

Article

Normative Ideals, “Alternative” Realities: Perceptions of Interracial Dating among Professional Latinas and Black Women

Rocio Garcia

Department of Sociology, University of California Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1551, USA;
E-Mail: rgarcia1@g.ucla.edu

Academic Editors: Silvia Dominguez and Cid Martinez

Received: 25 August 2015 / Accepted: 13 November 2015 / Published: 18 November 2015

Abstract: Family types continue to expand in the U.S., yet normative patterns of endogamy and the privileging of nuclear families persist. To understand how professional women of color navigate endogamy and family ideals, I draw on 40 in-depth interviews of professional Black women and Latinas to ask how they construct partner preferences. I find that professional Latinas and Black women prefer same-race, similarly educated partners but report significant barriers to satisfying these desires. Respondents’ experiences with racism, the rejection of ethno-racial and cultural assimilation, gendered racism from men of color, and the college gender gap emerge as mechanisms for endogamous preferences. These preferences resist and support hegemonic family formation, an ideological and behavioral process that privileges, white, middle class, endogamous, heteronormative ideals for families comprising courtship, marriage, and biological childbearing. By challenging the racial devaluation of people of color while preferring the normativity that endogamy offers, the women in this study underscore the fluidity embedded in endogamy.

Keywords: family formation; interracial dating; Latinas; Black women; intersectionality

1. Introduction

Despite the increase in U.S. “alternative” families from divorce, cohabitation, interracial relationships, and adoption, the nuclear family remains the form of family institution that accrues various economic, legal, and emotional benefits [1]. Implicit in this normative family structure are

same-race and separate sex partnerships rooted in “pseudo”-biological expectations of childbearing. As a result, the nuclear family structure is hegemonic, reproducing the belief that marriage and childbearing between members of the same ethno-racial group are value-laden, commonplace expectations. Those who opt out of or cannot achieve a marital union and biological childbearing not only face a loss of material benefits, but also the social benefits of normative family formation. For example, married couples earn a refundable tax credit for having children, gay rights activism has allocated extensive resources to same-sex marriage over challenging the normativity of marriage or other issues affecting LGBTQIA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual) groups, and married undocumented immigrant couples are more likely to be granted family reunification than unmarried couples. As a result, those who do not form legally recognized nuclear families are marginalized as “alternative” or deviant. In these and other ways, the U.S. disproportionately allocates rights and privileges to normative families over others, constructing the very notion of “the family” through the process.

Sociologists have been remiss to provide qualitative accounts of partner preferences from the vantage point of professional women of color in light of a growing college gender gap. Increasingly, U.S. women are accessing higher education and professional work at unprecedented rates. Though the college gender gap—involving women outnumbering men in college graduation—exists across all U.S. racial/ethnic groups, the gap is largest among Blacks and Latinos. This gendered educational phenomenon is therefore also racialized. As this college gender gap continues to grow, it is imperative to discover to what extent this pattern in education is filtering into family formation decisions.

Latinas and Black women produce an interesting comparison given that they share some important educational trends. Namely, Latinas and Black women share the experience of greater gains in higher education and professional work compared to their same-race/ethnicity male counterparts. However, Latinas and Black women diverge in other ways. Black women are less likely to marry compared to all other racial/ethnic groups and to Black men, more likely to have children outside of marriage, and less likely to marry outside of their race, with Black women making up 12 percent of newlyweds married to someone of a different race in 2013 compared to Black men who comprised 25 percent of new interracial marriages that year [2]. In contrast, Latinas have marriage rates that resemble more closely those of white women, are less likely to bear children outside of marriage than Black women [3], and have higher interracial marriage rates than Blacks, with Latinos accounting for 26 percent of new interracial marriages in 2010 with no significant gender differences [4].

To uncover the processes through which women of color navigate endogamy (intragroup marriage) and normative family ideals, this study asks how professional Latinas and Black women construct their partner preferences. In contrast to research suggesting that the highly educated are more likely to prioritize educational endogamy and marry interracially [5–7], I demonstrate that professional Black women and Latinas prefer same-race *and* similarly educated men with whom to form families, preferences that carry both normative and subversive implications for families more broadly. The desire for racial and educational endogamies among women of color simultaneously reproduces and challenges what I term “hegemonic family formation”, an ideological and behavioral meaning-making process that privileges white, middle class, heteronormative ideals for forming endogamous, nuclear families comprising courtship, marriage, and childbearing along a continuum. While the preference for men of color challenges racial hegemony by placing greater value on men of color in comparison to

white men, the prevalence of same-race and same-education marriages for nuclear families makes endogamy an important aspect for embodying the nuclear family structure, making interracial and interclass dating less coveted and viable options. The mechanisms that challenge and reproduce hegemonic family formation in this study are experiences with racism from whites, the rejection of racial and cultural incorporation into the dominant society, gendered racism from men of color, and the college gender gap. In outlining these factors, I demonstrate under what conditions Latinas and Black women occupy a shared nonwhite status that carries implications not only for how we understand the U.S. racial hierarchy, but also for how we understand families.

2. Hegemonic Family Formation as Theory

To conceptualize hegemonic family formation, I draw on intersectional frameworks centered on the experiences of women of color. Originating from Black feminist theorizing and activism, intersectional studies argue that lived experiences stem from the relationships between multiple identities, including but not limited to race, class, gender, and sexuality [8–15]. Intersectional work highlights the mechanisms that construct social and institutional arrangements of power that create unequal material realities. This body of work argues that group membership statuses are constructed, are interdependent, are influenced by time and place, and thus are fluid in shifting meanings and realities [16–18]. The U.S. traditional family ideal, consisting of “heterosexual couples that produce their own biological children (and) have a specific authority structure; namely, a father-head earning an adequate family wage, a stay-at-home wife, and children” [1] (p. 62) represents an exemplary site for the study of intersectionality because it undergirds interwoven racial, gender, and nation-based inequalities necessary for social reproduction.

Hegemonic femininity encompasses a pattern of practice that privileges and distorts both physical and behavioral ideals of white, middle-class heterosexual femininity (e.g., white women as independent self-expressive, and assertive) as normative and by extension, superior. Drawing on intersectionality, Pyke and Johnson [19] utilize hegemonic femininity to discuss the hierarchies that develop between Asian American and white women when considering categories of race, class, and sexuality. Asian American women internalize constructions of white femininity as superior over what they consider to be “backward” Asian femininity and as such, navigate both hegemonic and marginalized femininities in family, work, and school contexts. By constructing one expression of femininity as an ideological reference point and subsequently internalizing this ideal, both white women and women of color reproduce the subordination of other representations of femininity.

This research is a case of how marginalized racial/ethnic groups adopt and resist hegemonic family formation ideologies. Although an increasing number of families form through divorce, cohabitation, interracial relationships, single parenthood, same-sex partnerships, and adoptions, a dominant narrative that privileges a heteronormative, endogamous, nuclear pathway toward family formation persists [1,20]. Individuals reproduce commonsense notions of family through ideals of courtship, marriage, and childbearing. Fittingly, I conceptualize hegemonic family formation—linked to the existence of hegemonic femininity—as an ideological and behavioral process; as such, it privileges heteronormative ideals for forming families at the expense of other forms of kinship. Within this process, racial and educational endogamies serve two contrasting purposes: they reproduce hegemony

by reinforcing the normativity of intragroup relations while also challenging the hegemony attached to racial scripts that devalue people of color. Just as the existence of hegemonic femininity implies the existence of marginalized femininities, in the same way, hegemonic family formation begets marginalized family formations. The absence of cultural, legal, social, and economic privileges accorded to marginalized families results in perceptions of them as “deviant” or “alternative” in relation to the nuclear family structure, making families sites for both marginalization and resistance.

