Sandra Baker, a white male and Latinx female couple, experience a similar dilemma. Because both of his children have blonde hair and blue eyes, and because they live in a

primarily white neighborhood, Jason identifies his children as only white as opposed to mixed Latinx and white. Sandra, however, does not agree with how he identifies their children Abigail (6 years old) and Jack (2 years old). She stated:

> Sandra Baker
> I classify them as mixed. I call them Mexican and white. Sure, they don't look Mexican but I don't feel like that negates that they are. This is a conversation me and [Jason] often have because he tells me "Mexican isn't a race so why are you saying they're mixed? They're white with Hispanic ethnicity." And I say "no because I don't self-identify as white, I self-identify as Mexican or Latina which makes them half Mexican."

To Sandra, it doesn't matter that Abigail and Jack look white, they are half Mexican and she wants that to be part of their identity. She then took the time to explain why this is important for her:

> Sandra Baker
> For me a lot of it has to do with the need to reaffirm to my children that they are as much of me as they are their dad, even if strangers refuse to acknowledge it. Because the sad thing is, most of the time when people question if or how I am related to my kids, they hear it. I can laugh it off all day long but at the end of the day my kids are consistently being put in a situation where they have to think about why people don't believe I am their mom or that they're my kids. And that has to have some sort of emotional toll on them the way it does on me. So I don't know, maybe it is funny when my white looking kids claim they are Mexican but that's what I want from them. I want them to feel connected to me even if we look completely different from each other. When people ask them what they are, I want them to say they're Mexican so that when people see them with me there's no doubts that we are related or that they are in fact half Mexican.

The stark difference in Sandra and her children's skin tones creates many instances where her relationship to them is challenged. For example, she discussed being repeatedly mistaken for the nanny, asked if she has childcare availability, or asked what her babysitting rate is in front of her children. These instances publicly reinforce their differences and she worries about the implications this will have on her children's willingness to accept Mexican as part of their identity. Currently, both of her children identify predominantly with their Mexican side despite having blonde hair, blue eyes, and white skin. Sandra believes this is as a result of how much she

encourages them to embrace their Mexican heritage regardless of their physical appearance. And even though Sandra strongly encourages her children's mixed-race background, she also discussed being aware of the benefits their white skin and white sounding last name affords them.

For both Alex Molina and Sandra Baker, having their minority side be both acknowledged and embraced by their children was important. For Alex this need stemmed from the disapproval of his wife's family that emanated from him being Latino; for Sandra it stemmed from constantly having her mother-child relationship challenged. In both cases, their spouses failed to look past their children's physical appearance as monoracial and encourage a biracial identity. I would argue that this is in part possible because the Molina and Baker children all look white. Although there may have been variations in the shades of white among the combined four children, none of them would be categorized as a racial minority by someone who was unaware of their mixed-race background. The Molina and Baker parents have more flexibility in how they identity their children because their children's white skin minimizes the possibility of being ascribed to a racialized minority group.

The same likely cannot be said of mixed-race families where biracial siblings vary in skin tone. For example, Mateo and Alexis Santana, a Latinx male and black female couple, identify their children as mixed Mexican and black and do so because their daughter presents as monoracially black and their son presents as monoracially Latino. It would be odd to racially identify two children from the same parents in two different ways because of their physical appearance. The majority of interracial families who had children with distinct skin tones from one another chose to identify all of their children as biracial as opposed to identifying each individual child based on their skin tone and physical appearance. If we extend this rationale to the Baker and Rivas families, we are able to better understand why skin tone matters so much in

the parental identification process. For example, if Abigail Baker had been born with white skin like her father and Jack Baker had been born with brown skin like his mother, it is less likely that their father Jason would find it irrational for them to identify as biracial (Latinx-white) as he would be more inclined to reflect on his son's experiences as a person of color in a racialized society. And perhaps the same can be said of Brianna Rivas, who identifies her son as monoracially black because of his physical appearance. Her and Ernesto only have one son, but she would perhaps change how she identifies her son if they welcomed a sibling who looked either mixed or monoracially Latinx.

These findings align with research showing patterns of hypodescent among majority-minority, in this case white-Latinx, interracial families. But the interview approach provides a contextual narrative for why this may be happening. These particular cases where biracial children are being identified as monoracial by only one of their parents can be tied to the U.S. racial structure given that a black mother is accepting her sons position on the racial hierarchy, despite him being mixed, and the two white parents are protecting their children's whiteness.

Mixed Family Identities

The previous examples show that interracial couples with mixed race children do not always agree on how to accurately identify their children. For some parents, however, the experience of being part of an interracial marriage and having mixed-race children is so significant that they themselves take on a mixed-race family identity. Previous research has shown that individuals can be given "honorary" membership to an affiliative group if they regularly consume and deploy elements of an ethnic group and perceive it to be an integral part of their personal identity (Carter 2005; Jimenez 2010; Roediger 1995; Wilkins 2008). As such, these families provide further support for the flexibility of racial and ethnic boundaries as this particular element

of identity formation refers to the monoracial parent's identity with respect to having biracial children. It is important to note that in the following examples, the spouse who is more highly positioned on the racial hierarchy is the one who feels comfortable taking on a mixed-race family identity.

Lindsey Serrano, a white woman with a Mexican husband, is one such example. Together Lindsey and Isaiah Serrano have two children, a 7-year-old daughter named Willow and a 3-year-old son named Reed. Both parents described their children's physical appearance as being primarily white and both racially identify Willow and Reed as Mexican and white. When discussing how she identifies herself, Lindsey shared the following:

> Lindsey Serrano
> So even like with the kids I will tell them we're Mexican so I identify with being Mexican too because my kids are Mexican and my husband is Mexican. Not that I would like write it on a piece of paper but I have adopted it is part of my family culture and I always tell the kids we are Mexican so the kids know that it's a part of who we are as a family.

For Lindsey, it is important to take on a family identity that is inclusive of their Mexican side and that represents her family as a cohesive unit. Lindsey also views the family identity as a protective identity because she has family members who stereotype Latinos and make discriminatory racial remarks around her husband and children. Thus, by taking on this identity and including Mexican as part of her family culture, she is able to protect her family as a unit rather than have to defend her husband and children as individuals.

As a family, Gabriela and Colin Moore share a similar experience. Colin, a white man with a Mexican wife, shared that he too takes on a Mexican identity.

> Colin Moore
> I say I am Mexican By Choice - MBC - because I find the stereotypical white identification abhorrent. Everything they stand for, this whole republican, needy thing…. So I am MBC and that works for us because both my wife and the kids identify as Mexican.

Colin's motive to take on a "Mexican by choice" identity is grounded in his dislike of white people in addition to his desire to share an identity with his wife and children. Thus, both Gabriela and Colin encourage their children Damaris (13 years old) and Isaiah (10 years old) to identify primarily as Mexican because they themselves view it as their primary form of identity. Both Isaiah and Damaris do in fact self-identify as Mexican and only mention their white side when challenged by those who cannot see past their white skin and accept Mexican as their sole racial background. Even though both children willingly take on a Mexican identity, Gabriela and Colin do not let the benefits of their white skin go unnoticed. In her interview Gabriela shared:

> Gabriela Moore
> I usually explain to the kids how privileged they are because they look white and don't have to worry about things. I talk to them more about how people are judged by the color of their skin. I talk to them because I think they need to know how privileged they are to look the way they do. There is conversations that I have with them where I tell them that I am treated differently because of the color of my skin. Damaris knows she will be treated differently because she is a girl and that it's a misogynistic world and that things aren't fair. I also tell Isaiah he is very privileged because he looks white and that he needs to be aware of that.

