Racial Boundaries among Latinos: Evidence from Internet Daters’ Racial Preferences

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How the growing Latino population fits into the U.S. racial structure is a subject of considerable debate. Are Latinos developing into a separate racial group, becoming part of the dominant group, or creating a pan-minority group with nonwhites? Extending beyond existing research that uses intermarriage or survey data to assess racial boundaries, this study examines Latinos’ stated racial preferences for dates among a sample of over 4,000 Internet daters in Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, and Atlanta. We find that few Latinos prefer to only date other Latinos. Latinos are much more likely to prefer to date whites than blacks, and are much more likely than blacks to prefer whites, suggesting that the Latino-white boundary is less rigid than Latino-black or black-white boundaries. However, Latinos are also much more likely to prefer blacks than whites are. Further analyses highlight differences in racial preferences among Latinos by metropolitan area, educational level, language, and religion. Greater proximity to blacks in New York and Atlanta promotes greater acceptance. In these locales, we see some indications of a panminority group of blacks and a small set of Latinos developing. While the majority of Latinos accept racial hierarchies that privilege whites, providing evidence that many are assimilating into the dominant group, assimilation patterns vary for different segments of the diverse Latino population. Keywords: Latinos; race; racial hierarchy; dating; assimilation.

How does the growing Latino population fit into an American racial system that has historically been defined in terms of black and white? Demographic trends since the 1960s, especially increased immigration, have led to a steady increase in the Latino population in the United States, who now comprise over 14 percent of the United States, second only in size to non-Hispanic whites (U.S. Census Bureau 2011). Thus, this population’s incorporation is critical to understanding the future U.S. racial structure. While some scholars contend that Latinos will assimilate in similar ways to descendants of European immigrants (Warren and Twine 1997; Yancey 2003), others argue that Latinos are more similar to African Americans, a racialized and/or colonized minority group dominated by whites (Blauner 1972). Still others

1. We use the term Latino throughout this article to refer to individuals in the United States with Latin American ancestry, although we recognize it is problematic because not all such persons identify as “Latino” and Latinos do not necessarily constitute a cohesive group. Nevertheless, we use the term because many prefer it to Hispanic, and it provides a language to identify this population that is increasingly thought of as a racialized group.

2. For simplicity, we use the term “race” or “racial” while recognizing that whether Latinos constitute a racial or ethnic group is debatable, and that Latinos often use the terms race/ethnicity interchangeably (Vaquera and Kao 2006).

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suggest that most Latinos will indefinitely occupy an intermediate ground, somewhere in the middle of a racial structure that continues to privilege whites at the top and disadvantage blacks at the bottom (Bonilla-Silva 2004).

Central to understanding how racial boundaries are constructed between Latinos and others (now and into the future) are racial prejudices, preferences, and discrimination, on the part of other racial groups towards Latinos, and on the part of Latinos towards other groups. Racial boundaries cannot be diminished if prejudice and discrimination are pronounced on behalf of either group in question (Gordon 1964). However, most research has focused on whites’ racial attitudes and preferences, rather than those of minorities, particularly Latinos’ (for notable exceptions, see Dyer, Vedlitz, and Worchel 1989; Forman, Goar, and Lewis 2002; Murgia and Forman 2003; O’Brien 2008; Oliver and Wong 2003).

Further, while the two most common approaches to understanding the racial incorporation of Latinos in the United States—analyses of intermarriage data and surveys of racial attitudes—have revealed key insights, both have limitations. Intermarriage is both an indicator of diminished boundaries between groups and a facilitator of boundary reduction through the children produced by such unions (Feliciano 2001; Qian and Lichter 2007). However, marriage (and dating or cohabitation) outcomes are limited because they do not reveal the factors driving interracial pairings in the first place: romantic relationships are shaped by both preferences and opportunities. The distinction between preferences and opportunities is important for understanding racial boundaries because, historically, descendants of European immigrants intermarried once they moved out of ethnic neighborhoods and into mainstream institutions (i.e., once opportunities increased) (Alba 1981). On the other hand, even with increased education and integration, blacks have low intermarriage rates, suggesting that preferences (on the part of whites, blacks, or others) drive their relatively low intermarriage rates (Feliciano 2001; Qian and Lichter 2007). Intermarriage data itself cannot distinguish preferences from opportunities, nor reveal whose preferences drive marriage patterns.

The second common approach to examining racial boundaries is to draw upon surveys about attitudes towards other racial groups and race-based policies, or acceptance of other racial groups in various realms (i.e., social distance scales; see Bogardus 1928). However, most attitudinal surveys are based on hypothetical scenarios (such as questions about whether one would oppose their child marrying someone of another race) (Yancey 2003), and respondents have been found to appear more racially tolerant in abstract survey questions than in in-depth interviews (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000). Respondents may mask their true views in both interviews and surveys, understanding that in post-civil rights U.S. society, it is no longer socially acceptable to express racial biases (Bonilla-Silva and Baiocchi 2001; Gallagher 2008).

In contrast to these more conventional approaches to understanding racial boundaries, this study analyzes data from a real-life situation: stated racial preferences for dates among Internet daters. While intermarriage remains an important barometer of racial boundaries, its importance may be diminishing since men and women are marrying later in life and an increasing proportion of adults spend more of their lives single (Schoen and Standish 2001). Thus, dating is an increasingly important arena where race relations are played out. Interracial dating also serves as an intermediary measure of racial inclusion between racial tolerance in nonintimate relationships and a committed intimate relationship (Wilson, McIntosh, and Insana 2007; Yancey 2002). While individuals may be much more willing to interracially date than they are to interracially marry (Blackwell and Lichter 2004; Joyner and Kao 2005), interracial marriage or cohabitation cannot occur if individuals are closed to the possibility of dating outside of their own racial group. Thus, examining the acceptance of members of one’s own and other racial groups as dating partners offers a unique perspective on the state of racial boundaries.

Most prior research on racial preferences has focused on whites. This research has shown that Latinos are the out-group that whites are most open to dating (Feliciano, Robnett, and Komaie 2009), and that whites’ racial attitudes are more accepting of Latinos than blacks (Charles 2000; Yancey 2003). While this suggests that at least some Latinos may have the
option to assimilate into whiteness, assimilation also depends upon the agency of the group in question. Therefore, this study focuses on how open Latinos are to dating outside their racial group, and specifically, to dating whites and blacks.

We also consider whether divergent patterns may characterize different segments of the Latino population, given the diversity of people subsumed under the label. Included under the umbrella term Latino are people living in multiple regions of the country who have different national origins, immigrant generations, phenotypes, class backgrounds, religions, and language backgrounds. We explore the heterogeneity within the Latino “group” by examining diversity in racial preferences among Latino Internet daters by metropolitan area, educational attainment, language, religion, and other characteristics.

Assimilation and Racialization Theories

Our emphasis on the boundaries between Latinos and other groups links theories of assimilation—the process through which boundaries between groups are diminished—with those of racialization—the process through which racial categories are created and characterized. Assimilation theories include classical and neoclassical theories and segmented assimilation theory. The classical and neoclassical theories posit that over time and generations, immigrants and their descendants incorporate into the U.S. “mainstream” (Alba and Nee 2003; Gordon 1964). In contrast, segmented assimilation theory posits multiple pathways and outcomes of the assimilation process (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes and Zhou 1993). In addition to the classic upward assimilation path, segmented assimilation identifies two paths: selective assimilation—the achievement of upward mobility through the retention of ethnic community resources, cultures, and identities, and downward assimilation—“assimilation into the underclass” (Portes and Zhou 1993:82). Like other scholars (Golash-Boza 2006), we do not view these three possibilities as exhaustive of the possible outcomes for Latinos, although we find the central idea of multiple pathways to assimilation particularly useful in thinking about Latinos.