I find that the women in this study center their perceptions about partner preferences on their negative feelings toward interracial romantic relationships, in response to racism, the desire to embrace racial difference relative to whites, the societal privileging of white, hegemonic femininity, and the college gender gap. Black women and Latinas hope to marry same-race, similarly educated men, yet difficulties in finding partners lead them to consider self-proclaimed less desirable options, namely, interracial dating. Specifically, (1) interracial dating on the part of men of color becomes an impediment in the performance of hegemonic family formation for women of color, and (2) it signals a less suitable family option when women of color engage in it. Hegemonic family formation produces perceptions of hierarchies of family formation in which those that deviate from or are unable to meet the dominant expectation subsequently create “alternative”, pathways toward family formation that carry perceptions of marginalized statuses.

Hegemonic family formation encompasses marriage and childbearing; however, for purposes of this article, I focus on perceptions of marriage among professional Black women and Latinas. I show how the racial, gender, and professional identities among Latinas and Black women produce perceptions of stratified forms of marginalized family formations as they navigate hegemonic family formation within a context of a growing college gender gap and continuous racial endogamy. Most of the women in this study strive to achieve a normative family structure, but often make compromises to implement its narrative into their realities. This is evidence not only of its pervasiveness, but also of the marginalization power that it carries.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Intersections of Race and Gender in Romantic Partnerships

Despite a slow decline in marriage and increases in cohabitation in the U.S., marriage continues to be a fundamentally important step in adulthood, both in theory and practice [21,22]. Romantic relationships between individuals sharing similar social standing along educational, class, and racial lines continue to carry significant weight in partnership preferences [5,6,23–26]. Some research suggests that the highly educated have greater marital prospects because educational pursuit forces individuals out of racially and class-segregated areas and thus expands their dating options and likelihood of intermarriage [7,21,27,28]. In fact, today individuals are more likely to marry persons with the same level of education than in the past, creating a larger gap between those with low levels of education and those with higher education [26]. Marriages between heterosexual couples, specifically, usually involve individuals sharing education, race/ethnicity, class, and age characteristics [23,24]. This research offers important insights on patterns of U.S. romantic partnerships, yet qualitative accounts that provide insights into family formation processes are lacking.

Although interracial dating is increasing, especially among the highly educated, race continues to guide perceptions, prospects, and behavior surrounding romantic partnerships, with interracial marriages comprising only 12 percent of new marriages in 2013 [2,3,23,28–33]. Not only do most members of all racial/ethnic groups gravitate toward members of their own race, whites are also less likely to seek out people of color for romantic relationships [34], and people of color, when surrounded by same-race peers, express adversarial attitudes toward interracial dating [35]. Moreover, negative parental messages regarding interracial dating partially explain the racial distancing common in romantic partnerships [28,32,35,36].

Among Latinos, the presence of a continuous immigrant population, spatial segregation, and the patrolling of partner preferences by family members, peers, and community members provide greater opportunities and validation for same-race partnerships [23,28,37,38]. The boundary work involved in group formation—constructed distinctions and categorizations that reduce interactions and thought processes to an “us” and “them” dichotomy and require continuous divisive action—suggests that ethno-racial boundaries are subjective but are continuously solidified to the point that they take on an essentialized character [39]. Jimenez [40] suggests that the replenishment of Latino immigrants exacerbates ethno-racial boundaries by making all Latinos, regardless of immigrant status, appear to be “foreign” in relation to whites. Vasquez [28] argues that the prevalence of endogamous relationships among Latinos reflect learned “disciplined preferences” where Latinos internalize perceptions of whites and Blacks as incompatible partners and experience heightened residential segregation. These disciplined preferences further stem from boundary work enacted when white parents discourage their children from dating Latinos and when Latinos draw on anti-Black discourse to garner relative privilege within the U.S. racial hierarchy. As such, Vasquez concludes that Latinos support endogamy to distance themselves from Blacks, thus accruing racial privilege and reproducing the racial hierarchy. Understanding how Latinas preserve ethno-racial endogamy to survive racialized and nativist attacks against Latinas/os and to embrace ethno-racial difference compared to whites, rather than simply to gain racial privilege relative to Blacks, deserves further attention.

Discussions of interracial marriage and Latinos tend to center on the implications of Latino integration in the U.S. racial order [28,33,41–44]. While some research views Latinos’ higher intermarriage rates relative to Blacks as evidence of assimilation [41,44], others suggest that the racialization that Latinos experience places them in a nonwhite category along with other minority racial groups [43]. Still others suggest that the experiences of Latinos and Asians in the U.S. challenge the white/Black binary and call for re-conceptualizing the racial hierarchy as diamond-shaped, where whites are at the top, Blacks are at the bottom, and Latinos and Asians occupy middle positions, highlighting that the latter neither experience racialization in the same ways as U.S. Blacks nor do they accrue racial privilege as whites. This racial “prism” clarifies how the general public and members of nonwhite groups themselves come to understand who “belongs and does not belong” in the U.S. [45]. Existing qualitative research on attitudes toward interracial dating provides important insights into the causes for racial and ethnic boundary work. However, little research examines how the relationship between white femininities and women of color femininities work in tandem to solidify racial boundaries in romantic partnerships.

Historical accounts of Black families reflect a longstanding debate regarding the extent to which U.S. slavery continues to affect Black families [46–50]. Early research portrayed Black families as

pathological, providing sensationalist accounts of Black men as poor father figures and Black women as domineering, emasculating, and overly dependent on public assistance as explanations for the problems facing Black families [48]. Others attempt to downplay racial differences between Black and white families by arguing that during slavery, slave families resembled white families by forming monogamous relationships rooted in a stable, nuclear family structure [47,49,50]. More recently, historical work has emphasized the importance of slavery in producing qualitatively different family values and compositions [46] because male-dominated, nuclear family structures have never reflected the norm for most Black families. Scholarship that pathologizes Black families or minimizes the effects of slavery on families falls prey to using white family ideals to measure Black families, thus erasing the benefits of diversity among Black families for racial survival.

Most research on Black women's experiences with family formation focuses on poor and working class women [21,22,51–53]. Extensive research focuses on Black women's significantly lower marriage rates compared to other women and the implications of this pattern for their children. Much of this work is laden with narratives of Black cultural inferiority that blames Black communities for their family compositions in relation to notions of hegemonic family formation. Banks [29] offers a look at the intersection of race and gender for professional Black women, yet fails to fully account for the significance of race in family formation. Banks argues that low marriage rates among Black women are principally due to the drastic rise of professional Black women amidst the drastic decline of professional Black men. Banks urges Black women to marry outside of their race as a "solution" to low marriage rates that will benefit both Blacks and non-Blacks. Failing to give proper attention to the role of race and gender, Banks ignores the benefits that same-race partnerships may carry for Black women, including the emotional comfort that shared experiences with discrimination offer and the ability to avoid stigma attached to interracial dating. Research that heralds interracial marriage as a solution to Black women's obstacles in family formation [54] ignores the difficulties multiracial families face in finding accepting spaces where they are not stigmatized or admonished for violating the U.S. color line [36,55]. I take a different route by examining the ways that the confluence of race, gender, and educational attainment for Black and Latina professionals guides perceptions of family formation in ways that are similar and distinct from low-income women of color.

3.2. Normative Family Expectations and Alternative Realities

Contemporary research on marriage and families prioritizes quantitative accounts that draw heavily on exchange theories [5–7,23–27,46,56,57]. These theories suggest that marriage markets exist, comprised of rational actors seeking partners who will offer maximum rewards from marriage. Partner choices are based on the supply of available single in the market, partner preferences, and the resources available for individuals to meet preferences [56,57]. Research suggests that Blacks are less likely to marry than other racial/ethnic groups because Black women gain less economic benefits from marriage than white women and Black men may opt out or delay marriage if they cannot meet the economic exchange that normative family structures require of men [46]. Others further suggest that the smaller number of eligible Black men in relation to Black women impacts the latter's likelihood to marry [46]. Much of this scholarship, however, suffers from shortcomings that pose particularly troubling implications for people of color. The "choice" framework of exchange theories is vested in

an individualistic ideology guided by consumerist ideals, where individuals are thought to have a host of choices available for them to select. When people of color form families dissimilar from the nuclear family ideal, structural factors are obscured and people of color are penalized for “opting into” non-normative lifestyles. Moreover, much quantitative family research is limited to descriptions of values and changing patterns over time, often lacking interrogations of the meanings and implications of these values and trends.