In these instances, the salience of physical appearance is being signaled to these mixed-race children. They readily accept and claim their Mexican identity but are also being socialized to understand that being white carries privileges that are not extended to Gabriela, because unlike the rest of her family, her choices are constrained by the color of her skin. Having a white father who takes on the Mexican identity as his own likely facilitates this identity process for Damaris and Isaiah because they are experiencing it in action. His white skin does not prevent him from opting to take on a Mexican identity and they are therefore able to comfortably model his behavior.

Colin Moore and Lindsey Serrano are both white parents choosing to take on a mixed family identity. However, doing so does not affect their life chances or limit their opportunities, their skin is still white and they still have access to the privileges that are accorded to people with

white skin. And ultimately, because both the Serrano and Moore children look white, they too have access to these privileges. Should these children choose to take on a Mexican identity, as do the Moore children, or a mixed-race identity, as do the Serrano children, they will maintain their access to whiteness and its privileges because of the color of their skin.

Mixed Family Identity: When Sibling Variation Influences Identity

The choice to take on a family identity was not unique to white spouses in Latinx-white marriages. Arturo Mejia and Sergio Zapata, both Mexican men with black wives, took on a family identity that incorporated their children's black and Latinx sides. Arturo's three children, Eli (5 years old), Grace (3 years old) and Jocelyn (1-year-old) differ in their physical appearance. According to Arturo, Eli has the same color skin as his mother Bethany, Grace's skin color is "the perfect mix" of Arturo's and Bethany's but "her hair is the same texture as her moms", and Jocelyn's skin tone is the same as Arturo's and is so light that "no one believes she is half black". Because of the differences in their physical appearance, Eli is often racialized by others as black while Jocelyn is racialized as Latina, with people often failing to notice the other part of their biracial composition. The differences in skin tone within her family are so varied that Bethany jokingly stated, "when we stand together, we look like a makeup palette". Given these differences Arturo believes it is important to take on an inclusive family identity. In his interview he said:

> Arturo Mejia
> I don't look at us as an interracial couple that has mixed kids. We are a mixed family. Being mixed has to be part of who we are and how we identify so our kids feel like they fit in. Yeah we will teach them about Mexican culture and they will know they are black but they are both at the same time. What better way to teach them that then for me and Bethany to claim being both too?

For Arturo, taking on this identity means his children don't have to struggle to find their place in the family given their biraciality and the variations in skin tone and appearance. Like Colin Moore, Arturo is modeling self-identity for his children by showing them that even though he doesn't look

black he can take on a mixed-race identity because his family as a unit is mixed. He does this in hopes that his children, who are currently too young to racially self-identify, will feel confident taking on the same biracial identity as their parents despite Jocelyn looking Latinx, Eli looking black, and Grace being the only one that looks mixed. In other words, he doesn't want their children's physical appearance to define how they self-identity racially. His wife Bethany also discussed her perspective of the mixed family identity during her interview:

> Bethany Mejia
> We all look so different so I completely understand why Arturo talks about our family as interracial. If anyone asks what the kids are he responds with "we are black and Mexican" not "they are black and Mexican". He really emphasizes the we part because he does, he wants the kids to hear it, he wants them to say it too. He's always been really worried about how the kids are gonna be treated in the real world and I really do think that he says "we" because he thinks it's going to make a difference. Not just in terms of how they one day identify themselves but like how people treat them. Like if Eli says he is black and Mexican then it's going to somehow soften the blow, or how do I explain it, take the edge off him looking black. Like people are going to ask him before discriminating against his black skin.

When asked how she feels about the family identity, she elaborated:

> It doesn't bother me one bit. Arturo talks about it so much its second nature for me to identify our family the same way when people ask. But me as a person, I still identify myself as a black woman not as an interracial woman. And I don't really know if I buy into this idea that the interracial identity is going to protect the kids in some way. Maybe it will help them feel like our family fits good together but I don't know what it does other than that.

Bethany, although she self-identifies primarily as black, accepts the family identity, and speaks about it as necessary in support of her husband and her children. However, she also revealed that she thinks Arturo believes Eli saying he is mixed will take some of the stigma away from him looking monoracially black, something she doesn't fully agree with. There are therefore two ways of understanding the implications of the racial hierarchy as it pertains to Arturo and Bethany's perceptions of Eli's experiences. First, Arturo encourages a biracial black-Latinx identity to offset the discrimination Eli might experience as a child who looks monoracially black. And second, that

Bethany believes claiming a mixed-race identity will not protect Eli from being discriminated against because of his skin tone. Therefore, to Brianna, black skin in the U.S. is more salient than a brown-black identity.

Sergio and Charlie Zapata's experience as a multi-racial family has some commonalities with that of the Mejia family. Together, Sergio and Charlie have four children, Erika who is 8, Sara who is 6, Tina who is 4, and Benny who is 1. Charlie described Erika, Sara, and Benny as looking "just black" in terms of their physical appearance but described Tina as looking mixed, with people often assuming she is mixed black and white instead of black and Mexican. Because his wife is black and his children are half black, Sergio feels comfortable taking on a Blaxican identity. In his interview he stated:

> Sergio Zapata
> I like to tell Charlie I consider myself Blaxican but she hates when I say that. I'm not claiming to be a black person or all of a sudden identifying myself as a black man but having a black wife and black kids. Well, put it this way, I have to think about the things that affect black people every single day because they affect my wife every day and because they affect my kids too.

Sergio justifies taking on a mixed identity because he believes he has to internalize black social realities in order to protect his wife and children and better understand their life experiences. As an example, he shared the following observation:

> Sergio Zapata
> [Charlie's mom] tells Erika and Sara all the time that they're as sweet as hot chocolate but she has never told Tina the same thing. No one has ever asked her why she doesn't tell Tina, I've never even talked to Charlie about it because I don't want to create any issues around our racial differences for her and her relationship with her mom since it already isn't as strong of a relationship as it should be. But I do wonder why she doesn't say the same thing to Tina and I wonder when will Tina be old enough to realize (1) that she doesn't say it to her and (2) that it's because her skin is white. How do I explain that to my baby girl? I shouldn't have to. And I don't bring it up or haven't brought it up because I don't want to be perceived as this man who is always thinking about race. And so I will continue to tell her she is as Blaxican as all her brothers and sisters and hope that when they're all big and grown that they will all share that same identity.

There is an underlying belief here that a mixed family identity will serve as a shield of protection from the experiences that arise due to their differences. When children from interracial marriages have different skin tones it requires a more nuanced identity narrative and more careful consideration of the effects of racial differences in everyday life. As previously mentioned, a monoracial identity is more accessible if all children within a family have similar skin tones. When there is variation, the multiracial identity becomes more relevant.

Again, the spouse more highly positioned on the racial hierarchy was the one who encouraged the adoptions of a mixed family identity. In the Latinx-white couples, it was Lindsey Serrano and Colin Moore, both of the white spouses; in the Latinx-black couples, it was Sergio Zapata and Arturo Mejia, both of the Latino spouses. Waters (1990) discusses the ability of whites to choose their ethnicity as opposed to people of color who have it ascribed to them. While this ethnic option is available to Lindsey and Colin, it is interesting that in the two black-Latinx couples the Latino husbands would feel comfortable taking on a mixed identity that was inclusive of their mixed children's black side given that they themselves are already racialized as Latinx, a minority group in the U.S. These findings show that individuals, not just whites, feel comfortable self-identifying differently if they are taking on the identity of a lesser positioned group. Charlie Zapata's discussion of the shared family identity speaks to this possibility. In her interview she stated:

> Charlie Zapata
> [Sergio] will sometimes say he's also Blaxican like the kids because his kids are black but I don't know. I would never identify as Mexican. I don't think black people are able to do that, choose what they want to be. But Serge just sees it as something he can say and he thinks I should think the same way but it's kind of a weird idea to wrap my head around. I'm not Blaxican because my kids are black, my kids are Blaxican cause I'm black.