However, we contend that assimilation theories by themselves cannot provide the blueprint for understanding the incorporation of Latinos because of their relative inattention to issues of race and racialization (see Jung 2009). For instance, the classic or neoclassical straight-line assimilation view of incorporation into the “mainstream” does not stress that it could only apply to those Latinos who can be viewed as white, as far as whiteness is still considered a prerequisite for being fully “American” (Golash-Boza 2006; Tuan 1998). Segmented assimilation theory’s consideration of race is mainly related to their downward assimilation path, which assumes that identification with racialized minorities will lead to socioeconomic disadvantage. Thus, the theory does not allow for the possibility that socioeconomic mobility may coexist with a racialized minority status (Neckerman, Carter, and Lee 1999).

Racial triangulation theory provides a nuanced approach to understanding the incorporation of groups who are neither clearly white or black (Kim 1999). This theory recognizes that different groups are racialized in relation to one another, and that some groups are given status on different dimensions. This idea is especially important for our purposes since our focus is on boundaries between groups within the realm of dating, and the status of different groups in the dating market may differ from their status in other realms, such as education or business (although these may be related). However, while informative, the racial triangulation approach that Claire Kim (1999) applies to Asian Americans vis-à-vis whites and African

3. We note that our view of assimilation is not a normative one; that is, we are not arguing that assimilation is necessarily desirable nor intentional. Instead, we use the term assimilation analytically, to describe a process through which boundaries between ethnic and racial groups are broken down, such as occurred historically as European immigrant groups became integrated into U.S. society. At issue is whether a similar process is occurring among Latinos, not whether it is desirable or intentional.
Americans is not directly applicable to the Latino case. The key issue is that, while a single racialization story as “model minorities” may be imposed on Asian Americans of varying backgrounds, the racialization of Latinos is much more complex, not only because of the heterogeneity within Latinos (skin color, socioeconomic status, geographic concentration, national origin, legal status, etc.), but also because individuals of Latin American descent were in some historical times and contexts considered “racially” distinct from whites, and in others, given the privileges of whiteness (Almaguer 1994; Gomez 2009; Guglielmo 2006).

How processes of racialization play out today determine whether boundaries between different groups get reduced, and thus are intricately related to assimilation. By linking assimilation and racialization theories, we identify three main views of how Latinos fit into the current racial structure and how racial boundaries among Latinos and between Latinos and others are likely to change in the future.

Possible Racial Boundary Scenarios among Latinos

Three divergent views about the assimilation and racialization of Latinos are that (1) Latinos are/will remain a separate racial group; (2) Latinos will assimilate into the dominant group as “white” or “nonblack”; and (3) Latinos will join with other racialized minorities, especially blacks, in developing a panminority group identity.

The Latino Racial Group Thesis

The view that Latinos are and will remain a separate and distinct racial group is based on several different sets of claims. One view emphasizes an assumed isolation and exclusivity of Mexicans, Cubans, and other Latinos who “threaten to divide the United States into two people, two cultures, and two languages” (Huntington 2004:30). This view, which assumes that Latinos do not assimilate and will remain in Spanish language communities indefinitely, has been widely refuted by available evidence on Spanish language retention over generations (Rumbaut, Massey, and Bean 2006). However, the thesis also rests on assumptions that most Latinos actually prefer to isolate themselves in separate communities and will not accept others as intimate partners (Huntington 2004), a proposition that has not been adequately tested.

A second related possibility is suggested by segmented assimilation theory’s selective assimilation route, which argues that remaining embedded within the ethnic community can lead to socioeconomic advancement. While this view differs from the above in that some assimilation, especially language, is expected to occur, the persistence of this form of assimilation across generations similarly depends on whether Latinos remain embedded within their ethnic communities, which would include dating and marrying coethnics. Unfortunately in this study, we are unable to distinguish between a strong coethnic (i.e., Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, etc.) versus a strong panethnic or same-race preference in dating; thus, an endogamous preference for Latinos might also be driven by a panethnic racialization process.

This alternative view envisions a coming-together of different national-origin groups into a new, panethnic group as Latinos in the United States, which itself remains distinct (Itzigsohn 2004; Lopez and Espiritu 1990). This view does not assume that Latinos constitute a cohesive group currently, but rather that Latinos are a racialized group in-formation (Yancey, Ericksen, and Juliani 1976), undergoing a process of “racialized assimilation” based on shared experiences in the United States (Golash-Boza 2006; Golash-Boza and Darity 2008). That is, due to shared political interests (Padilla 1984), as an adjustment into an intermediate category in the U.S. racial hierarchy (Itzigsohn 2004), or because of similar experiences growing up between two cultures or being labeled and discriminated against as Latinos by others (Golash-Boza 2006; Obolet 1995), this view suggests that Latinos are becoming a separate “group” somewhere in the “racial middle” (O’Brien 2008).
Some empirical support for panethnic racialization can be found in studies of intermarriage and racial identity. Intermarriage studies have found a modest tendency towards Latino panethnic intermarriage (Fu 2007; Qian and Cobas 2004; Rosenfeld 2001). However, this tendency is weaker among native-born Latinos than immigrants, and weaker among Latinos than Asians (Rosenfeld 2001). Jose Itzigsohn (2004) argues that as Dominican immigrants incorporate into U.S. society, they adopt panethnic identities. Additionally, Rubén G. Rumbaut (2009) finds that, in contrast to their immigrant parents, children of Latin American immigrants often adopt Latino as their self-reported race.

Many argue that for Latinos to truly shift from a category to a self-conscious group would require a sense of belonging with other Latinos, beyond simply applying the categorical label (Barth 1969; Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov 2004). According to social identity theory, this panethnic Latino group would distance itself from majority and minority groups alike (Tajfel and Turner 1986). However, Amanda Lewis (2004) contends that groups may be racialized if their life experiences and conditions are similar, even if they do not internalize a distinct identity as a “group.” In either case, if Latinos are more similar to each other than other groups (blacks or whites) in terms of racial preferences, this would support the view of Latinos as a racial group. More specifically, strong preferences towards endogamy (preferring to only date Latinos) among Latino Internet daters in this study would provide evidence for the Latino racial group thesis.

The Whitening Thesis

Some scholars argue that the process in which the boundaries of “whiteness” extended to include European immigrant groups is also occurring for Latinos (Warren and Twine 1997; Yancey 2003). Others argue that Latinos will become part of a new dominant group, consisting of nonblacks, currently being formed (Lee and Bean 2007). Consistent with these views, Laura Gomez (2009) highlights how historically, Mexican Americans were defined as “white” if they had one drop of Spanish blood, in contrast to the one-drop rule for blacks. She argues that Mexican Americans were “bought off with honorary white status and . . . the accompanying privileges” and in turn, contributed to the subordination of blacks (Gomez 2009:98). This perspective suggests that “whiteness” may be available to Latinos in a way it is not for blacks, and that distancing from blacks, while promoting proximity to whites, are mechanisms through which Latinos can incorporate into an expanded dominant group, gaining access to its associated privileges (Gans 1999; Guglielmo 2006).