Families headed by married, heterosexual couples parenting their biological children have decreased in the last several decades across all racial and class groups, yet research continues to emphasize this phenomenon among low-income groups [21,22]. For example, rates of childbearing outside of marriage have increased over time in the U.S for all class and racial/ethnic groups [56]. However, some research suggests that the changes in how families are formed, such as low marriage rates and childbearing out of wedlock, are correlated with lower socioeconomic status [21,22]. With fewer resources to marry, prevailing research suggests that the poor and working class view childbearing and rearing as an attainable and meaningful activity. Despite these demographic realities, the importance of marriage as a symbolic status persists [52,57]. Extensive research continues to focus attention on lower class groups and communities of color, often with problematic interpretations of them as “deviant families” [58].

By prioritizing the role of socioeconomic status, existing research tends to obscure the roles that race and gender play in guiding perceptions of and behavior surrounding family formation. According to this work, members of the poor and working classes may view marriage as an unattainable middle-class practice, even though they continue to express desire for marriage. Edin and Kafelas [21] argue that the link between class and difficulties with finding spouses are not prevalent among highly educated and middle-class individuals because they delay marriage in order to find suitable partners, are marrying partners similar to themselves, and as a result are experiencing greater marital and life satisfaction. In contrast, Marsh and Dickerson [59] attempt to remedy the shortcomings of existing class-based research on race and family formation. Noting the number of Black female-headed middle-class households relative to the total numbers of middle-class households, the authors argue that though marriage may continue to be the preferred route toward family formation for professional Black women, difficulties in finding equally educated same-race male partners make educational attainment, labor force participation, and economic stability a viable alternative toward middle-class status. While some research on family and socioeconomic status control for the effects of race, gender, and education, this work tends to treat group membership statuses as additive variables rather than examine the processes by which these categories create distinct social and material realities.

In contrast to most family research, I take the partner preferences and family values of professional women of color as launching points for analysis rather than conclusions. This strategy provides leverage to move beyond normative accounts of families to theorize about how women of color navigate white family ideals in ways that simultaneously resist and reproduce hegemonic family formation. As such, I ask the following questions: How do professional Latinas and Black women view their romantic partnership prospects? How do they construct partner preferences? Are their perceptions of prospects and partner preferences affected by race/ethnicity and the gender gap in higher education? I build on theories of intersectionality to highlight how the hegemonic stronghold of the nuclear family can take hold of women of color to such an extent that they hope to mirror

normative family structures in some ways despite historical and contemporary evidence of non-normativity prevalent among families of color. The prevalence of endogamy and normative family ideals are not new phenomena; however, when we focus on endogamy and normative families simply as outcomes, we miss opportunities to advance alternative explanations for why these patterns persist.

4. Methods

This article draws on 40 in-depth interviews with 20 Latina and 20 Black women professionals residing in Los Angeles County, CA. Participants were between 24 and 35 years old, heterosexual, never married, and without children. Each respondent possessed, at minimum, a bachelor's degree, and 23 of 40 women possessed graduate degrees. Participants were also employed in their profession for at least one year. Furthermore, respondents were U.S. born. Of the 20 Latina respondents, 15 were children of Mexican immigrants and 5 were children of South or Central American immigrants. Of the 20 Black respondents, 18 identified their lineage to U.S. slavery and 2 were children of Kenyan immigrants.

Interviews were collected between June and September of 2013 using snowball sampling of various channels. I sampled one Latina and one Black professional networking organization in Los Angeles as launching points to outreach to professional women of color and to garner subsequent referrals of women who were not members of the organizations. The networking organizations were selected based on the large numbers of active participants and their well-known presence in Los Angeles. The Black organization is intended to educate young Black professionals on how to take on leadership roles in their communities through networking and business development. Six of 20 Black respondents were members of this organization and the women they referred me to were not members of this organization. The Latina organization was founded in the late 1990s and is intended to create professional networks among Latina attorneys. Two of the 20 Latina respondents were members of this organization, and only one of the two respondents referred me to another member of the organization. I also outreached to three nonprofit organizations focused on health and civic engagement issues that were not race or gender focused. These organizations were selected based on their large size and because women across all racial/ethnic backgrounds continue to enter into helping professions at significant rates [60]. I recruited three initial respondents from each nonprofit organization and they each referred me to either staff members of their organizations, or to women not affiliated with any organization.

Most Latina respondents were of working class origins and as such, their parents did not complete elementary education. Fourteen of 20 Latina respondents were raised with biological parents. Most Latina respondents lived with their parents and siblings at the time of the interviews, though as professionals, they assumed greater financial responsibility in the home. From the Latina sample, 12 of the 20 respondents held graduate or professional degrees compared to 8 who held bachelor's degrees. Occupations varied among Latina respondents, with 6 of 20 working in education; 5 in nonprofits; 4 in research; 2 in law; 2 in media/advertising; and 1 in social work.

Black respondents revealed more heterogeneity in class background as they were raised in working class, lower middle, or middle class families. Thirteen of 20 Black respondents were raised with both biological parents and all of the parents had earned at least a high school diploma and some had earned bachelor's and graduate degrees. Most Black respondents lived alone or with roommates and did not

report helping their families financially on a regular basis. Black respondents held occupations similar to the Latina respondents, with 5 in media/advertising; 4 in medicine/counseling; 3 in nonprofits; 3 in business administration; 3 in social work; and 2 in education.

The interviews were semi-structured, most lasting approximately two hours but ranging from one to three hours and were audio-recorded. I conducted all of the interviews in public settings of respondents' choosing. Respondents were asked about: (1) the types of families in which they were raised along with the family structures of friendship networks; (2) relationship histories; (3) partner and family formation preferences; (4) and whether they experience any stigmatization from family and peers due to their single status. The interview schedule was modified throughout the process of data collection, a technique that Yin [61] refers to as "case study logic", where interview questions are refined and added based on unexpected insights offered by respondents. This process not only strengthened the schedule but it also facilitated analysis by solidifying the pertinent themes. The audio-recorded data were transcribed and analyzed using inductive coding [62], meaning that though I drafted an interview schedule with general topics to discuss, I did not create a codebook until data collection was complete. After each interview, I wrote analytical memos summarizing the most engaging responses to each interview topic. This strategy facilitated initial coding to move from preliminary codes to analytical categories and themes. I subsequently conducted focused coding, where I labeled poignant data excerpts with codes from the codebook and ultimately organizing the data into larger analytical themes. I then created concrete codes for partner preferences, attitudes toward interracial dating on the part of women and men of color, and strategies for family formation, comparing responses between races.

I share with respondents a similar age range, ethno-race and generation status (for the Latina sample), and education attainment, thus making me an "outsider within" [8]. Respondents admitted feeling comfortable disclosing information about past romantic relationships (including abusive ones) and traumatic family experiences, often offering information around these topics without being prompted.