Charlie struggles with the Blaxican family identity because she does not feel black people are able to choose how they are racially categorized the way Sergio can as a lighter skinned Latino. Despite these feelings, Charlie did not express any apprehension to identifying her children as Blaxican, even though one of her children can pass as being white and the other three present as monoracially black rather than mixed black/Latinx. For Charlie it appears that it is acceptable to take on a mixed identity if and only if you are actually mixed.

These examples really highlight the importance of positionality in understanding this process because of the contrast within the examples themselves. In the Latinx-white couples it was the white spouse who opted to take on a mixed-family identity, not the Latinx spouse. Yet the Latinx spouses in the black-Latinx couples were the ones taking on a mixed family identity. The interviews therefore show that it isn't so much that only whites have this option, rather that the person employing an affiliative identity should be drawing from groups positioned lower within the racial hierarchy.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I examine how Latinx-white and black-Latinx interracial parents identify their biracial children. I argue that while many parents racially identify their children as mixed, skin tone variations within families influence the parental identification process. Some white parents with monoracial white looking children, for example, refused to acknowledge their children's Latinx side while the mother of a black-Latinx child identified her son as monoracially black because of the color of his skin. In these instances, the choice to monoracially identify their mixed-race children was a reflection of the U.S. racial structure- white parents were protecting their children's whiteness and a black mother was protecting her black son, who she believed would maintain a black social position despite being biracial.

In families where siblings had considerable skin tone differences, some parents opted to take on a mixed family identity that was inclusive of both parents racial group. This identity formation was used by parents in an attempt to protect their children from racialized experiences by others and to create a sense of cohesiveness despite difference. However, it was only the parent more highly positioned on the racial hierarchy that took on the mixed family identity, that is, the white spouse in the Latinx-white couples and the Latinx spouse in the black-Latinx couples. This is also a reflection of the U.S. racial structure because the option to take on an affiliative ethnic identity is more accessible to those who are positioned higher on the racial hierarchy.

Although interracial families and multiracial children represent fluidity across racial and ethnic boundaries, it is evident that racialized differences impact these families and affect not only how mixed-race individuals self-identify, but how parents racially identify them as well. Although not all families agreed on how to racially identify their biracial children, the narratives throughout of *why* parents identify their children a certain way reflect parents attempts to shape their children's self-identity, and provide insight into the role of skin tone and the racial hierarchy. For some interracial families this may mean encouraging biraciality, for others it may mean encouraging monoraciality, and still for others it may be a combination of the two. Ultimately, the examples in this chapter show how nuanced and complex this process can be.

CHAPTER 4

Cognitive Dissonance and Minority Unity: How *Shared Racial Narratives* Reinforce Racial Boundaries and Challenge Classic Assimilation Theories

Previous research on interracial intimacy has focused primarily on white-nonwhite interracial relationships without fully examining how race plays out in couples where both partners are racialized minorities. Moreover, research on interracial marriage tends to highlight the moments that accentuate racial differences, for example, by discussing how spouses may experience shifts in racial consciousness or develop a relational identity in response to their interracial marriage. In

this dissertation chapter, however, I focus on how individuals create a *shared racial narrative* between themselves and their spouses despite their racial differences. Additionally, I consider the implications *shared racial narratives* have for classic assimilation theories by addressing the following research questions:

1) Why do partners within interracial marriages create shared racial narratives? Do these shared racial narratives differ between Latinx-white and black-Latinx married couples?
2) What are the implications of shared racial narratives for traditional assimilation theories? How do the implications differ for minority-majority and dual-minority interracial couples?

While these two questions may appear to be seemingly unrelated, assimilation research often focuses on how groups change from one generation to the next. In this chapter, I use interracial marriage as a framework to challenge traditional assimilation theories and demonstrate how interracial marriage can serve to reinforce racial boundaries. I expand this perspective by also examining how shared racial narratives within dual-minority couples speak to assimilation theories and also reinforce racial boundaries.

BACKGROUND

Assimilation Theories

Theories of assimilation are relevant to interracial intimacy because interracial marriage has been historically used to understand race relations and minority group acceptance in the U.S. (Gilbertson, Fitzpatrick & Yang 1996; Gordon 1964; Kalmijn 1993, 1998; Moran 2001; Qian & Lichter 2007). Classic assimilation theorists view intermarriage as the concluding step in the process of assimilation (Gordon 1964; Qian & Lichter 2001). When minority group members marry into the dominant group, they argue, assimilation is accelerated. Gordon (1964), for

example, stressed *marital assimilation* as a key phase of assimilation. He believed marital assimilation is indicative of an environment where same-race and interracial marriages are equally accepted by society. Traditional assimilation (also referred to as classic assimilation) theorists view assimilation as an inevitable process whereby all minority groups eventually become absorbed into the dominant group (Francis 1976; Gordon 1964). Proponents of this perspective believe that differences between racially subordinate groups and the dominant group become increasingly less important over time until racism and racial discrimination eventually disappear (Gordon 1991), thus making way for increased acceptance and the formation of interracial relationships. This perspective of assimilation, however, is extremely one sided. In holding the white middle class American value system as the norm, all subordinate groups are forced to let go of their personal value and cultural systems (Alba & Nee 2003). Additionally, critics of traditional assimilation theory argue that it is not applicable to contemporary race relations, particularly because it does not accurately reflect the experiences of the "new" post 1965 immigrants.

In contrast to classic assimilation theories, segmented assimilation theorists posit that the experiences of post-1965 immigrants, primarily Asian and Latin American immigrants who migrated following the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act, are more nuanced and complex than that of their predecessors (Portes & Zhou 1993; Portes & Rumbaut 2001). Unlike the straight-line assimilation experiences of their European counterparts, new immigrant group's assimilation is strained as they often have to negotiate their place within already established U.S. racial hierarchies. Many segmented assimilation theorists also propose that the absorption of subordinate groups into mainstream society varies by group and that assimilation criteria are flexible and change over time, with some groups never achieving assimilation (Zhou 1997). Proponents of segmented assimilation argue that the process of integration is influenced most by the unwelcome

reception some immigrants receive in the U.S. (Portes & Rumbaut 2001), while classic assimilation theorists predict that increased time spent in the new country will ultimately result in convergence between the immigrant and native populations (Alba & Nee 2003).

Vasquez (2014) argues that studying interracial marriage fills "a gap in the literature concerning the incremental nature of assimilation" (pg. 388). Vasquez (2014), however, focuses solely on Latinx-white intermarried couples, finding that biculturalism, whereby white partners migrate into Latinx culture, is the primary outcome within these couples rather than the assumed whitening of Latinx spouses. I extend this framework by contributing an additional perspective that examines how individuals in interracial marriages modify their racialized perceptions of their spouses in an effort to create *shared racial narratives* that challenge classic assimilation theories. I further challenge these theories by examining how dual-minority interracial couples experience their racial differences and how interracial marriage excluding the dominant group defies assimilation theories.