Numerous studies have provided evidence of such distancing. For example, patterns of racial self-identification suggest that Latinos tend to deny their African ancestry and to self-identify as white, engaging in what William Darity, Jason Dietrich, and Derrick Hamilton (2005) call a strategy of “collective passing.” Both native-born and immigrant Latinos have been shown to express more negative racial attitudes towards blacks than whites (McClain et al. 2006; O’Brien 2008; Telles and Ortiz 2008), to be more accepting of contact with whites than blacks (Dyer et al. 1989), and to feel more warmth towards whites than blacks (Murgia and Forman 2003). Although we do not know whether the preferences of whites or Latinos drive marriage patterns, intermarriage data are also consistent with the view of Latinos as “whitening,” since over one-third of third-generation Latinos marry whites (Feliciano 2001), compared with only 10 percent of blacks who marry whites (Qian and Lichter 2007). The view of Latinos as assimilating into whiteness would be supported in the current study if (1) Latinos express greater dating preferences for whites than blacks or other Latinos only and (2) Latinos’ preferences for dating blacks are similar to those of whites.

The Panminority Group Thesis

Finally, a less common argument is that Latinos may join together with blacks in creating a new panminority identity (Carter 2005). One view of Latinos holds that historically, like
blacks, many Latinos have been oppressed, as they were incorporated into the United States through conquest (Mexico) or colonization (Puerto Rico) (Blauner 1972). Thus, a common history of oppression by whites might foster solidarity with blacks. Contemporary experiences of discrimination might also lead to coalition-building (Johnson 2005; O’Brien 2008). Some scholars argue that a coming together of blacks, Asians, and Latinos as “minorities” could lead to a more racially democratic society (Feagin 2000; Jackson, Gerber, and Cain 1994). From a social-psychological or political standpoint, minorities who experience prejudice and discrimination from a majority group might avoid or reject the majority group, face in-group stigma for intimate associations with the majority group, and be more attracted to one another (Heider 1958).

Some evidence of such panminority identifications have been found in qualitative studies (Aranda 2007; Carter 2005; O’Brien 2008). Eileen O’Brien (2008) found that a sizeable minority of her Asian and Latino respondents were “racially progressive”; they rejected dominant white ideologies and emphasized commonalities with African Americans. Likewise, Prudence Carter (2005) found that common experiences of poverty, living in shared neighborhoods, and attending the same schools led some Latino youth to share a “panminority identity” with African Americans. This idea has not been widely explored in quantitative studies. In the current study, if Latinos express greater preference for blacks over whites as dates or if Latinos are less exclusionary towards blacks than whites are, it would be evidence for the formation of a panminority racial group.

Diversity among Latinos

Whether Latinos represent a meaningful group at all, given the diversity subsumed under the term, is an important empirical question. Descendants of Latin Americans in the United States do not collectively accept a panethnic Latino or Hispanic identity (Oboler 1995). Some scholars have suggested that the considerable diversity within the Latino category means that the different scenarios outlined above could apply to different segments of Latinos (Bonilla-Silva 2004; Feliciano 2001; Qian and Cobas 2004), and even different segments within the same national-origin group (Murgia and Forman 2003; Rumbaut 2009; Telles and Ortiz 2008).

Major sources of divergence in Latino incorporation patterns identified in prior research include skin color (Bonilla-Silva 2004; Forman et al. 2002), national origin (Feliciano 2009; Oboler 1995; Rumbaut 2009), class or educational attainment (Feliciano 2001; Rodriguez 2000; Telles and Ortiz 2008), nativity and immigrant generation (Feliciano 2001; Qian and Cobas 2004; Telles and Ortiz 2008), religion (Murgia and Forman 2003), and location/geographic context (Rumbaut 2009). The current study is limited in that we do not have information on national origin, immigrant generation, or skin color. However, we can examine some related measures, including metropolitan area and community racial/ethnic composition, educational attainment, religion, and Spanish language knowledge and preferences.

Previous research has shown that racialization and assimilation processes vary by context (Lewis 2003; Rodriguez 2000; Telles and Ortiz 2008). For example, Lewis (2003) found the racialization of Latino students varied in different school settings (from characterization as “foreigners” in one school to treatment as “honorary whites” in another). Our comparisons across four different metropolitan areas allow us to consider some broad contextual differences. However, we note that the representation of national-origin groups within each metropolitan area is a major source of diversity that we are unable to completely tease apart from other contextual factors (see Appendix Table 1). Mexicans, both historically and currently, are the dominant ethnic group in Los Angeles, although Central Americans and Asian immigrant groups are also represented in sizeable numbers. In New York, Puerto Ricans are the largest Latino group, followed closely by Dominicans; Mexicans (due to recent migration), and South Americans are also present in sizeable numbers, and New York is a historic destination of immigrants from Europe and Asia as well. Chicago is also a historic destination of European
migrants, as well as of both Mexicans and Puerto Ricans. Atlanta has historically been a majority African American city, and has only recently become a destination for new Mexican and Central American immigrants.

Latino diversity by national origin within these four contexts likely shapes racial boundaries. Studies of Mexican Americans have generally provided evidence for the “whitening” thesis (Gomez 2009; Murgia and Forman 2003). However, evidence for a panminority group in-formation has generally come from studies of other national-origin groups, especially Dominicans and Puerto Ricans (Aranda 2007; Carter 2005; Lee 2006). Given that Puerto Ricans and Dominicans tend to have more African ancestry and a history of poverty and colonization we expect to see evidence of panminority identification through greater preferences for dating blacks in New York.

The sizes of the Latino populations within each metropolitan area also vary markedly. For example, because Atlanta is a new immigrant destination, Latinos make up only 9 percent of the population, compared with 19 percent in Chicago, 22 percent in New York, and 44 percent in Los Angeles. Group size may have implications for racial preferences because preferences may be shaped by the opportunity context. Preservation of ethnicity through selective assimilation is most feasible in contexts where significant numbers of coethnics are located. Thus, a mate availability perspective (South and Lloyd 1992) predicts that Latinos in Atlanta are more open to out-dating than those in Los Angeles (and Chicago and New York fall in between) because Latinos in Atlanta are more likely to have fewer dating options if they restricted themselves to dating only other Latinos. By the same logic, we expect Latinos in Los Angeles to be the most likely to prefer to only date other Latinos.

Although the direction is not clear from prior studies, the racial composition of the surrounding context and thus the opportunities to meet other racial groups off-line is also likely to shape racial preferences. Previous research supporting a “group threat” perspective has shown that whites’ racial attitudes are most negative when exposure to blacks reaches a critical point (Taylor 1998). From this perspective, racial preferences among Latinos might be biased against blacks in communities where blacks make up a larger percentage. On the other hand, the contact hypothesis posits that greater exposure leads to more favorable perceptions (Allport 1979).