5. Findings

The findings indicate three themes that highlight how professional Black women and Latinas simultaneously resist and embrace hegemonic family formation through their preferences for same-race, similarly educated men. First, I show that the women in this study prefer men of color because of the comfort that comes with shared experiences with racism. Respondents also report preference for same-race partners as a means to avoid cultural and racial assimilation, embracing racial difference relative to whites. Under these conditions, racial endogamy functions as a tool of resistance against the whiteness embedded in hegemonic family formation ideals while also reaffirming hegemonic family formation by favoring the normativity those endogamies bestow. Second, I outline how women of color view dating white men as an unappealing alternative to partnering with men of color but a possible option for educational endogamy given the shortage of similarly educated men of color. Lastly, I examine how women of color perceive men of color dating white women as a form of gendered racism that privileges white hegemonic femininity and places Latinas and Black women in a shared nonwhite category. Taken together, these findings shed light on the fluid and relational aspect central to endogamous work within hegemonic family formation.

5.1. Favoring Same-Race Partners: “Sticking Together Because He Gets It”

Most respondents (27 of 40) conceptualized their ideal partner as someone of the same race. Respondents emphasized the importance of racial and cultural endogamy (respondents often perceived the two as interchangeable) through discussions of interracial dating among women and men of color. Discussions about same-race partnerships reflected two distinct but related benefits. First, respondents noted that same-race marriage helps stave off the racial and cultural assimilation of their children.

The perceived role of race/ethnicity in affecting family and cultural values was important for Carla, a 34-year-old Latina high school teacher. In an earlier part of the interview, Carla detailed her tumultuous relationship with a white man. Despite being engaged for a period of time, what she perceived to be cultural differences plagued their relationship from the start. When I asked why she now prefers to date Latino men, Carla stated:

“It really comes back to the family. I think it all comes back to those family values. In my last relationship things that I had to explain about family I wouldn’t have to explain to someone from the same culture. It’s just a given. Of course my loud mom and my aunts and my sisters and their friends are welcome (in our home). Of course we’re going to go to the birthday party.”

For Carla, comfort in same-race/ethnic partnership reduces conflict in shared family values. Carla notes that she had to explain her relative’s behaviors to her former fiancé in ways she would not have to were she in a relationship with a Latino, creating tension between the two. Believing that strong family ties are central to her familial dynamics and reflective of a larger Latino community orientation, Carla found the relationship to be incompatible with long-term marriage plans.

Anabel, a 26-year-old Latina research manager for a marketing firm, further exemplifies the responses that women gave regarding their racial/ethnic preferences for staving off racial and ethnic assimilation. In discussing why she would not engage in interracial dating, Anabel explains:

“I don’t want to lose the cultural identity that I grew up with. For me being Hispanic is very important. I don’t want to have children who look Hispanic but don’t subscribe to Hispanic cultural norms. I find that embarrassing. I understand that you’re American, but you’re not just American, you’re a special mix. For me it’s very important to replicate the upbringing that I had.”

Anabel describes the importance of maintaining a Latina identity in the U.S. for passing on cultural traits across generations. The “embarrassment” that Anabel refers to when Latinos do not ascribe to cultural markers of Latina/o identity reinforces the normative aspect of racial endogamy. Interracial relationships become less appealing compared to the normativity of same-race partnerships; rather than embrace the possibilities for cross-racial solidarity in multiracial families, Anabel suggests that those unions result in a loss of Latino identity. Anabel’s viewpoint suggests that for Latinas, partner selection is not merely an individualistic decision, but rather carries implications for the maintenance of ethno-racial identity and boundary work. Specifically, Anabel’s cultural argument suggests that there is a qualitative difference between Mexican and U.S. culture that goes beyond a U.S.-centric racial context. Though this example deals specifically with Latinos, it reflects common responses

among Black women as well. For both groups, finding a same-race partner was of central importance in affecting how they perceived potential partners.

A second benefit to same-race marriage that many respondents identified is the likelihood of garnering comfort from shared experiences with racial discrimination. Lea's, a 26-year-old Black social worker, perspective on the importance of finding a man of color highlights the importance of race in relationships similar to Anabel. Lea demonstrates that sharing experiences with racism is another important component in partner desirability:

“I would date a Latino guy because I kind of feel that that's a Black guy. We've had the same struggles. When I see a white man, I know he doesn't know my struggle. You don't know what it's like to be called a nigger. You don't know what it's like to be thought of as low-class and ghetto. You can empathize but you don't really get it because you walk around with white privilege”.

Though she has never dated a white man, Lea is certain that she is incompatible with a white partner because of their drastically juxtaposed positions in the racial hierarchy. Lea believes she shares more in common with Latinos than whites because of their mutual nonwhite status and experiences with racism. Lea's awareness of the inability for whites to viscerally understand experiences with racial discrimination and micro-aggressions demonstrates an acute awareness of the power dynamics that undergird the racial hierarchy and of the social and emotional benefits that come with racial endogamy.

The white/non-white divide illustrated by Carla, Anabel, and Lea was prevalent in the data. Fears of racial/ethnic assimilation and partnering with someone lacking an understanding of racial discrimination demonstrates how partnership decisions work as boundary-making strategies to fend off losing a strong sense of racial consciousness that will be shared and passed to their children. This boundary work is imperative to hegemonic family formation because of the rewards that marrying within groups—a normative practice—garners. In the process of solidifying the advantages of same-race partnership, heightened group homogeneity is reaffirmed, making interracial dating all the more undesirable. The perceived benefits of racial and cultural preservation along with comfort in shared experiences with discrimination thus elevate the worth of same-race partnerships, reinforcing same-race marriage as a necessity for achieving hegemonic family formation.

Although most respondents emphasized the importance of finding same-race partners, there were some exceptions. Stephanie Ann, a 26-year-old Black student affairs administrator, explains her preference for white men:

“I'm attracted to white men; but I think it also has to do with having an Obama complex. If you're Black; I expect you to be like Obama or you're nothing. I think I expect more out of Black men than humanly possible. I feel like maybe I'm just not willing to work as hard for a Black man. I expect them to work for me. When I date Black men, it feels like I have to do the planning and pursuing; but the white men take initiative, they set everything up. I love Black men; I love Black love; but I want to be treated like a lady.”

For Stephanie Ann, the expectations for Black and white men in romantic relationships are markedly different. While she does not completely exclude Black men as potential partners, Stephanie Ann admits to expecting Black partners to be more successful and ambitious than white men, alluding to President

Obama as a marker of success. Her racial preference, however, is gendered. She equates relationships with Black men as ones where Stephanie Ann must proactively engage her partners, whereas white men have allowed her to enact normative gender scripts that afford her a degree of passivity. It is interesting that Stephanie Ann draws on discourse that elevates a few successful Black figures above all other Blacks and applies it to romantic relationships, suggesting new avenues for understanding how people of color may obscure their structural obstacles to economic success.

5.2. “Plan B”: Interracial Dating and White Men

Twenty-eight of 40 respondents discussed their desire for men of color with at minimum a college degree. However, most respondents cited the different rates of educational attainment among women and men in their respective racial/ethnic communities as a significant barrier to family formation. In light of the intersections of race, gender, and class, the criminalization of men of color (particularly Black men) was the most discussed explanation for the difficulties with educational endogamy. As Kaylie, a 32-year-old Black pediatrics nurse, explains,

“There’s a lack of educated Black men, for whatever reason, either they’re lazy or getting caught up in the system, meaning incarcerated, so they always have some story for why they haven’t gotten it together. There’s a lot more professional Black women, that’s just how I feel. I don’t know if it’s a gender thing, a race thing, or both. Black men have all these other things going on that create setbacks and challenges for them.”

Kaylie emphasizes a significant structural context affecting Black men—their racialization as criminals resulting in higher rates of incarceration—yet couches it in an individualistic reasoning. She points first to laziness as a potential reason for their lack of progress compared to Black women and notes that Black men always have a justification for this disparity. Kaylie’s remark that questions Black men’s work ethic as a potential explanation for the college gender gap underscores the classism that characterizes some motivations for educational endogamy necessary for the normativity of hegemonic family formation. Yet her observation that Black women outnumber Black men in professional work reflects a longstanding reality for U.S. Blacks that is growing over time. As a result, most women who sought highly educated and successful men of color as romantic partners believed that it would be difficult to find men who met their preferences.