Race Relations and Boundary Blurring

Increases in interracial marriage are believed to be a reflection of increased acceptance among different racial and ethnic groups. Although racial and ethnic categories were originally thought to be fixed categories (Cornell & Hartmann 1998), scholars now recognize them as flexible, fluid, and a matter of personal choice (Nagel 1994; Saperstein & Penner 2012). White Americans, for example, engage in a process of symbolic ethnicity, a voluntary ethnic identity that provides a sense of belonging and identity without individual costs or constraints (Waters 1990). The experience for non-white groups, however, is neither voluntary nor costless. In her examination of white and black ethnic options, Nagel (1994) expresses that the "difference between the ethnic options available to Blacks and Whites in the U.S. reveal the limits of individual

choice and underline the importance of external ascriptions in restricting available ethnicities" (p. 156). These views suggest that white ethnics are able to identify symbolically because they are neither bounded by racial categories nor externally classified into ethnic categories. Wimmer (2008) advances boundary-making literature by discussing the options individuals have for reacting to existing boundaries, whether the reaction is an attempt to reinforce these boundaries, overcome them, or expand them to include new groups. This extension of boundaries shifts the focus from how boundaries are maintained and instead considers boundary "making" by individuals and political movements.

Scholars have examined the flexibility of boundaries across racial and ethnic groups. In some cases, ethnic identity is viewed as the result of a social process whereby ethnic identity changes and develops over time rather than being a cultural given (Barth 1969). Jimenez (2010), for example, finds that individuals can be given "honorary" membership to an affiliative group if they regularly consume and deploy elements of an ethnicity and perceive it to be an integral part of their personal identity. Jimenez (2010) refers to this process as *affiliative ethnic identity.* An additional manifestation of flexibility in ethnic identity is referred to as *ethnic hybridity*, which results when people simultaneously mix different ethnic cultures with one another. Such is the case, for example, when second generation youth combine elements of the cultures they navigate in their daily lives with those from their own ethnic heritage (Kazinitz et al. 2008).

While the aforementioned findings demonstrate the flexibility of racial and ethnic boundaries, I examine how the use of shared racial narratives occurs in response to cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance refers to inconsistencies between one's beliefs and one's behavior (Festinger 1962). In this specific case, the inconsistency lies between individual's stereotypes and perceptions of people from a certain racial group (the belief) and marrying

someone from said racial group (the inconsistent behavior). I therefore focus on how racialized perceptions of respondent's spouses reinforce racial boundaries while simultaneously challenging them.

Racial Hierarchies and Interracial Intimacy

Boundary blurring literature is closely tied to research showing that interactions between individuals of different racial and ethnic groups are often filled with tension and distrust (Goff, Steele, & Davies 2008; Johnson, Olson, & Fazio 2009). As long as there is tension and distrust, racial boundaries can never fully dissolve. Consequently, resistance to interracial marriage is oftentimes rooted in how different groups are racialized in the U.S. There is an extensive literature, for example, that exposes fear of race mixing as one of the primary reasons people oppose black-white intermarriage (Dalmage 2000; Feagin 2000; Herman & Campbell 2012). Additional research shows that whites feel interracial relationships with Asians and Latinos are more acceptable than interracial relationships with blacks (Davis 1991; Feagin 2000; Herman & Campbell 2012). How we socially construct race in the U.S. therefore makes individuals who are higher on the racial hierarchy more appealing as dating and marriage partners.

Moreover, differences in how Latinos racialize whites and blacks indicates that knowledge of the racial order influences how different group members interact with one another. In 2015, for example, 42% of newlyweds were Latinx-white couples compared to the significantly smaller 5% share of newlywed black-Latinx couples (Livingston & Brown 2017). Such a stark difference can in part be explained by the emergence of black exceptionalism and the black/non-black racial divide (Lee & Bean 2010). For instance, research shows that Latinos racialization of other groups corresponds to the U.S. racial structure. In other words, Latinos have been found to hold more positive perceptions of whites (who hold the highest position on the racial hierarchy) than they do

of Latinos (Jimeno-Ingrum, Berdahl, & Lucero-Wagoner 2009), and also of holding strong anti-black sentiments rooted in stereotypes about racial inferiority (McClain et al. 2006; O'Brien 2008; Telles & Ortiz 2008). Consequently, Latinos intentionally distance themselves from blacks in an effort to advance their proximity to whites on the racial hierarchy (Guglielmo 2006; Marrow 2009), particularly when they are lighter skinned and their perceived racial status is white (Feliciano & Robnett 2014).

Despite these findings, the number of black-Latinx interracial couples continues to grow, although not nearly at the pace of Latinx-white couples. As the flow of Asian and Latinx immigrants continues to increase and expand the pool of potential marriage partners, it becomes increasingly important to understand the mechanisms minority-majority and dual-minority couples use to cope with racial differences.

DATA AND METHODS

This dissertation chapter draws from 60 in depth, semi-structured interviews with 15 black-Latino married couples and 15 Latino-white married couples living in various Southern California cities. Interviews were conducted in person at respondent homes and in coffee shops, over the phone, and via skype and lasted approximately 1.5 hours. All respondents were given a $5 gift card for their time and participation in the study. Given the nature of the questions, I conducted interviews with married partners separately, resulting in a total of 60 individual interviews. Table 1 below shows the number of couples interviewed by racial composition.

Table 1: Number of Couples Interviewed by Racial Composition

Black/Latinx Couples	**Latinx/White Couples**
Black Female-Latinx Male	*Latinx Female-White Male*
7 couples	7 couples
Latinx Female-Black Male	*White Female-Latinx Male*
8 couples	8 couples

I intentionally sought out this combination of couples because doing so allowed me to contextualize their experiences of race and ethnicity in their everyday lives while also considering the importance of gender composition.

To account for nativity differences in rates of interracial dating and marriage, all Latinx participants were U.S. born. Studying interracial relationships among Latinos is complex and can be challenging due to Latinx intra-group diversity and variation. Phenotypic difference among Latinos is one source of variation, with individuals who self-identify as Latinx at times being categorized by others as black or white (Itzigsohn 2009; Rodriguez 2000). Of particular relevance to this dissertation are Feliciano and Robnett's (2014) finding that self-identified white Latinos are less open to dating blacks and more open to dating whites, while self-identified black Latinos are less open to dating whites and more open to dating blacks. When Latinos self-identify racially as black or white, there are implications for how Latinx-white and black-Latinx couples experience their interracial status, particularly if Latinx-white couples do not view race as a matter of concern or if black-Latinx couples both self-identify as black. These are important points to consider for this research and as such I make a concerted effort to control for some of these variations by excluding Latinos who self-identify racially as black. It is also important to note that none of the Latinos interviewed self-identified as white. Including Latinos who racially identify as black or white would have required a larger subset of interracial couples (i.e. black-Latinx/black couples) to make generalizations. For the purposes of this dissertation, I have therefore limited my respondents to Latinos who identify as Latinx or a Latinx group (i.e. Mexican American).

Sandra Baker provides a detailed explanation as to why she racially identifies as Mexican and not white:

Sandra Baker

> I think others identify me as being Mexican or Latino. I don't think at any point if anyone asked me what race are you, and I said white, I don't think anyone would be satisfied with that answer. Like I get my race is white and my ethnicity is Latino but if you came up to me and asked me "what is your race?" and I said "white" you would say something like, "I mean, what is your nationality or ethnicity?" because white is not a satisfactory answer for someone who looks like me. So I just can't bring myself to self-identify as white.

This excerpt is reflective of how Latinos tend to be categorized by others as a racial group as well as why they themselves may opt out of self-identifying racially as white. For this study I therefore refer to Latinx as a racial group rather than an ethnic identification, similar to Vasquez-Tokos (2017) who argues that the "history of conquest and colonization feeds into contemporary legal definitions of Latinos as a separate group that qualifies for federal programs for disadvantaged racial minorities, further legitimizing understandings of Latinos as a racial category" (pg. 29).

I used snowball sampling to obtain my sample of 30 interracial couples, beginning with those from my personal networks and those of close friends, family, and faculty members. Each respondent was asked to complete a demographic sheet prior to the start of the interview. The information provided on this form was used to obtain demographic information (i.e. age, educational attainment, occupation, and income) and to determine the relevance of some interview questions (i.e. questions related to children). Refer to Table 1.2 to review social and demographic characteristics of study participants.