Indeed, research in multiethnic contexts has found that increased contact with other racial groups leads to more positive attitudes (Oliver and Wong 2003). Qualitative studies have also suggested that Latinos who live in the same neighborhoods as blacks are more likely to identify with them (Carter 2005; Lee 2006). From the contact perspective, Latino daters’ preferences for whites or blacks should increase with the proportion of whites or blacks in their communities, while their preference for endogamy will increase with an increased proportion of Latinos in their communities.

The expected relationship between educational attainment and racial preferences among Latinos is not clear from prior research. Intermarriage studies have shown that highly educated Latinos are more likely to intermarry with whites but we do not know whether this pattern stems from racial preferences or increased opportunities to meet whites (Feliciano 2001). Other research has indicated that higher education experiences can heighten ethnic attachments (Feliciano 2009; Tovar and Feliciano 2009), suggesting increased preferences for endogamy among highly educated Latinos. Some attitudinal surveys have shown that increased education leads to more favorable attitudes towards blacks among Latinos (Dyer et al. 1989; Murgia and Forman 2003). However, other scholars found little evidence that education leads

4. However, the influence of African ancestry should not be overstated. There is a long history of preference for whiteness and denial of blackness in Latin American countries, including Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic (Darity et al. 2005; Guglielmo 2006).

5. Based on authors’ calculations of the 2005 American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau 2005).

6. We acknowledge that neighborhood choices can also be driven by preferences. Absent longitudinal data, we cannot evaluate the degree of reverse causality. However, given existing theories and the costs involved in residential mobility, we argue that it is likely to be more common that neighborhood contexts shape preferences than the reverse.
to more positive intergroup attitudes (Jackman and Muha 1984), and some have argued that more educated people have simply learned and are more inclined to use politically correct answers to survey questions about race (Bonilla-Silva 2003). Thus, we do not expect education to significantly affect preferences for blacks or whites. However, highly educated individuals usually date and marry others with similar levels of education (Kalmijn 1991). Thus, because relatively few Latinos are highly educated, we expect that highly educated (bachelor’s degree or more) Latinos will be less likely to prefer to date only other Latinos.

Research on the relationship between religion and openness towards other groups has also been mixed, suggesting that religious affiliations can either promote or attenuate racial prejudice (Hunsberger and Jackson 2005). Thus, we do not expect religion to significantly affect preferences towards whites or blacks. However, most Latinos have origins in predominantly Christian countries and among immigrants, religion has been found to connect individuals to their homelands (Levitt 2007). Edward Murgia and Tyrone A. Forman (2003) argue that Latino Catholics are more connected to their homeland and more socially distant from other groups. Thus, we expect that Latino daters who identify as Christian or Catholic are more likely to prefer to date only other Latinos.

Finally, knowledge of the Spanish language may be associated with dating preferences. Spanish language knowledge is strongly related to immigrant generation (Rumbaut et al. 2006). Knowledge of Spanish is a key marker in debates about “authenticity” among Latinos, and is a potential source of division between immigrants and later generations (Jimenez 2008; Ochoa 2000). Later-generation Latinos have been shown to feel more warmth towards African Americans than immigrants do (Charles 2000; Murgia and Forman 2003; O’Brien 2008). Therefore, we hypothesize that Latinos who do not speak Spanish (and thus are likely later generations) will be more likely to prefer to date blacks than those who do speak Spanish. Those who express a preference for dates who speak Spanish are likely to be first- and second-generation Latinos who are highly fluent in Spanish and value this aspect of their culture. We therefore expect Latinos who speak Spanish or who prefer dates who speak Spanish to be more likely to prefer to date only Latinos.

Data and Methods

We collected data between September 2004 and May 2005 from Internet dating profiles posted on Yahoo! Personals, which was then the most popular national online dating Web site (Madden and Lenhart 2006). We randomly selected profiles from people who self-identified as black, white, and Latino living within 50 miles of four major U.S. cities: New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Atlanta. We chose these cities because they vary by region (West, Northeast, Midwest, and South), historical and contemporary racial politics, racial compositions, group sizes, and national-origin groups represented. Given that persons over the age of 50 are less well-represented on the Internet (Madden and Lenhart 2006; Sautter, Tippet, and Morgan 2010), we limited the age range to those ages 18 through 50. Since we view racial preferences as inputs into eventual marriage outcomes, we also limited the sample to those who were only seeking heterosexual dates. We randomly selected 200 profiles for each race/gender combination in each city, for a total sample size of 4,626.

Although it was free to post profiles on Yahoo! Personals, the data are by no means representative of the general population. The data are, however, fairly representative of Internet users in these U.S. cities, who tend to be more educated and skilled in writing in English.7

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7. We collected a random sample of Yahoo Internet daters and compared their racial makeup to a sample of Internet users in each region using the 2003 CPS School Enrollment and Computer Use Supplement (U.S. Census Bureau 2003). The racial composition of Internet users in each region closely aligns with the racial composition of Yahoo! Personals (results available upon request). In fact, whites were the only racial group who were slightly underrepresented on the Web site.
For Latinos, the data especially underrepresent recent immigrants. Our findings better represent the preferences of Latinos who are most integrated into mainstream institutions; from the standpoint of assimilation theory then, we expect our findings to be biased in the direction of overestimating the degree to which Latinos in general would prefer to out-date. We also might expect more openness towards interracial dating in our study than among the general population since the Web site is multiethnic.

Notwithstanding their limitations, the data hold a number of advantages. First, Internet use has expanded exponentially in the past decade, and Internet dating has become increasingly popular. Recent studies have found that nearly three-quarters of all Internet users who are single and looking for romantic partners have used the Internet to find dates (Madden and Lenhart 2006) and Internet daters do not differ in demographic characteristics from single Internet users who do not date on the Internet (Sautter et al. 2010). Second, and most importantly, our data provide a rare opportunity for researchers to examine how people behave in real-life situations. Unlike marriage and dating outcomes (Harris and Ono 2005), stated racial preferences are not limited by physical proximity. On the Internet, individuals are free to state preferences for groups they might not normally come into contact with in their neighborhoods, schools, or workplaces. Therefore, stated racial preferences may be a better indicator of racial boundaries between groups than actual dating or marriage outcomes.

**Independent Variables**

We first coded all the demographic information about the dater who posted the profile. As control variables, we include gender, age (daters average around 33 years old), education (coded as high school graduate or less, some college, college graduate, or post-graduate), political views (coded as liberal or very liberal versus middle of the road, conservative or not political), religion (Christian, not religious, other, or missing), Spanish language (speaks Spanish, does not speak Spanish, and no answer), and body type (slim/slender/average versus thick/a few extra pounds/voluptuous).

We also coded information about the characteristics online daters were seeking in a date. In addition to race, daters could express a preference for 19 other possible characteristics in a potential date, such as age, educational attainment, religion, body type, or language, or leave the default as “any,” to indicate that they have no preference. We control for whether the dater stated a preference for educational attainment, religion, body type, or language. We also created a control variable measuring how selective the dater was about their date’s characteristics overall, based on the percentage of these 19 other items for which the dater expressed a preference.