Brenda, a 33-year-old Black ER nurse, speaks directly to the intersections of race, gender, and educational attainment in barriers to family formation:

“Yep, I would be married with kids, most definitely (if I were a white woman). A woman of color is already set to have a different aura about her. I’m sure you’ve heard the cliché about her attitude, her expectations, kind of uppity and thinks she’s all that, even if she just has the basic high school education and job. That’s how we’re looked at: hair, nails, clothes, off the bat, that’s just how it is. So you already have that going against you. Now you add on the education, now you add on the career, then it’s (assumption of being ‘uppity’) magnified to the tenth power. So he could deal with the attitude if you take away the education and career because they’re on the same level, he can tolerate that. But if you add the other two, he may feel a little intimidated.”

Brenda describes what she believes are the perceptions men of color hold of educated women of color. She explains that it is difficult for women of color to have an education and career without being perceived as elitist and intimidating to men of color. Significantly, Brenda did not hesitate to state that she would be married with children if she were white, holding occupational status constant. Researchers have found that negative and erroneous representations of Black women as narcissistic, domineering, and bitter in relation to Black men and white women commonly guide public thought, popular media, and research [8,58]. While the assumption that Black men will negatively interpret Brenda's educational attainment as elitist carries classed connotations, the gender power dynamics that require women to downplay academic and career success in some relationships are all too familiar for Brenda and other respondents, given the racialized overtones that guide men's perceptions of marriageability [28].

In light of most respondents' preference for same-race partners, their views on interracial dating reflected a begrudging willingness to engage in it, but only as a means for avoiding a permanently single status. Discussions of relationship histories demonstrated that Latinas were more likely to date interracially—namely white men—than Black women. Regardless of past experiences with interracial dating, most respondents viewed interracial dating with white men as a last resort rather than an appealing option. Ashley, a 25-year-old Black accountant, shares the common perceptions of interracial dating among her friendship networks:

“My friends and I never say, ‘Oh, I want a white man!’ What we’re saying is, ‘These Black men out here aren’t doing it, I’m going to have to get with a white guy’. It’s kind of like a backup plan, Plan B. We talk about the men that are in LA. We don’t think that there are very (high) quality men out here. I’m African American so I would love to marry a Black man. I’m not racist or anything, but when I think about marriage, I see him being the same race as me. We would love to marry Black men, but in HBCU’s in the South, they have more Black men in school. If I were in the South, I’d be married already.”

Here, Ashley explains that she and her friends do not actually hope to date white men, but rather view interracial dating as an alternative to a preferable same-race partnership. Ashley makes two distinct yet interconnected points about the pursuit of same-race marriage. First, she emphasizes the fact that if Black women had more control over their dating options, they would choose Black men over white men. It is important to note that Ashley's difficulties in finding Black men also stem from her unwillingness to date Black men with low educational attainment. Yet, Ashley's ideal relationship involves a similarly educated Black, highlighting the importance of shared experiences. Second, Ashley touches on the significance of place in guiding romantic racial preferences and opportunities. Ashley, like several others, believes that she would not have to consider interracial dating if she attended a historically Black college or university (HBCU) in the South, an area of the U.S. with high rates of Black men pursuing college and graduate degrees. These institutions seek out Black women and men, thus facilitating same-race networks and relationships.

Noemi, a 29-year-old Latina financial counselor for a nonprofit organization, describes her partner preferences as follow:

“I just don’t find them (white men) attractive. Our cultures are so different and the way of living is so different. I just can’t picture bringing a white guy to Boyle Heights, I just can’t.

He's going to think we live in a shack! That's a big thing, culture clash".

What is it about Latinos that you find attractive?

"The similarities in culture, the fact that because I'm fluent in English and Spanish, sometimes the Spanish comes out—the Mexican comes out—and just having that comfort with them. Being able to communicate with my family is important to me, that there's no language barrier."

Noemi highlights the importance of geographical location, culture, and class in guiding desirability and availability. She lives with her family in Boyle Heights, a working class predominantly Latino neighborhood located east of downtown Los Angeles. Noemi conflates whiteness with class privilege and as such believes she and white men are inherently incompatible because of her low-income neighborhood. She then expands on this incompatibility by emphasizing the importance of shared cultural understandings, using Spanish language as a marker of Latino culture. The desire for the comfort that comes with a shared ethno-racial culture is understandable because it solidifies solidarity through shared experience. Further, the importance of preserving Latino culture for respondents undoubtedly carries an element of resistance by embracing a culture that is largely devalued in the U.S. However, by privileging same-race relationships, Noemi and others cement the normative power of intragroup relations embedded in hegemonic family formation.

Generation status, along with race, is significant to how Latinas think about their partner preferences [33]. As second-generation women, the Latinas in this study are close to the immigrant generation, thus they may carry cultural expectations, including Spanish fluency and empathy to working class lifestyles, distinct from later generation Latinas or other U.S. born women. In other words, second-generation Latinas may construct their partner and family preferences in relation to the types of families in which they grew up. Thus, for Latinas, hegemonic family formation is not bounded to the U.S. racial hierarchy because their ideas about race and family are also tied to the Latin American context, creating expectations that do not fit U.S. society.

In contrast to Noemi, Ashley, and others, some respondents did not view dating white men as settling. Flor, a 33-year-old Latina attorney, believes that satisfying interracial relationships are possible:

"It makes sense to me that people who share similar values and ideas would fall in love, even if they might come from different cultures or racial backgrounds. I personally don't have an issue with Latinas or Latino men dating outside their race."

While many of the respondents felt that race creates life experiences so distinct to make interracial compatibility difficult or impossible, Flor suggests that values can transcend race. Flor disclosed in a latter part of the interview: "I was in a long-term relationship with a white guy in college, we really got along and supported each other. It didn't work out because I went to law school and he went to med school so we knew we weren't going to stay together, but it was good while it lasted." Flor's experience demonstrates that race does not have to impede relationships, as college can facilitate interracial dating by allowing members of different racial groups to interact and find commonalities (e.g., educational attainment) aside from race.

The responses toward interracial dating by the women in this study demonstrate that feelings of settling signal perceptions of sacrificing on cultural values and racial identities through their

partnership decisions. For many respondents, there is a direct link between perceived difficulties in partnering with highly educated men of color and perceptions of interracial dating white men as a possible, albeit less desirable, option. While women like Brenda discuss their difficulties with family formation in relation to white women, opening themselves up to the possibility of dating white men further demonstrates the frustration of their position. For professional women of color, navigating romantic relationships and family formation involves traversing the meanings of their racial/ethnic, gender, and professional identities.

5.3. “What Does That Say about Your Women?” Interracial Dating among Men of Color

The majority of Black respondents (18 of 20) and half of Latina respondents (10 of 20) cited the prevalence of interracial dating among men of color as another impediment to finding partners. Several women in the study were apprehensive about the growing rate of men of color dating outside of their race, particularly white women. Not only did respondents view interracial dating among men as an obstacle to their own partnerships, many fervently admonished it as an affront to women of color and to their respective racial/ethnic group by extension. As a result, women in this study express frustration and feelings of low self-worth, feeling compared to white women and being deemed less worthy. However, Lea, a 26-year-old Black social worker, feels that Black men dating outside of their race is, not only an insult to the worth of Black women but is, indicative of the racial hierarchy in the U.S.:

“I don’t really want him (Black men) dating any other races and the reason being is Black women are doing so well for themselves. It’s not hard to find those Black women, but when you try to find those (successful) Black men, it’s cricket, cricket, cricket (alluding to silence). So when I see a Black man going to look for Becky—I like to call her Becky—I think, “Why”? The black men I like—the ones that are educated and have it together—they treat Becky like if she were a Rolex. But what does that say about your Black women?”