Interviews consisted of questions that covered 6 broad topics: (1) biography, (2) relationship with spouse, (3) relationships with family and friends, (4) influence of public spaces, (5) ethnic/racial identity, and (6) interracial partnership questions. Biography questions were used to understand respondent's former experience with other racial and ethnic groups, for example, if they grew up in diverse neighborhoods or had close friendships with children of other races. Questions also revealed how individuals personally identify, racial and ethnic categorization (how

others racially perceive and categorize members of these interracial relationships), influence of ethno-racial identifiers on ethnic identity (i.e. ethnic language proficiency; last name as ethnic marker), how family members and close friends react to partners of a different racial group (i.e. acceptance, rejection, confusion), and for those with children, the influence of interracial marriage on parenting. I audio recorded all interviews and later transcribed them.

I purposely elected to sample only from California because it is currently one of only four majority-minority states in the United States. Current Census Data suggests that we will have a majority-minority nation by 2044, with a projected 220 percent increase in the multiracial population between 2014 and 2060 (Frey 2018). Conducting this research within California, given its advanced state in this regard, can presumably yield results that will provide context for the growth in interracial relationships and be relevant for the future of race relations in the United States. This approach, however, is not without its limitations. Since California residents have been found to be more open to interracial dating and is more progressive in terms of accepting interracial intimacy (Feliciano, Robnett, & Komaie 2009), the generalizability of the results will be limited. Nevertheless, California is a harbinger of race and class relations especially as the Latinx population settles in new immigrant destinations.

Given the small study sample for this dissertation (15 black-Latino couples and 15 Latino-white couples), it is difficult to generalize the findings to all interracial unions in the U.S. The purpose of this study is therefore to contribute to existing literature on interracial intimacy that utilizes interview data with relatively small samples to reveal the nuances of peoples lived experiences (Childs 2005; McNamara, Tempenis, & Walton 1999; Rosenblatt, Karis, & Powell 1995). For anonymity purposes, all participants names have been changed to pseudonyms and city names have been altered.

Analysis

Drawing from the grounded theory approach of analyzing qualitative data, I engaged in theoretical sampling and the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin 1997). Theoretical sampling requires subsequent sampling that is based on the emerging theories in the data, while the constant comparative method involves writing reflective memos as data is collected in order to form interpretations early on. I therefore began by conducting open coding, using interview memos as a starting point and then expanding the coding scheme as I continued conducting interviews and analyzing the data. This allowed me to cultivate a more defined coding rubric.

RESULTS

Identifying commonalities and developing shared experiences helps interracial couples maintain intimacy across racial lines. Identified commonalities can be as trivial as liking the same sports team or music genre or as significant as developing shared ethno-racial experiences. The latter, a key theme in this chapter, is perplexing given that all study participants were included precisely for being part of an interracial marriage. The following sections detail how interracial couples create what I call *shared racial narratives* that can both reinforce racial boundaries between Latinos and whites and create racial alliances between blacks and Latinos.

Shared Racial Narratives within Latinx-White Couples

Erasing Images of Whiteness

Within Latinx-white couples several Latinx respondents created a shared racial narrative that centered around Latinx culture. Latinx individuals discussed why they believe their white spouses are more Latinx than they are white, often times exceptionalizing them and claiming they are unlike other white people. The Morales couple provides one such example. Armando Morales is a Mexican man married to Megan Morales, a white woman. Armando and Megan have been married

for 5 years and have two sons who look white but are heavily immersed in their father's Mexican culture. They live in a primarily Latinx community and spend a lot of their time with his family. When asked if she is conscious of her race when they spend time with Armando's family, Megan responded:

> Megan Morales
> No, not at all. And this is a funny thing but Armando always jokes around that he loves me and we click the way that we do, he jokes and says "I don't even know what you are." He forgets I'm white, and I think because I grew up in a predominantly Hispanic city and around a lot of Hispanic people--- I just feel very comfortable around them. I love the food, I love the music, I love the culture, so I never feel like I'm an outsider, and to be honest, sometimes I forget. I'm just in with it and it doesn't bother me at all and I don't even think about it.

To Megan, the racial differences between her and Armando are insignificant, so much so that she started her interview by saying, "I hadn't ever thought of us as a mixed couple." This may be in part because she comes from a family where interracial marriage is common, but the excerpt above makes it clear that Megan's perception of difference between her and Armando is minimal because of how immersed she is in Latinx culture. Her being raised in a primarily Hispanic community and being so accepting of the Latinx culture allows Armando to "forget" that she is white. In his interview, Armando share a similar sentiment. He stated:

> Armando Morales
> I guess she isn't like any other white girl I have ever met. It feels weird saying that but it's true. Just because she really dives into whatever I like, whether it be food or music. She really dives into it and never acts like she's above it, which is what other white girls do. We really complement each other.

Armando doesn't believe Megan is like other white women because she is willing to "dive into" his culture without acting like she is above it, which is what he believes other white women would do. Armando is therefore exceptionalizing Megan as a white woman: she is white but she is unlike white women because other white women are not open to Latinx culture. For Armando, who used to say he would "never marry a white girl", this makes Megan an acceptable marriage partner. But

Armando is not the only one who "forgets" Megan is white. In the following excerpts Armando reveals that his family and friends also do not consider Megan to be white:

> Armando Morales
> [My family are] always themselves around her. Like I said, I think they forget she is white, or maybe don't even really think about her as white because she loves our culture so much. …
>
> My closer friends that really know her, I think that the image of her being white has been erased because she is so immersed in the culture, it's like she's been accepted as one of us. I kind of joke that she's more Hispanic than me, wearing *guaraches* [laughs].

According to Armando, his family and friends have either forgotten Megan is white or the image of her being white has been erased. Embracing Mexican culture makes Megan more acceptable and also makes her less of an outsider within her marriage. However, the need to erase her white image and speak almost in colorblind terms shows that it isn't so much her being white that is being accepted, as that image has been erased by several people around her; rather it is her being unlike other white people that makes her acceptable. Megan identifies herself as white so her self-identity has not changed in response to her marriage. To herself she is a white woman who embraces Latinx culture, but Armando and his family forget she is white *because* she embraces Latinx culture. The difference may seem subtle, but it is really telling when we consider assimilation theories that argue intermarriage is the final marker of complete assimilation (Gordon 1964). Within this specific couple, where a minority Latinx man is married to a white woman-Armando is not assimilating to the dominant culture. Instead, he has created a shared racial narrative by claiming she is more Latinx than white, making her both similar and acceptable to Armando, his family, and his friends.

Even though Armando and Megan identified their racial differences and acknowledged having race-based experiences that were a consequence of them being an interracial couple, these

differences were not central to their experiences as a married couple. Rather than focus on these differences, they focused on their shared experience and love of the Latinx culture. This occurred in other couples as well. Elena Sanders, for example, discussed how her white husband, Paul Sanders, is "growing into the Hispanic culture." She stated:

> Elena Sanders
> I almost see Paul as more Hispanic than white. It is so weird, super weird, but for instance we got invited to a wedding and a couple of *quinceaneras* and he loves Mexican music, like *bandas*, and he likes to dance to it but I don't like that. So, he is kind of growing into the Hispanic culture. I know he is white or American but I don't see him different than I see myself. I know we have different traditions and different lifestyles and different upbringings but I view us as similar, and he's really not like other white people that I know, or that I've met, so I do see him as more Hispanic.