We also collected data on the racial composition of the community that each dater reported as their residence on their profiles. Using data from the 2005 American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau 2005), we collected data on the percent non-Hispanic white, percent non-Hispanic black, percent Mexican, percent Puerto Rican, percent Cuban, and percent other Latino in each town/municipality. Although one limitation of our study is that

8. Race/ethnicity was among the most commonly stated preferences, following age and body type.

9. Despite its smaller sample size and thus, larger sampling errors as compared with the Census, using the American Community Survey is preferable because: (1) Only the ACS provides estimates in 2005, the year of our data collection. Relying on the 2000 Census would have resulted in outdated information, especially in recent immigrant destinations such as Atlanta that are undergoing rapid demographic changes; and (2) the ACS oversamples small governmental jurisdictions to provide more accurate estimates of small places, townships, and school districts (Citro and Kalton 2007).

10. All daters entered their zip code, which was converted by the Web site to a town/city/municipality that was publicly viewed. Racial composition data for each municipality/town was obtained from the 2005 American Community Survey in several ways. First, we used a name search for each municipality/town and obtained the racial composition data based on the municipality/town name. If this did not yield any search results, we used an address in that particular municipality/town and obtained the racial composition data based on that address. When using an address search, the American Community Survey provides demographic characteristics based on several geographic areas: PUMA, School...
we do not measure racial residential segregation per se, the racial composition data indicate possible exposure to different racial groups.

**Dependent Variables**

We coded racial preferences into three sets of multinomial dependent variables. The default response on the Web site is to state “any” as the preference. If daters wish to state a racial preference, they can select one or more of 10 groups they might prefer to date by checking the corresponding boxes. Groups include Caucasian (white), African American (black), Asian, Hispanic/Latino, Middle Eastern, Native American, Pacific Islander, East Indian, Interracial, and Other. Daters chose over four hundred unique combinations of racial groups as preferred dates. To simplify, we focused on three multinomial outcomes. First, we examine a preference for endogamy using a four category dependent variable: (1) prefers own racial group and other groups; (2) prefers own racial group only; (3) excludes own racial group/prefers only other racial groups; and (4) no stated preference. Second, we examine a preference for, or exclusion of, whites using a three category outcome: (1) excludes whites; (2) prefers whites; and (3) no stated preference. Third, we similarly examine a preference for, or exclusion of, blacks: (1) excludes blacks; (2) prefers blacks; and (3) no stated preference.

**How Do Latinos’ Racial Preferences Compare to those of Blacks and Whites?**

**Endogamy and Exogamy Preferences of Latinos, Blacks, and Whites**

Figure 1 shows the breakdown of three endogamy and exogamy outcomes for Latinos, as compared to blacks and whites, separately by gender. First, based on the height of the bars, we note that similar percentages of male and female whites, blacks, and Latinos express a racial preference, although females are more likely to do so. Those who did not express a racial preference, and whose profiles state they are open to “any” race/ethnicity, are not shown on the graph. However, because “any” is the default on the Web site, it is difficult to interpret this response.11

Examining same-race preferences, we see that Latinos are more open to dating outside their racial group than both blacks and whites: only 8.5 percent of Latino males and 12 percent of Latinas prefer only endogamy, compared to 13 percent of black males, 35 percent of black females, 17 percent of white males, and 47 percent of white females. More Latinos (43 percent-males; 50 percent-females) state a preference for their own racial group and other racial groups compared to black males and females (approximately 36 percent each), white males (38 percent), and white women (only 22 percent). Also significant is that 12 percent of Latinas prefer to only out-date; this is twice the percentage for black women (6 percent) and

---

11. Because this is the default, this may not reflect a true preference but rather a nonresponse for daters in a hurry. Previous research examining interactions on another online dating site finds that individuals who state “any,” do not behave as if they have no racial preferences, and tend to discriminate against other racial groups (Hitsch et al. 2010).
Racial boundaries among Latinos

The finding that so few Latinos prefer to date only other Latinos challenges the Latino racial group thesis. Thus, we do not find much support for the idea that Latinos are developing a strong panethnic Latino identity, that Latinos are selectively assimilating by remaining embedded in their ethnic communities, or that Latinos are dividing the United States into “two peoples, two cultures, and two languages” (Huntington 2004:30).

We consider whether these findings could be driven by personal characteristics, other dating preferences, or the community ethnic context by controlling for these factors in a multinomial logistic regression analysis, presented in Table 1. Overall, these factors do not change the substantive results of the descriptive analysis. In the first column, we see that, indeed, with controls, black men are over one and a half times and white men are over two times as likely as Latino males to prefer to only date within their respective racial groups. Differences are even more marked among women: black women are nearly four times as likely as Latinas to prefer to only in-date, while white women are over eight times as likely as Latinas to prefer to only in-date. The second column in Table 1 shows that, net of controls and consistent with descriptive findings, black men are over two times as likely as Latinos to exclude their own racial group as a date. With controls, Latinas also remain more likely than black and white women to exclude their own racial group, although this finding only borders on significance. The third column shows that, among women, blacks and whites are more likely than Latinas to not state a racial preference than to prefer their own group and others. These findings further support the conclusion that Latinos are not constructing rigid in-group boundaries because Latinos are much less likely than blacks or whites to prefer endogamy.

Preferences for Blacks and Whites

That Latinos are, for the most part, very open to dating other racial groups does not mean that they are open to dating all racial groups equally. Indeed, Figure 2 shows that Latino males and females are much more likely to prefer to date whites than blacks. Among males, 38 percent percent of Latinos prefer to date whites, compared to only 11 percent preferring blacks. Among females, 50 percent of Latinas prefer whites, compared to 18 percent...
Table 1 • Relative Risk Ratios from Multinomial Regressions of Endogamy and Exogamy Preferences, by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Prefer Own Racial Group Only (vs. Prefer Own &amp; Other Groups)</th>
<th>Exclude Own Racial Group (vs. Prefer Own &amp; Other Groups)</th>
<th>Any/No Stated Preference (vs. Prefer Own &amp; Other Groups)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Men</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1.65**</td>
<td>2.29**</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>2.40***</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ref: Latinos)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>2,234</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>3.95***</td>
<td>.66†</td>
<td>1.51**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>8.31***</td>
<td>.59†</td>
<td>2.36***</td>
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<tr>
<td>(ref: Latinas)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>2,126</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Models include controls for metropolitan area, education, age, body type, political views, religion, selectiveness, preferences for religion, education, body type, and height, and percent of own racial group living in municipality.

*p < .10  *p < .05  **p < .01  ***p < .001 (two-tailed tests)

![Figure 2](image_url)
preferring blacks. The preference for whites among Latinos is also much higher than blacks’ preferences for whites (16 percent-males, 18 percent-females). This descriptive finding is reinforced by the multivariate analyses in Table 2. In the first column of Table 2, we see that blacks are about six times as likely as Latinos to exclude whites as dates (men = 5.97, women = 6.65). These findings, along with the descriptive finding that 57 percent of the Latinas and 44 percent of the Latinos in the sample exclude blacks as possible dates (Figure 2) lend support to the whitening thesis; Latinos clearly express far greater preferences for dating whites than blacks.