Lea’s response epitomizes the reactions from most Black interviewees. Lea believes it is unnecessary for Black men to date outside of their racial group because there are plenty of successful Black women with whom to partner. Thus, she uses class status to measure the worth and eligibility of both Black women and men. Furthermore, what is significant here is that Lea perceives Becky—the quintessential white woman—not simply as a competitor for eligible Black men, but as a status symbol for Black men, highlighting the devaluation of Black women on the part of their same-race male peers. Despite Black women’s advances, Lea’s comment suggests that Black men—especially professional Black men—continue to internalize an ideology of white superiority and by extension white female beauty that places Black women at a distinct disadvantage [8].

In a later portion of the interview, Lea explains that Black men conceptualize racial dating preferences on a continuum and perceive white women as a marker of success: “When you were nobody you were paying attention to Black women, but now you think, ‘I’ve arrived. I have a good job, a nice car, I have money in the bank, I have investments. I’m somebody. But the one thing that will set me over the top is if I get a Becky’”. What is significant about Lea’s response is that although she initially explains disliking Black men dating anyone other than Black women, her answer centers

on ideals of white womanhood—hegemonic femininity emerges as a barrier to the pursuit of hegemonic family formation.

Respondents also expressed their aversion to interracial dating as a slight to the larger racial group. Gender was also significant in this context; it mattered in signaling Black women as suitable partners and carried implications for perceptions of Black mothers and their struggles within their racial communities. Jasmine, a 33-year-old Black professional in marketing, explained the negative messages that Black men's dating behavior communicates to Black communities:

“At the end of the day, I look at it like disrespect to your mother. To me it's the equivalent of saying that your mother is not good enough. Anybody of an ethnic group knows this: there's certain things that each group faces that the other can't necessarily sympathize with. To marry someone who has no clue of what you go through on a daily basis doesn't make sense.”

Jasmine equates Black men dating interracially with disrespecting their mothers as Black women. For Jasmine, race and gender are inherently intertwined in Black men's decisions to date white women. When Black men marry white women, it suggests that they do not value their mother's worth not only as women, but also as Black women. She explicitly explains the importance for Black women to feel appreciated by their same-race male peers because of the unique struggles that Blacks endure. Ethno-racial boundary work thus not only strengthens group cohesion but it also elevates the status of women of color in their communities. Nonetheless, Jasmine's sharp disapproval of interracial dating reinforces the marginalization of multiracial families since they must navigate various racial contexts as they cross the U.S. color line. Black women who opposed Black men dating outside of their race were also more likely to oppose dating men outside of their race.

Responses by Latinas regarding the dating patterns of men of color clustered at opposing ends of the spectrum. Half of the respondents expressed approval because they perceived it as rare for Latinos to date outside of their race—therefore not a threat to them—or because it would broaden Latinos' perspectives on other racial groups, while others expressed indifference. The response of Nancy, a 27-year-old development associate for a nonprofit organization, highlights the approval from half of the Latina respondents:

“I think it's a good idea for Latino men to do interracial dating even if it's not for a long-term relationship. Interracial dating would allow them to be more open minded about others experiences and perspectives. I do not feel any ownership over Latino men so I have no problem with Latino men dating women of other racial backgrounds.”

Nancy believes that it would be advantageous for Latinos to date outside of their ethno-racial group to make them more attuned to the racial/ethnic experiences of other women. Interestingly, she argues that she does not feel that she owns Latinos, suggesting that to oppose interracial dating among Latinos is to feel ownership over their behavior. Nancy's contrasting response is significant because it highlights the subjectivity embedded in ethno-racial boundary work. Interracial relationships are evidence of the permeability of ethno-racial group divisions as individuals maneuver race in various contexts. Despite this subjectivity, ethno-racial boundaries undoubtedly shape patterns of action and group attachment. Nancy's perspective does not negate the importance of ethno-racial boundaries for

both Latinas and Black women; rather, her response brings to the fore factors that lead some women of color to solidify racial group membership and others to transcend them. Other respondents noted that compared to other racial/ethnic groups, Latinos appeared to date and marry within their racial/ethnic group at higher rates. In general, the notion of Latinos dating outside of their racial/ethnic group as a threat was much more abstract for Latinas than it was for Black respondents.

The other half of Latinas expressed views similar to Black women, noting that Latinos dating outside of their race meant less available men for Latinas to date. Carla, a 34-year-old Latina junior high school teacher, echoes Black women's sentiments regarding the slight of men of color when dating outside of their racial/ethnic group:

“When they (Latinos) date or marry white women, it feels like a slap in the face a little bit. There are so few educated men of color, and we Latinas want to marry someone of the same culture, education level, *etc.* and if the few that are around go elsewhere, where does that leave us? White men don't tend to go for Latinas, so if they don't want us and our own men don't want us—who does?”

Carla interprets Latinos dating white women as a show of disrespect that also reduces the pool of eligible men of color. Carla suggests that Latinas are caught between wanting partners who share their similar educational and occupational successes and those who share their racial/ethnic and cultural experiences as marginalized individuals. She also highlights what many of the respondents perceived as a unique obstacle for professional women of color in the dating realm—feeling unwanted by both “their own men” and white men because of the societal preference given to white women. White women emerged as a reference group as respondents evaluated their partnership prospects, highlighting the perceived privilege that white women hold as embodiments of success and desirability. Respondents like Carla, Lea, and Jasmine implicitly suggest a lack of agency for women of color in forming romantic relationships. This trend displays the unique disadvantages perceived by women of color as both racial and gender minorities, disadvantages that, ironically, are further exacerbated by their professional achievements. When respondents discuss their feelings regarding men of color dating white women, the lack of available men of color in their geographical area, and the barriers men of color face in accessing higher education, they point to seemingly insurmountable drawbacks to accessing the normative advantages of hegemonic family formation.

6. Conclusions

Research has long established the prevalence of racial endogamy and the existence of a normative family structure, yet this article offers a new framework for expanding on how professional women of color are uniquely situated to simultaneously resist and reproduce hegemonic family formation through racial and educational endogamy, highlighting the fluid and relational traits of hegemonic family formation unique to communities of color. As the demographic makeup of U.S. families continues to expand, gender and race—in conjunction with educational attainment—continue to shape marginalized and empowered partner and family desires for professional Black women and Latinas. The stronghold of hegemonic family formation—an ideological imperative that essentializes the normative family structure by benefiting heteronormative, middle-class whiteness—creates material consequences that

disadvantage women of color and all others who cannot or choose not to pursue a normative family structure. The aim of this study is not simply to argue that Latinas and Black women face barriers to hegemonic family formation and therefore should be alleviated from these barriers. Rather, the aim is also to demonstrate that the very existence of hegemonic family formation poses a significant problem for redefining and embracing multiple family types [1,8,58].

This study extends research on cross-racial relationships in four ways. First, I include Latinas in research on interracial romantic relationships to provide a more inclusive account of the racialization women of color experience in family contexts outside of a Black/white binary. The importance of preserving a Latino cultural identity suggests that some of the respondents may implicitly understand interracial relationships in a context that ascribes *mestizaje*—racial mixing between indigenous and European peoples—as central to the national character of Latin American countries. Discourses surrounding *mestizaje* often essentialize and homogenize culture and race, resulting in the glorification of a “singular mestizo identity”. Further, I support existing research pointing to the lack of incorporation into the dominant group for Latinas given the importance of same-race partners for gaining emotional support against racism and to stave off ethno-racial and cultural assimilation [28,43]. Extending research on the ways that Latinos distance themselves from Blacks to gain racial privilege [28], I demonstrate that in certain contexts, professional Black women and Latinas also encompass a shared nonwhite identity with perceived negative repercussions for family dynamics, evidenced in their hope to cement ethno-racial boundaries through endogamy and their adversarial perceptions of men of color dating white women. Commonalities in racial experiences across groups help us understand how nonwhite status for both Black women and Latinas matters in the larger racial hierarchy.