Similar to Megan, Elena is able to identify the racial difference between her and her husband Paul. Even though she knows he is white, she views him as being more Hispanic because of how he has adapted to her Mexican culture. Elena does not view Paul as a white man who embraces Mexican culture, instead she claims he is "more Hispanic than white" and is "not like other white people." Elena is exceptionalizing Paul much like Armando exceptionalized Megan. Elena's conceptualization of Paul as more Hispanic than white, however, is more complex because there were very clear cultural and race-based challenges within their marriage. For example, Elena shared that she and Paul have a lot of racially charged conversations because she is a democrat and he is a republican who voted for Trump. Moreover, Elena discussed how important it is for Mexicans to spend time with their family while also venting that white people don't do that, thus making it a source of tension for her and Paul. When asked if they ever have conversations about race, Elena responded:

> Elena Sanders
> We do sometimes, then he asks why I have to bring race into our conversations. For example, like the holidays, I tell him that it's a big deal for me that he be part of the holidays and be with the family and I always say that it's because he is white

> and he didn't have that. And for like [our sons] 1st birthday I told him we are having a big party with a piñata and he doesn't want to. It's so big in our culture and he's like "why do you have to bring race into this"? Having a big party is part of the Mexican culture and it's important for me and my family but he's white so he doesn't understand it.

Elena's response shows how cultural and racial differences can create barriers within interracial marriages. Creating a shared racial narrative by claiming that she views him as more Hispanic than white doesn't eliminate the racial differences that may be sources of conflict within their marriage. Moreover, their families have not erased each other's racial images like Armando's family and friends who have erased their image of Megan as white. Paul and Elena's families are very cognizant of their racial differences, Paul even described his father as a "slightly racist" man who will "keep to himself" when Elena is around.

For this particular couple, it is more difficult to understand why Elena would describe Paul as being more Hispanic and being unlike other white people she knows given that they both attribute their marital challenges to racial differences. Additionally, Elena identifies herself as Mexican and Paul identifies himself as white, both often speaking of one another in racialized terms. At no point did Paul mention feeling like the Hispanic culture is a significant part of his marital experience. In contrast, he said that while he has indeed witnessed Mexican traditions before, he doesn't actually understand Mexican culture. If the differences are so stark, why would Elena claim that Paul is "more Hispanic than white"?

Elena's desire to change how she views Paul, to exceptionalize him as being different than other whites, is rooted in cognitive dissonance and stems from how she feels about whites in general. When asked to describe white people, Elena responded, "plain, like boring, kind of judge-y and rude, a little bossy, not the best people but they have an advantage." Elena's perception of whites is not the most positive and to accept Paul as white would mean accepting these traits as

part of who he is. Rather than accept that these traits are equally applicable to Paul as they are to other whites she is describing, Elena exceptionalizes him as being different and the dissonance is therefore between her racial perception of whites and her perception of Paul. Paul is acceptable because he is not like other white people, and thus her beliefs about whites can remain unchanged. Meanwhile Elena is able to move forth positively in her interracial marriage by exceptionalizing Paul, engaging in cognitive dissonance, and using him "growing into" Mexican culture as a commonality that renders their racial differences irrelevant. This shared racial narrative that Elena has created between her and Paul not only helps to maintain racial boundaries because she has exceptionalized him and his whiteness without changing her views about whites as a whole, it also provides another example where the minority spouse (Elena) in a minority-majority interracial union is retaining her Mexican culture not adopting the dominant white culture.

Americanized Latinos: How White Women Exceptionalize their Latinx Husbands

In contrast to Latinx respondents who created a shared racial narrative around Latinx culture, some white respondents, particularly women, expressed feeling comfortable within their marriage because their Latinx husbands were more Americanized than other Latinos. Elizabeth Rios, a white woman married to Thomas Rios, a Mexican man, detailed why her husband being Americanized was so critical to them being able to maintain an intimate relationship across racial lines. In her interview she shared that she is not open to dating traditionally Mexican men, rather Thomas was okay because "he is Americanized Mexican but not traditional Mexican." She also shared:

> Elizabeth Rios
> I guess because Thomas never really talks about being Mexican it helps me feel like I am not different. That was one of the things I really liked about his family, it was never about them being super Mexican, everyone just likes everyone. And I realized his mom and dad didn't bring him up to think that he was in any sort of racial group, he just views himself as American. I mean, he knows he is Mexican

> heritage wise but he was never really raised to be Mexican. And I have friends who were so I see that difference so I think that made me really comfortable with him. He was never pushed to be any certain way because of his heritage. It made me more comfortable in knowing that we were different and that he never thought about it cause I would rather people not think about it.

In the excerpt above Elizabeth is downplaying Thomas's Mexican heritage because her perception of him as Americanized is what has allowed her to maintain her relationship with him given that she is not into "traditional" Mexican men. Thomas, however, identifies strongly with his Mexican culture even though he does not speak Spanish fluently. For example, he talked about meeting with his grandma regularly over the course of a year to learn how to cook all of her traditional Mexican dishes. Additionally, Elizabeth and Thomas regularly attend traditional Mexican celebrations such as *posadas*. Thomas' Mexican culture is therefore clearly present within their marriage.

When asked if her and Thomas ever have conversations regarding their racial differences, Elizabeth stated:

> Elizabeth Rios
> We will have those conversations when we do end up going to one of these really traditional Mexican events. Sometimes I am just so confused. Like we will go, and his family they treat me differently because I am not familiar with it, because I don't speak Spanish and because I'm white. But he doesn't even speak Spanish. But they like dumb it down and explain it, sometimes they call me the white girl. And so it kind of makes it, it highlights the difference. So after those kinds of things we talk about it. Our conversations after are basically me joking about it. I'll play it off like it's fine and it doesn't bother me. He says they're just trying to be this or that, but he doesn't take them as being offensive so I just joke about them, play it down, because he doesn't feel it the way I do and he doesn't experience it the way I do.

For Elizabeth, it is important that their racial differences not be highlighted as it is something she does not want to think about herself but also does not want others to think about. Claiming that Thomas is not a traditional Mexican man and viewing him as someone who wasn't "raised to be Mexican" are what she views as likable traits in Thomas. At monoracial events where she is the only white person among his family, she not only notices the differences but jokes it off and plays

it down because for her it is not acceptable that they are different. Perceiving Thomas as being more Americanized than Latinx is what allows their marriage to work. Much like Paul and Megan who were acceptable because they were unlike other white people, Thomas is acceptable because he is unlike other Mexicans, at least in Elizabeth's eyes.

Elizabeth is therefore also engaging in the process of cognitive dissonance because her perception of Thomas does not align with her racial perception of traditional Mexican men. To eliminate this dissonance and justify her interracial marriage with a Mexican man Elizabeth creates a shared racial narrative between her and Thomas that highlights their shared experience as "American". Of equal importance here is that Elizabeth is equating American with whiteness. She does not view Thomas as a Mexican man who embraces the dominant culture the way Elena and Armando view their spouses as whites who embrace Latinx culture. Instead Elizabeth views Thomas as American and describes him as someone who was "never really raised to be Mexican". Consequently, Elizabeth's view of traditional Mexicans does not have to change in any way to accommodate her relationship with Thomas.

When Latinx-white couples exceptionalize their spouses by engaging in cognitive dissonance and creating shared racial narratives, it suggests that intermarriage does not permanently blur racial boundaries as much as we would expect. On the one hand, these shared racial narratives provide insight into how racial boundaries can be permeated from external group members. On the other hand, the shared racial narratives also serve to further reinforce racial boundaries by allowing individuals from interracial marriages to maintain their negative perceptions of their spouses racial group while being accepting of their spouse.