However, the support for the whitening thesis is not unequivocal because Latinos’ preferences for blacks do not precisely mirror those of whites. Although only 11 percent of Latino males and 18 percent of Latinas prefer to date blacks (Figure 2), these percentages are over twice as high as compared to white men (4 percent), and almost three times as high as compared to white women (6 percent). Controlling for demographic characteristics and other preferences in the multivariate analyses in Table 2 column 3, we see this finding is not explained by other factors, although here the white-Latino difference is stronger among males.12 White males are over three times as likely as Latinos to exclude black women as dates while white women are over two times as likely as Latinas to exclude black men. The higher likelihood of preferring blacks as compared with white daters and the preference for blacks and exclusion of whites by some Latinos (48 percent of Latinos who prefer blacks exclude whites as dates—not shown), is consistent with the panminority group thesis among a small subset of Latinos. This evidence for the development of a panminority group among a small subset of Latinos can only be reconciled with the evidence for the whitening thesis by considering the sources of diversity with the Latino category, which may be associated with different racial preferences. Therefore, we focus the rest of the analyses on the Latino sample only, exploring metropolitan area variations, and considering which characteristics help explain dating preferences among Latinos.

12. The change in the direction of the gender effect is explained by the controls for choosiness (the number of other characteristics expressed a preference for), and preferences for other characteristics.

### Table 2 • Relative Risk Ratios from Multinomial Regressions of Preferences for Whites and Blacks, by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preference for/Exclusion of Whites</th>
<th>Preference for/Exclusion of Blacks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excludes (vs. Prefers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>5.97***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White (ref: Latinos)</td>
<td>.15***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N = 2,234</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>6.65***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White (ref: Latinas)</td>
<td>.09***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N = 2,126</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Models include controls for metropolitan area, education, age, body type, political views, religion, selectiveness, preferences for religion, education, body type, and height, and percent of own racial group living in municipality

\[^{1}p < .10 \quad {2}p < .05 \quad {3}p < .01 \quad {4}p < .001\] (two-tailed tests)
Latinos in the Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, and Atlanta metropolitan areas live in contexts that differ substantially in terms of the national-origin groups represented, the racial composition of their residential areas, and the size of the Latino population. Related to these compositional differences, Latino online daters in each metropolitan area differ in terms of average educational level, Spanish language knowledge and preferences, and religious affiliations (see Appendix Table 1). These factors likely shape metropolitan differences in racial dating preferences.

As Table 3 shows, the extent of Latinos’ racial in-group and out-group preferences generally correspond to expectations based on the compositional differences of these metropolitan areas. Consistent with a mate availability perspective, in Los Angeles, the area with the highest proportion of Latinos, the highest percentage of daters (15 percent) prefer to date other Latinos exclusively. In contrast, in Atlanta, the metropolitan area with the lowest percentage of Latinos (see Appendix Table 1), less than 2 percent prefer Latinos exclusively. Conversely, only 4 percent of Latinos in LA exclude Latinos as dates, while 12 percent of Latinos in Atlanta exclude Latinos as dates.

Metropolitan area differences in the exclusion of whites and blacks are generally consistent with our expectations based on the contact and mate availability hypotheses and the national-origin make-up of each area. Latino online daters in New York and Los Angeles, where whites are a smaller percentage of the population, are the most likely to exclude whites (25 percent-NY, 22 percent-LA). Similarly, Latino daters in Atlanta, where whites and blacks are more numerous, are the least likely to exclude blacks (47 percent) or whites (16 percent). Consistent with our expectation that there would be more evidence of panminority racial formation in New York because of the greater representation of Puerto Ricans and Dominicans there, we find that New York Latinos are more likely than those in Los Angeles or Chicago to express a greater preference for blacks as dates. However, the differences in the exclusion of blacks by metropolitan area are not substantial.

Overall, these descriptive findings provide evidence for all three major perspectives on Latino racial boundaries. The whitening thesis is most evident in all locales, but especially in Atlanta and Chicago (Latinos there are the most likely to prefer whites); the Latino racial group thesis is more evident in Los Angeles (Latinos there are most likely to prefer to date only other Latinos), and the panminority group thesis is more evident in New York and Atlanta (Latinos there are most likely to prefer blacks). However, these descriptive findings do not show whether metropolitan area differences are influenced by daters’ individual characteristics or racial compositional differences at a more local level; for this, we turn to multivariate analyses.

### Predictors of Endogamy and Exogamy among Latino Online Daters

Table 4 shows the results of multinomial logistic regression models predicting whether Latino daters prefer to only date endogamously or only date exogamously, as compared to preferring to date both Latinos and other racial groups. Presented in the table are the effects of the factors of theoretical interest: metropolitan area and racial composition, education,
First, we focus on metropolitan area differences in preferring endogamy. Table 4, Model 1, column 1 shows that, consistent with descriptive findings supporting a mate availability perspective, Latinos in Chicago and Atlanta are less likely than those in Los Angeles to prefer to date only other Latinos. More specifically, Latino daters in Los Angeles are about 1.7 times as likely as those in Chicago and about ten times as likely as those in Atlanta to prefer to only date other Latinos.

Model 2 considers whether these metropolitan differences are explained by the racial composition in these areas. We see that, consistent with the contact hypothesis, daters living in an area with a higher percentage of Latinos and thus lower percentages of other racial groups are more likely to prefer to date other Latinos exclusively. Moreover, the greater proportion of Latinos in Los Angeles helps explain their greater preferences for endogamy.

We tested whether there was a curvilinear relationship between any of the racial composition variables (percent Latino, percent white, percent black) and any of the outcomes and found that there were no significant curvilinear patterns.
Adding racial composition in Model 2 completely explains the difference in endogamy preferences between Latinos in Chicago and Los Angeles. Comparing Los Angeles and Atlanta, Latinos’ greater preference for dating only other Latinos declines from ten to five times as likely once racial composition is included.

The next two columns examine preferences for only other racial groups. Column 3, Model 1 shows that both Latinos in New York and Atlanta are over two and a half times as likely as those in Los Angeles to exclude other Latinos as possible dates. While the Latino composition in each locale does not significantly affect whether daters exclude other Latinos (column 4), Model 2 shows that a greater preference for exogamy is explained in Atlanta and partially explained in New York by the lower proportion of Latinos in these metropolitan areas versus Los Angeles.

Within and between metropolitan areas, Latinos differ in individual characteristics, such as educational level, religion, and Spanish language knowledge. In terms of education, we expected more highly educated Latinos to be more open to exogamy because few Latinos have advanced degrees. We find, consistent with our hypothesis, that the most educated Latinos (with postgraduate degrees) are less likely than those with high school degrees or less to prefer to exclusively date Latinos (column 1). However, this finding only borders on significance and we see no differences among Latinos with bachelor’s degrees or less. Moreover, the effect of postgraduate education is not significant controlling for percent Latino (column 2). This is consistent with the mate availability perspective because it suggests that because highly educated Latinos are less likely to live in areas with high concentrations of Latinos, they are more open to out-dating.

Contrary to our hypothesis that Christian Latinos would be more likely to prefer endogamy, we do not find that religion is associated with significantly greater preferences for endogamy among Latinos. Religion is also not associated with a preference for exogamy.

Finally, we see the effects of Spanish language on racial preferences. While it is difficult to ascertain the meaning behind the effects of Spanish language itself—Latinos who do not answer the language question are twice as likely as those who do not speak Spanish to prefer to only in-date—daters’ Spanish language preferences are consistent with theoretical expectations (columns 1 and 2). Daters who prefer to date Spanish speakers are over two times as likely to prefer to only date other Latinos (columns 1 and 2) and nearly 70 percent less likely to exclude Latinos as those who prefer their dates speak another language. This suggests that the Spanish language is an important cultural resource that can reinforce ethnic-specific or pan-Latino boundaries (Jimenez 2008).