Second, the importance of finding similarly educated partners expressed by respondents carries significant implications for assortative mating among communities of color. The shortage of equally educated same-race male peers is a demographic reality that the women in this study view as hindering the enactment of racial and educational boundary work. The fact that over half of respondents hope to find partners with college degrees strengthens class divisions that create a larger gap between working and middle classes. In this sense, educational endogamy carries classist connotations necessary for hegemonic family formation. This classism is especially salient because educational endogamy is uncommon among Black families [46] and was uncommon even among white middle class couples until white women entered higher education and professional work at comparable rates to white men. However, educational endogamy signals more than classed perceptions. Socioeconomic status is measured by education, occupation, and income; therefore, educational attainment alone is not a robust marker of class position or of perceptions of class. All respondents in this study have accessed higher education and professional work, yet several of them reside in the same working class or lower middle class neighborhoods in which they grew up or live in areas with similar race and class compositions to their childhood neighborhoods, some women providing significant financial contributions to their parents and siblings. This pattern shows that educational attainment does not guarantee significant economic mobility nor does it suggest that motives behind educational endogamy reflect solely classed interests. In the same vein that respondents prefer same-race partners because of the comfort that comes with shared experiences, preferences for similarly educated men of color may signal the desire to find partners with similar experiences with and views on higher education. For professional Latinas and Black women, decisions about partnership are not based solely on rational, individual choices as

dating and marriage market theories suggest [56]. The professional statuses of the women in this study, when considered in conjuncture with their gender and racial identities, are perceived to penalize them rather than elevate their prospects, a finding that contradicts the existing literature largely focused on white, middle-class women. As the college gender gap continues to grow among Blacks and Latinos, it will undoubtedly affect how communities of color form families.

Third, this research carries significant implications for understanding gender dynamics between women by providing an intracategorical approach to gender [3,28,30–33]. Women in this study find comfort in partners who can understand experiences with racial discrimination and therefore view interracial dating between men of color and white women as an insult to their racial group and a threat to their respective group's cultural maintenance. This perception, however, has a gendered overtone. Not only does interracial dating on the part of men of color signify turning their backs on their ethno-racial group, it is also a reminder of the devaluation of women of color in their respective racial communities [8]. This gendered-racialized affront is evidence of the domination and subordination that exists between white and nonwhite women in the construction of distinct femininities manifest in family contexts. Thus, I demonstrate the extent to which the relationship between ideals of white femininity and women of color femininities provides nuanced opportunities for expanding on cross-racial relationships between women [8,19]. Many women do not fit the criteria for hegemonic femininity—a framework that privileges heterosexual, able-bodied, middle-class white womanhood. Yet messages and images that prioritize this ideal-type are so pervasive, they are internalized as more than simply superior, but as normal and natural. I show that it is through this hegemonic dissemination process, a socialization process that carries negative repercussions for racialized gender ideals, that marginalized femininities are created and maintained by elevating a one-dimensional set of values intended to privilege few but applied to all. And while the slow increase in interracial dating over time is lauded by some as evidence of the unraveling of the U.S. racial divide [29,54], it is important to remember how perceptions against interracial dating both reinforce and disrupt hegemonic family formation. Interracial dating highlights the marginalization of women of color and their subsequent political consciousness in light of race and gender-based structural violence. Yet it also demonstrates that rejecting interracial relationships serves as a mechanism for reproducing endogamous normativity within hegemonic family formation [28].

Fourth, I show how professional women of color reject the privilege attached to white, middle class masculinity in favor of the privileges accorded to racial endogamy within the normative family structure. While existing research tends to focus on the potential benefits of interracial dating for communities of color [29,42,44], the prevalence of endogamous marriage along racial and class lines makes interracial and interclass relationships atypical and subject to social sanctioning because they disrupt existing racial and class divides [36]. The reality of these women's gender and racial marginalized identities—despite their high educational attainment—mitigates the effects of professional status in a way that makes marriage appear as unachievable as it does to low-income women of color, a finding that contradicts class-based family studies [21,22,52]. Class-based analyses also do not account for the dialectic between hegemonic/marginalized femininities in constructing hegemonic/marginalized family formations. The respondents do not simply value marriage as a marker of middle class status as existing research suggest [56], but rather, they value it as a racial and

gendered achievement to which whites disproportionately have access. The frustration voiced by respondents stems from the disjuncture between hegemonic family ideals and lived realities.

The generalizability of the findings is unclear based on the use of snowball sampling and of professional networking organizations. It is possible that had respondents been recruited without the use of racial/ethnic professional networking organizations, data might yield more heterogeneity concerning respondents' perceptions of interracial dating. However, extensive quantitative research [5–7,23–27] demonstrates that though interracial dating is increasing over time, race-based intragroup relations remain the normative pattern in the U.S. Thus, the desire to find same-race partners prevalent in the present findings does not deviate from the national outcomes evidenced in demographic research; rather, the data here provide qualitative insights to contextualize larger family formation patterns. Ultimately, the purpose of this paper is to explore one avenue in which the intersections of racial, gender, and professional identities affects perceptions of family formation among Latinas and Black women and to theorize about the fluidity embedded in hegemonic family formation.

Hegemonic family formation is a fruitful analytical tool for understanding pathways to family formation by other marginalized groups on the basis of interlocking systems of race, sexuality, gender, immigrant status, nonwestern religion, *etc.* The respondents in this study use discussions of interracial dating to demonstrate how existing structures of inequality reaffirm narratives of normativity within hegemonic family formation. Research is needed that considers how race is gendered for men of color as well. For instance, gender scholars [63] have theorized about the existence of stratified masculinities stemming from ideal traits that benefit middle class white men. Future studies might examine whether Black and Latino men garner gender privileges when dating white women. It is necessary to determine whether men of color revere white femininity when constructing partner preferences and under what conditions men of color seek out interracial relationships. Research should also consider what men of color lose in interracial dating. It may be that Black and Latino men must cautiously navigate the racial contours of masculinities in particular ways when dating white women, especially given the historical legacy of violence against men of color if they were believed to interact with white women. Moreover, the lack of research examining men's perceptions of family formation and stigma attached to multiracial families suggests that we should examine the factors that men of color consider when forming families. By centering the fluidity of interlocking systems of power, hegemonic family formation offers the potential to demonstrate how families can simultaneously become sites of both inequality and resistance for women of color and other groups. Future research should continue to move beyond normative accounts of family values to understanding the hegemonic dynamics that undergird constructions of "the valued family".