Shared Racial Narratives within Black-Latinx Couples: Minority Unity

Within black-Latinx interracial couples, respondents discussed the important contribution minority unity has in helping them maintain a marriage that crosses racial lines. Unlike partners from Latinx-white marriages who exceptionalized their spouses in an attempt to create a shared racial narrative, dual minority couples acknowledged their racial differences but also underscored the important role that mutual marginalization plays in their experiences as a married interracial couple. For black-Latinx couples, then, the *dual-minority shared racial narrative* is centered around their similar experiences as racialized minorities.

Clara Porter, for example, is a Mexican woman married to a black man named Brandon Porter. Both of their families were welcoming and accepting of their interracial relationship from the beginning and neither of their families created any barriers for them as their relationship transitioned from a dating relationship to a marriage. As a couple, however, the Porter's had several public experiences where strangers conveyed that their interracial relationship was not acceptable. For example, Clara detailed an experience that she and Brandon had when eating at an authentic Mexican restaurant. She shared:

> Clara Porter
> I took him to this place because I was craving real Mexican food, not American Mexican food, and they just stared at him the entire time with anger. Like they were mad that he was there with me, or like he didn't belong there. And the whole time we felt really uncomfortable and unwanted. Not that I wasn't wanted there, but I wasn't wanted if he was going to be there with me

Despite being made to feel that their interracial marriage is problematic, and despite experiences such as the one discussed above, Clara also discussed how being from different races but sharing a minority status with Brandon contributes positively to their marriage. When asked if she and Brandon ever have conversations about race Clara stated:

> Clara Porter
> We talk about every day struggles with people that revolve around race. For example, [Brandon] always talks about how people don't expect to see a manager

> who is black. Sometimes he gets looks or rude comments. Sometimes I talk to him about the way people treat me, clients at the law firm are sometimes uncomfortable with me or speak down to me, and things like that. So it comes up a lot in our marriage but it's good for us to have these conversations. It makes us realize how much we have in common when we do talk about it. The experiences might be different but they are there for both of us and they really shape us as a couple and also what we stand for.

As a dual minority couple, Clara and Brandon are able to share their experiences of discrimination with one another. For them, it is a shared experience of marginalization that "comes up a lot" in their marriage and therefore acts as a shared racial narrative that helps to strengthen their relationship. In their case, sharing a minority status and being able to relate on such a personal level trumps experiences that signal interracial intermarriage is unacceptable.

Unlike the Porters who have the support from their family, Charlotte Zapata's mother has disapproved of her relationship with Sergio Zapata, a Mexican man, since the start of their relationship. When asked how her family gets along with Sergio, Charlotte responded:

> Charlotte Zapata
> My mom just thought I needed a black husband to, I don't know, be black with. She still asks how Serge is going to have the black man talk with [our son] Benny. She doesn't think he will be able to explain to Benny what it's like to live his life as a black man if he has never experienced it himself. I try to tell her that it isn't very different being black and brown, especially being black and brown and living in a poor neighborhood, but she doesn't get it. When I try to tell her, she gets very defensive and says things like "oh, I didn't know Mexicans were slaves too".

Charlotte's mother is very blatant about her dislike of Sergio and her disapproval of their interracial marriage. His experiences as a Mexican man are insufficient for her black daughter and grandchildren but Charlotte views their shared experiences of marginalization as something that "brings us together" despite her mom's inability to see that "brown people are equally oppressed or get treated the way black people do." Thus within black-Latinx couples, even when families are not supportive of their relationship for race-based reasons, spouses still feel that their shared racial narrative of having a minority status helps to unify them as a couple.

Monsserat Vega, a Mexican American woman married to Aaron Hughes, a black man, sheds light on how being able to share their experiences as individuals from targeted groups "calms" them. She shared:

> Monsserat Vega
> I think, however, being people of color who are a target group, like, racism is hard, and that has a toll on our wellbeing, and we bring that to our relationship, right? So we have difficult conversations about how we're feeling shitty something happened in the world, right? And I imagine that that's a thing that other people, generally white people, may not have to have…..We get to vent, debrief, validate each other when we are feeling targeted, you know, either through media or through policy. We're able to see how our different kind of- the historical legacy of racism has affected our communities differently, but in many ways, it's kind of the same undercurrent. And so, that also, I think, calms us, for sure.

Monsserat states that being part of a targeted group who regularly experiences the weight of racism takes a toll on racialized minorities and it is something they in turn bring into their relationship. Moreover, she acknowledges that these feelings and experiences are not generally felt by whites as they do not have similar race-based experiences as people of color. Having a black husband who can relate to her experiences as a Latinx woman, despite differences in how racism affects each of their respective communities, provides validation and brings a sense of calmness to their relationship. A calmness and validation that she would be unable to experience if her spouse was not also a racialized minority.

White Exceptionalism in Dual-Minority Couples

Some dual-minority couples felt so strongly about their shared racial narrative that they expressed feelings of never being able to be in a committed relationship with a white person. These findings reflect previous research showing that educated Latinas who feel racialized and have experienced discrimination are hesitant to date white men due to fears that such men would be unable to empathize with their racialized experiences (Muro & Martinez 2018). Aaron Hughes,

Monserrat's husband, for example, reiterated the importance of having a shared minority experience but also contributed a point of white exceptionalism. In his interview he stated:

> Aaron Hughes
> I think we do find a lot of common threads in terms of how we perceive our groups, our respective groups being situated and being 'othered.' Yeah, I actually do think that it matters that [Monsserat] is part of, identifies, and is conscious of this marginalized group. I actually don't think that I would be able to be in a long-term relationship with a white person. And even if I was able to be in a healthy and long-term relationship, I honestly think that the post 2016 environment would be such a strain, such a breaking point. There have been times when Monsserat and I have just kind of commiserated with our anguish over the collective white America. And to be able to have that, I think, is really needed for our mental health. And I thought about, if I were partnered with a white person, would I just be putting that person on edge saying, "You need to talk to your people every day." So I definitely think that it has been a viable thing for us.

Aaron feels so strongly about their dual-minority shared racial narrative that he believes having an outlet where they can discuss their experiences of marginalization is not only a benefit, but contributes to their mental health. Research has shown that having experiences of discrimination validated by others contributes positively to health (Kohn-Wood & Hooper 2014; Williams, Neighbors, & Jackson 2003) and this is something that Aaron discusses in his response. Moreover, he mentions not being able to maintain a long-term relationship with a white person given the presumed differences in racialized experiences as well as fear that he would hold a white partner accountable for the macro-level oppression of people of color in America.

Alexis Bryant, a black woman married to Mateo Santana, a Mexican man, ties her reluctance to marrying a white man to her previous experiences with a white friend. She shared:

> Alexis Bryant
> What I think has been great is that we both recognize and acknowledge when things have happened, that is something I am really grateful for. I had a white friend in college and I would sometimes tell her when I would experience some things at like stores or just in general and it, I never felt like she actually believed me, or she thought I was exaggerating or would give me possible explanations for what happened. That never happens with Mateo, he usually sees it too and that is very meaningful. I couldn't be married to a white man if it meant my experiences were

> never going to be validated, I couldn't do it. That validation and him getting it, I need that.

Having a white friend who minimized her experiences of discrimination as a black woman has made Alexis more conscious of the positive contribution that being part of a dual-minority relationship brings to her marriage.