Predictors of White and Black Exclusion among Latino Online Daters

Table 5 shows the results of multinomial regressions predicting the exclusion of, or preference for, whites and blacks among Latinos. The individual characteristics discussed above—education, religion, and Spanish language—did not significantly influence these outcomes, suggesting that such factors are more important in shaping out-dating preferences in general rather than a preference for a particular non-Latino racial group. The null effect of education and religion is consistent with the mixed findings of previous research as to whether and how these characteristics are associated with racial attitudes (Hunsberger and Jackson 2005; Jackman and Muha 1984).

The second models (columns 2 and 4) reinforce how context shapes racial preferences. While we do not see significant differences by metropolitan area among Latinos in preferences for whites, Latino daters who live among higher concentrations of whites are less likely to exclude whites, consistent with both contact theory and a mate availability perspective. Furthermore, Latinos in New York and Atlanta are about 45 percent less likely than those in Los Angeles to exclude blacks as dates (Model 1, column 3). However, Model 2, column 4 shows that these metropolitan area differences are explained by Latinos in New York and
Racial boundaries among Latinos

Discussion and Conclusion

The growing Latino population’s place in the U.S. racial structure is complex and full of contradictions. By some media accounts, Latinos are clearly racialized as “others” who are “taking over” (Chavez 2008), yet in other accounts, Latinos are unequivocally accepted as part of the new mainstream (Guzman and Valdivia 2004). These contradictions are evident not only in popular culture and media, but in official contexts as well. For example, the U.S. Census simultaneously considers “Hispanic origin” individuals to be of any race, while at the same time presenting official statistics of Hispanics alongside “non-Hispanic” whites, “non-Hispanic” blacks, Native Americans, and Asians, suggesting Latinos are a fifth major racial group.

This study delves into the complexities of racial boundaries among Latinos by drawing on unique data from Internet daters’ racial preferences. Our findings suggest that: (1) racial boundaries around “Latinos” are not very strong, relative to those around blacks or whites, given that only about 10 percent of Latinos prefer to date only other Latinos; (2) The Latino-white boundary is less rigid than the Latino-black boundary, since Latinos are more likely to prefer to date whites than blacks; (3) The Latino-white boundary is also less rigid than the black-white boundary, since Latinos are more likely to prefer to date whites than blacks are; (4) Boundaries between some Latinos and blacks are not as rigid as white-black boundaries, since Latinos are much more likely to prefer blacks than whites are; and (5) Latino racial boundaries vary by metropolitan area and racial composition, educational attainment, level of acculturation (Spanish language use and preference), and religion.

Contrary to arguments that Latinos may eventually create a “separate nation” within the United States (Huntington 2004), we find that Latinos are highly inclusive of the possibility of dating non-Latinos, especially whites. Indeed, our finding that the majority of Latino daters prefer to date whites (over blacks or only Latinos) is consistent with the view of Latinos as whitening minorities (Lee and Bean 2007; Yancey 2003). This does not mean that Latinos in

Table 5 • Relative Risk Ratios from Multinomial Regressions of Excluding or Preferring Whites and Blacks among Latinos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metropolitan area</th>
<th>Exclude Whites (vs. Prefer Whites)</th>
<th>Exclude Blacks (vs. Prefer Blacks)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>Model 2</td>
<td>Model 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlanta</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(city ref: Los Angeles)

City composition

| Percent white in city/town | .99** |
| Percent black in city/town  | .98** |

N = 1,452

Notes: Models include controls for gender, age, education, body type, political views, religion, Spanish language, selectiveness, and preferences for education, religion, language, and body type. Any versus prefer whites/blacks not shown, available upon request.

*p < .10 *p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001 (two-tailed tests)
future generations will necessarily “become white,” since this will depend on whether Latinos can overcome the barriers of low education and segregation and whether they are fully accepted by whites (Telles and Ortiz 2008).

Our findings further suggest that the majority of the more educated, more acculturated Latinos who are well-represented among Internet daters accept dominant racial ideologies privileging whites. These findings are consistent with quantitative (Feliciano 2001; Murgia and Forman 2003; Qian and Cobas 2004) and qualitative studies (Lee 2006; O’Brien 2008) of intermarriage and racial attitudes among Latinos. For example, O’Brien (2008:120) argues that some of her Latino respondents feared they would jeopardize their “honorary white” status if they dated blacks; she found that some Latino respondents even indicated more family support for marrying a white person than another Latino. We find evidence of similar tendencies among a small subset of Latino Internet daters: of the 7 percent of Latinos who explicitly exclude other Latinos as dates \( n = 112 \), 72 percent prefer to date whites (not shown). These findings suggest that the ingrained U.S. racial hierarchy in which whites are dominant is more powerful among most Latinos than a tendency to favor one’s national-origin group or to develop a panethnic Latino group or panminority group with blacks.

However, our findings also suggest that different racial boundary scenarios, varying by context, are evident within the diverse panethnic Latino category. In Los Angeles, we see evidence that some Latinos are remaining a separate racial group, perhaps selectively assimilating and making deliberate efforts to preserve a Latino or specific national-origin group identity by dating only other Latinos. These in-group preferences fit with Los Angeles’s history as a central place for the development of Latino (especially Mexican American) politics, culture, and mobilization (Escobar 1993). However, even within Los Angeles, only 15 percent of Latinos prefer to exclusively date other Latinos, and this tendency is only evident in areas with high proportions of other Latinos.

Latinos in the New York and Atlanta metropolitan areas are more likely to prefer to date blacks than those in Los Angeles, which is consistent with these cities’ histories as centers for African American culture and politics. These findings are also explained by the greater proportion of blacks living in Latino daters’ communities, which supports the contact hypothesis in interracial relations (Allport 1979). Our findings suggest that proximity to blacks promotes greater acceptance. It is mainly in locales where Latinos are fewer in number and reside close to blacks that we see some possibility of the creation of a panminority group.

Our findings suggest—similar to the major claim of segmented assimilation theory—that assimilation is occurring in different ways for different segments of the diverse Latino population (Portes and Zhou 1993). However, our findings lend only limited support to some of the particular outcomes of segmented assimilation. Evidence for selective assimilation is modest, even in Los Angeles, where preferring to date within the ethnic community is more common but still not nearly as common as preferring to date Latinos and other groups (especially whites). Further, we find that Latino Internet daters are more likely to prefer blacks as dates than whites are, which suggests the possibility that a small subset of Latinos might develop into a panminority group with blacks. This possibility is not considered by segmented assimilation theory, which assumes that identifying with native-born blacks will necessarily result in “downward assimilation” and socioeconomic disadvantage.

Our findings support the view that assimilation processes vary among Latinos because of differing racialization processes (Golash-Boza 2006; Golash-Boza and Darity 2008; Jung 2009). Some who identify as Latino are racialized as white, others may be racialized as black, while still others may be racialized as a separate Latino group in the “racial middle” (O’Brien 2008). While data limitations preclude an analysis of skin color or discrimination, these factors are likely significant (Golash-Boza and Darity 2008). For example, individuals may prefer blacks and identify with them because they share similar types of discrimination and experiences, or they may prefer and identify with only other Latinos for the same reasons (Golash-Boza and Darity 2008). The racialization of Latinos may also diverge in different contexts as evidenced by the variations in racial preferences by metropolitan area and racial context.
A unique contribution of our study is that we can distinguish between opportunities and preferences in shaping dating (and ultimately, marriage) outcomes. Our focus on stated racial preferences among Internet daters allows us to consider a scenario in which, theoretically, daters could express a preference for any racial group, regardless of whether they had contact with that group in the off-line world. Further, by considering the actual opportunity structure, in terms of the percentage of various racial groups that live in the daters’ proximity, we can ascertain whether preferences are shaped by opportunities. We find that the racial composition of daters’ communities does influence racial preferences, but that differences between Latinos and whites or blacks in their racial preferences are not driven by opportunity factors alone. Thus, the overall patterns of racial boundaries we find are not primarily driven by proximity to different racial groups.

Limitations and Future Research

Our study is necessarily limited because online daters differ from the general population in several respects. Nevertheless, selection and other data issues do not undermine our findings. One concern may be that those who choose Internet dating are especially particular about who they date (wishing to date only certain racial groups) or have difficulty meeting people in the off-line world. However, we addressed this concern by examining daters’ stated preferences for all other characteristics, and then controlling for how selective the dater was in general.

Another data limitation is that we could not distinguish between those who are looking for a serious relationship, versus those who are seeking only a casual relationship. Given prior research, which shows that interracial relationships are less likely than same-race relationships to lead to marriage (Joyner and Kao 2005), our results do not necessarily represent willingness to engage in serious interracial relationships. However, willingness to even casually date someone of another racial group indicates a certain level of social acceptance and is necessary for a more serious relationship to develop.

A further limitation is that there may be some misrepresentation in daters’ self-descriptions and stated preferences. For example, some daters might have lied about their age or body type to try to appear more desirable. While misrepresentation certainly occurs, we were not as concerned with the effects of daters’ characteristics (age, height, body type, education) per se, as much as with their stated preferences. A more serious problem is if daters did not accurately state true preferences. However, if online daters do misrepresent racial preferences, they are likely to do so in the direction of including racial groups whom, in reality, they are not open to dating. Prior research examining actual online contact on a dating Web site shows that daters who do not state any racial preferences in their profiles nevertheless tend to discriminate against members of different racial groups (Hitsch, Hortaçsu, and Ariely 2010).

For this reason, we made an analytical distinction between those who state they are open to dating “any” racial group and those who stated a particular preference and excluded a particular group. Given that these are real individuals searching for a date, daters would have no reason to exclude groups that they are actually open to dating, and thus we are confident that the patterns of exclusion we find represent true preferences.

This study suggests several directions for future research. The Latino Internet daters in our study are a select group who tend to be more educated and more culturally assimilated.

14. Despite this limitation, we chose to use the Yahoo! Personals over other dating Web sites because it was the largest and most representative Web site at the time of our data collection with public access to profiles.

15. Indeed, Cornwell and Lundgren (2001) find that misrepresentation of age and physical characteristics is higher among daters who meet in cyberspace than among those who meet in person. However, they only find misrepresentation of age and physical characteristics.

16. Hitsch and associates (2010) also find that internet daters act in accordance with their stated preferences. While their study makes a significant contribution by examining revealed, as well as stated, preferences, it only considered same-race preferences and not whether particular racial groups were preferred; the sample size of their study in San Diego and Boston was also not large enough to compare the racial preferences of different racial groups.
(i.e., fluent in English) than the general Latino population; future research should compare our findings to those from Spanish-language dating sites. Further, our findings are limited to four multiethnic urban areas; similar data could be collected from rural and other urban areas and more precise racial residential segregation data would help tease out the effects of group contact. While all of the Internet daters chose the Latino or Hispanic label to describe themselves, this does not indicate that they identify strongly with “Latinos” as a group. Further exploration of the diversity of Latino identities is warranted. Although we explored some of the variability within the Latino category, we could not distinguish among different national origins, phenotypes, and immigrant generations. Finally, we cannot know conclusively that online daters act in accordance with their stated racial preferences. However, given the striking patterns of racial preferences that emerged in this data, it is clear that individuals of Latin-American origins are varyingly becoming incorporated into a racialized, and not color-blind, U.S. society. To understand how and where this growing population will fit into a potentially new U.S. racial structure, future research should continue to explore the complexities and diversity within the Latino category.

### Appendix Table 1 • Characteristics of Latino Internet Daters by Metropolitan Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>LA</th>
<th>NY/NJ</th>
<th>Chicago</th>
<th>Atlanta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Racial/ethnic composition</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% black in city/town</td>
<td>7.64</td>
<td>21.54</td>
<td>29.53</td>
<td>32.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6.49)</td>
<td>(12.62)</td>
<td>(12.63)</td>
<td>(22.12)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% white in city/town</td>
<td>33.47</td>
<td>29.73</td>
<td>37.77</td>
<td>49.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16.55)</td>
<td>(16.96)</td>
<td>(17.66)</td>
<td>(20.16)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Latino in city/town</td>
<td>45.09</td>
<td>35.88</td>
<td>26.27</td>
<td>11.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16.17)</td>
<td>(16.92)</td>
<td>(10.54)</td>
<td>(8.70)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>% Mexican in city/town</td>
<td>34.17</td>
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<td>21.55</td>
<td>8.79</td>
</tr>
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<td>(14.75)</td>
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<td>(7.54)</td>
<td>(6.80)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Puerto Rican in city/town</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>10.56</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1.8)</td>
<td>(4.78)</td>
<td>(.93)</td>
<td>(.46)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Cuban in city/town</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.20)</td>
<td>(3.06)</td>
<td>(.10)</td>
<td>(.30)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% other Latino in city/town</td>
<td>11.81</td>
<td>20.70</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>2.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4.78)</td>
<td>(11.44)</td>
<td>(.61)</td>
<td>(2.38)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N for Latino subgroups</strong></td>
<td>325</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS graduate or less</td>
<td>12.60</td>
<td>10.10</td>
<td>15.85</td>
<td>18.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>50.66</td>
<td>44.82</td>
<td>42.90</td>
<td>38.56</td>
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<tr>
<td>College grad</td>
<td>28.87</td>
<td>32.90</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>32.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post grad</td>
<td>7.87</td>
<td>12.18</td>
<td>7.92</td>
<td>10.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spanish</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R speaks Spanish</td>
<td>44.36</td>
<td>55.44</td>
<td>63.66</td>
<td>76.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>44.62</td>
<td>36.01</td>
<td>24.59</td>
<td>6.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R does not speak Spanish</td>
<td>11.02</td>
<td>8.55</td>
<td>11.75</td>
<td>16.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religious affiliation</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other religion</td>
<td>12.34</td>
<td>9.59</td>
<td>9.29</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>52.49</td>
<td>59.59</td>
<td>63.11</td>
<td>70.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>23.36</td>
<td>17.88</td>
<td>16.94</td>
<td>13.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not religious</td>
<td>11.81</td>
<td>12.95</td>
<td>10.66</td>
<td>13.17</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>381</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>319</td>
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Notes: The sample size for Latino subgroups is smaller than the overall N because detailed Latino ethnic composition data were not provided in some places by the ACS data. Standard deviations for racial composition variables are presented in parentheses.
References