For black-Latinx couples that rely heavily on the dual-minority shared racial narrative, it is difficult to comprehend how they would maintain an interracial relationship with someone who is white and does not understand their experiences as a racial minority. The theme of white exceptionalism that emerges therefore brings into question how increases in minority-minority interracial marriages would help to accelerate assimilation processes when they seem to do the opposite by making way for minority unity. Like Aaron Hughes stated, a shared racial narrative allows dual-minority couples to commiserate with their "anguish over the collective white America." Additionally, these dual minority couples challenge assimilation theories because neither partner may necessarily adapt to the dominant culture.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this chapter I examine how interracial couples create *shared racial narratives* that help them maintain intimacy across racial lines. For Latinx-white couples, creating a shared racial narrative is a response to cognitive dissonance. In this process, individuals change their racial perceptions of their spouses rather than change their racial perceptions of their spouses' racial group. This allows individuals from Latinx-white marriages to maintain racial stereotypes by exceptionalizing their spouses. This not only reinforces racial boundaries, but in instances where Latinx individuals claim their white partners are more Latinx than white, it challenges theories of assimilation that assume minority-majority couples will eventually lead to assimilation by minority group members.

Black-Latinx couples, in contrast, used their shared marginalization as racialized minorities to create a *dual-minority shared racial narrative*. In many instances the need for this shared racial narrative was so strong that partners, both black and Latinx, discussed being unable to marry a white person who would not understand their race-based experiences. The dual-minority shared racial narrative, along with the theme of white exceptionalism that emerged, also reinforce racial boundaries but via a different mechanism than shared racial narratives among Latinx-white couples by creating more rigid racial boundaries between whites and racialized minorities. Moreover, the experiences of black-Latinx couples within this study do not support assimilation theories which argue that increases in interracial marriage will lead to assimilation into the majority group.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

> It's weird to me that people even ask what my husband is, I just want to tell them his name. Do they want to know about him, or just that he's Mexican? Why does that make a difference? Why is that your first question? I don't know, you want to know if my kids are mixed but you don't want to know about them as people? Do they feel like they can get more information about who they are based on their race? Me saying Mexican, what does that give you? You don't know their names or if they're smart or anything like that, but somehow knowing their race would provide insight to our family.
>
> -Lindsey Serrano
> White woman married to Mexican man

The excerpt above from Lindsey Serrano's interview is not intended to reveal the types of challenges interracial couples experience, rather its purpose is to highlight how much emphasis our society places on racial categories and the type of information we believe we acquire when we racially categorize others. I began my dissertation research with a very simple question, I wanted to know how dual-minority couples *lived* and *experienced* race in their everyday lives as a result of their relationship. I anticipated detailing the nuances of couples' experiences, describing, for example, how they dealt with looks of disapproval or how they navigated monoracial spaces. But

then my committee chair pushed me to include a comparison group to be able to contrast dual-minority couples' experiences with majority-minority couples' experiences. I agreed. The more interviews I conducted and coded, the more my research became about how these individual experiences speak to broader race relations. Conducting a comparative study allowed me to really examine the implications of our very racialized society through the lens of interracial intimacy. I originally expected to show how increases in interracial marriage help to blur existing racial boundaries but instead I learned of the many ways interracial intimacy further reinforces these boundaries.

I began conducting my interviews with interracial couples shortly after Donald Trump was elected president of the United States. His position in office and his history of racist remarks were a point of conversation in the majority of interviews I conducted. For Latinx-white couples who shared political views, Donald Trump's presidency became additional proof of the different ways whites and racialized minorities experience race. For Latinx-couples whose political views differed, Donald Trump's presidency became a source of contention. In contrast, black-Latinx couples who discussed Donald Trump during their interviews detailed how their objections to his racist views created feelings of unity and solidarity within their marriage. The way historical contexts such as the enslavement of blacks and the implementation of anti-miscegenation laws have affected interracial intimacy throughout history, so too does the current state of race relations in the U.S. Donald Trump's presidential election is one example of how broader race relations influence interracial intimacy, while parents fear over their phenotypically black sons in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement is another.

My goal in this dissertation was to examine how black-Latinx and Latinx-white couples experience intimacy across lines of racial and social stratification. Specifically, I was interested in

better understanding if and how interracial couples challenge existing racial boundaries and how these processes differ between dual-minority and majority-minority couples. I divided my dissertation into three separate empirical chapters, each of which examined how the U.S. racial structure affects interracial couples via different mechanisms. In Chapter 2 I examined how parents directly and indirectly transmitted racialized messages regarding interracial intimacy to their children (the respondents). I found that messages of disapproval often stemmed from their understanding of the racial hierarchy. Latinx and white parents who displayed feelings of black exceptionalism did so in an effort to protect their position on the racial hierarchy by attempting to maintain racial boundaries through social closure towards blacks. Parent's messages regarding interracial intimacy were also tied to their perceived implications of interracial marriage on one's position within the racial hierarchy. Latinos with white spouses were expected to gain upward social mobility through intermarriage with someone of the dominant group, while messages of black exceptionalism showed parent's concerns regarding downward mobility. When messages of black exceptionalism are relayed from one generation to the next it not only reinforces racial boundaries but also directly impacts rates of interracial dating and marriage.

In Chapter 3 I turned my focus to parents' racial identification of their mixed-race children to understand how increases in the multiracial population, which emanates from interracial relationships, challenge existing racial boundaries. I found that parents' identity formation process relies heavily on their internalization of the racial hierarchy. Some parents opted to identify their children as monoracially white to protect their children's privilege, other parents celebrated and encouraged a biracial identity, and still others created a mixed family identity intended to protect their family as a unit. Skin tone was a key factor in how parents chose to racially identify their children, and only the parent more highly positioned on the racial hierarchy opted to take on a

family identity. These findings show that the implications of the U.S. racial hierarchy extend beyond the interracial couple and trickle into their children's experiences.

In Chapter 4 I argue that increases in interracial marriage not only reinforce racial boundaries but also challenge traditional assimilation theories. This happens when Latinx-white couples create *shared racial narratives* that allow them to maintain negative racial views of their spouse's racial group while also being married to them. In these instances, the partner who has created a shared racial narrative in response to feelings of cognitive dissonance prevents racial boundary blurring by exceptionalizing their spouse rather than changing their views on the racial group as a whole. Black-Latinx couples, in contrast, reinforce racial boundaries by creating a *dual-minority shared racial narrative* that is centered around their shared marginalization as racialized minorities. Couples who discussed the importance of the dual-minority shared racial narrative also expressed feelings of white exceptionalism, which creates more rigid racial boundaries between racialized minorities and whites. Both shared racial narratives and dual-minority shared racial narratives challenge classic assimilation theories because in Latinx-white couples the Latinx spouse is not assimilating to the dominant group and in black-Latinx couples neither partner belongs to the dominant group.

Overall, this dissertation examines how the U.S. racial hierarchy affects interracial marriages and their ability to fully challenge and deconstruct racial boundaries. This can in part help to explain the disproportionate number of interracial marriages across different racial groups. Examining interracial unions in this regard broadens our understandings of the continued implications of the U.S. racial structure on interracial intimacy and existing color line discourse.

Directions for Future Research

In this dissertation I focus solely on the experiences of black-Latinx and Latinx-white

interracial couples. Future research should examine how the key themes discussed in this dissertation play out within other ethnoracial combinations (i.e. black-white, Asian-black, Latinx-Asian). Doing so will provide further insight into the permeability of racial boundaries for different racial groups and help us better understand the disparities in rates of interracial marriage across racial groups. My dissertation research shows that intermarriage alone is not sufficient to fully challenge racial boundaries and, in many ways, interracial relationships actually reinforce racial boundaries and racial hierarchies. A continued increase in interracial marriage is thus not a clear indicator that we are headed toward a post-racial America, nor is the continued growth of the multiracial population. It is therefore critical that sociologists continue to investigate the relationship between interracial intimacy and the U.S. racial structure. If interracial marriage is going to be framed as a progressive step in helping to eliminate racial categories, then future research should investigate how interracial relationships

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