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Vilma Ortiz for unwavering support and feedback on numerous drafts. I am thankful to Mignon Moore for feedback on earlier drafts and to the members of Vilma Ortiz's UCLA research group for providing valuable suggestions on several versions of this paper. I would like to thank Phi Su and Lina Stepick for their advice and encouragement. Thank you also to the reviewers at *Societies* whose comments notably improved this article.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

1. Collins, P. It's All in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation. *Hypatia* **1998**, *13*, 62–82.
2. Wang, W. Interracial Marriage: Who Is “Marrying out”? Available online: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/06/12/interracial-marriage-who-is-marrying-out/> (accessed on 29 September 2015).
3. Clarke, A. *Inequalities of Love: College-Educated Black Women and the Barriers to Romance and Family*; Duke University Press: Durham, NC, USA, 2011.
4. Wang, W. The Rise of Intermarriage: Rates, Characteristics Vary by Race and Gender. Available online: <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2012/02/16/the-rise-of-intermarriage/> (accessed on 29 September 2015).
5. Schwartz, C.; Mare, R. Trends in Educational Assortative Marriage from 1940 to 2003. *Demography* **2005**, *42*, 621–646.
6. Schwartz, C.; Mare, R. The Proximate Determinants of Educational Homogamy: The Effects of First Marriage, Marital Dissolution, Remarriage, and Educational Upgrading. *Demography* **2012**, *49*, 629–650.
7. Kalmijn, M. Shifting Boundaries: Trends in Religious and Educational Homogamy. *Am. Sociol. Rev.* **1991**, *56*, 786–800.
8. Collins, P. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 1990.
9. Carbado, D.; Crenshaw, K.; Mays, V.; Tomlinson, B. Intersectionality: Mapping the Movements of a Theory. *Du Bois Rev.* **2013**, *10*, 303–312.
10. Cho, S.; Crenshaw, K.; McCall, L. Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis. *Signs* **2013**, *38*, 785–810.
11. Choo, H.; Ferree, M. Practicing Intersectionality in Sociological Research: A Critical Analysis of Inclusions, Interactions, and Institutions in the Study of Inequalities. *Sociol. Theory* **2010**, *28*, 129–149.
12. Crenshaw, K. Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanf. Law Rev.* **1991**, *43*, 1241–1299.
13. Glenn, E. *Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Freedom and Labor*; Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, USA, 2002.
14. McCall, L. The Complexity of Intersectionality. *Signs* **2005**, *30*, 1771–1800.
15. Nash, J. Rethinking Intersectionality. *Fem. Rev.* **2008**, *89*, 1–15.
16. Espiritu, Y. *Asian American Women and Men: Labor, Laws, and Love*; Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, 1997.
17. Higginbotham, E. African American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race. *Signs* **1992**, *17*, 251–274.
18. Zavella, P. Reflections on Diversity among Chicanas. *J. Women Stud.* **1991**, *12*, 73–85.

19. Pyke, K.; Johnson, D. Asian American Women and Racialized Femininities: “Doing” Gender across Cultural Worlds. *Gend. Soc.* **2003**, *17*, 33–53.
20. Park, S. *Mothering Queerly, Queering Motherhood: Resisting Monomaternalism in Adoptive, Lesbian, Blended, and Polygamous Families*; State University of New York Press: Albany, NY, USA, 2013.
21. Edin, K.; Kefalas, M. *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood before Marriage*; UC Press: Berkeley, CA, USA, 2005.
22. Edin, K.; Reed, J. Why Don’t They Just Get Married? Barriers to Marriage among the Disadvantaged. *Futur. Child.* **2005**, *15*, 117–137.
23. Schwartz, C. Trends and Variation in Assortative Mating: Causes and Consequences. *Annu. Rev. Sociol.* **2013**, *39*, 451–470.
24. Schwartz, C.; Graf, N. Assortative Matching among Same-Sex and Different-Sex Couples in the United States, 1990–2000. *Demogr. Res.* **2009**, *21*, 843–878.
25. Schwartz, C.; Han, H. The Reversal of the Gender gap in Education and Trends in Marriage Dissolution. *Am. Soc. Rev.* **2014**, *79*, 605–629.
26. Mare, R.; Schwartz, D. Educational Assortative Mating and the Family Background of the Next Generation: A Formal Analysis. *Riron to Hoho* **2006**, *21*, 253–277.
27. Rosenfeld, M. Racial, Educational and Religious Endogamy in the United States: A Comparative Historical Perspective. *Soc. Forces* **2008**, *87*, 1–32.
28. Vasquez, J. Disciplined Preferences: Explaining the (Re) production of Latino Endogamy. *Soc. Probl.* **2015**, *62*, 455–475.
29. Banks, R. *Is Marriage for White People? How the African American Marriage Decline Affects Everyone*; Dutton: New York, NY, USA, 2011.
30. Feliciano, C.; Lee, R.; Robnett, B. Racial Boundaries among Latinos: Evidence from Internet Daters’ Racial Preferences. *Soc. Probl.* **2011**, *58*, 189–212.
31. Glasser, C.; Robnett, B.; Feliciano, C. Internet Daters’ Body Type Preferences: Race-Ethnic and Gender Differences. *Sex Roles* **2009**, *61*, 14–33.
32. Morales, E. Parental Messages Concerning Latino/Black Interracial Dating: An Exploratory Study among Latina/O Young Adults. *Lat. Stud.* **2012**, *10*, 314–333.
33. Vasquez, J. *Mexican Americans Across Generations: Immigrant Families, Racial Identities*; NYU Press: New York, NY, USA, 2011.
34. Mendelsohn, G.; Taylor, L.; Fiore, A.; Cheshire, C. Black/White Dating Online: Interracial Courtship in the 21st Century. *Psychol. Popul. Media Cult.* **2014**, *3*, 2–18.
35. Field, C.; Kimuna, S.; Straus, M. Attitudes toward Interracial Relationships among College Students: Race, Class, Gender, and Perceptions of Parental Views. *J. Black Stud.* **2013**, *4*, 741–776.
36. Dalmage, H. *Tripping on the Color Line: Black-White Multiracial Families in a Racially Divided World*; Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick, NJ, USA, 2000.
37. Qian, Z.; Lichter, D. Social Boundaries and Marital Assimilation: Interpreting Trends in Racial and Ethnic Intermarriage. *Am. Sociol. Rev.* **2007**, *72*, 68–94.
38. Qian, Z.; Lichter, D. Changing Patterns of Interracial Marriage in a Multiracial Society. *J. Marriage Fam.* **2011**, *73*, 1065–1084.

39. Lamont, M.; Molnar, V. The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences. *Annu. Rev. Sociol.* **2002**, *28*, 167–195.
40. Jimenez, T. *Replenished Ethnicity: Mexican Americans, Immigration, and Identity*; University of California Press: Berkeley, CA, USA, 2010.
41. Alba, R.; Nee, V. *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration*; Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, USA, 2003.
42. Lee, J.; Bean, F. *The Diversity Paradox: Immigration and the Color Line in Twenty-First Century America*; Russell Sage Foundation: New York, NY, USA, 2012.
43. Telles, E.; Ortiz, V. *Generations of Exclusion: Mexican Americans, Assimilation and Race*; Russell Sage Foundation: New York, NY, USA, 2008.
44. Yancey, G. *Who is White? Latinos, Asians, and the New Black/Nonblack Divide*; Rienner: Boulder, CO, USA, 2003.
45. Masuoka, N.; Junn, J. *The Politics of Belonging: Race, Public Opinion, and Immigration*; University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL, USA, 2013.
46. Tucker, M.; Mitchell-Kernan, C. *The Decline in Marriage Among African Americans*; Russell Sage Foundation: New York, NY, USA, 1995.
47. Gutman, H. *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*; Pantheon Books: New York, NY, USA, 1976.
48. Moynihan, D. *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*; U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Policy Planning and Research: Washington, D.C., USA, 1965.
49. Jones, J. *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present*; Basic Books: New York, NY, USA, 1985.
50. White, D. *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*; Norton: New York, NY, USA, 1983.
51. Blum, L.; Deussen, T. Negotiating Independent Motherhood: Working-Class African American Women Talk about Marriage and Motherhood. *Gend. Soc.* **1996**, *10*, 1999–2011.
52. Edin, K.; Kefalas, M.; Reed, J. A Peek inside the Black Box: What Marriage Means for Poor Unmarried Parents. *J. Marriage Fam.* **2004**, *67*, 1007–1014.
53. Flavin, J. *Our Bodies, Our Crimes: The Policing of Women's Reproduction in America*; NYU Press: New York, NY, USA, 2008.
54. Root, M. *Loves' Revolution: Interracial Marriage*; Temple University Press: Philadelphia, PA, USA, 2001.
55. Childs, E. *Navigating Interracial Borders: Black-White Couples and their Social Worlds*; Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick, NJ, USA, 2005.
56. Cherlin, A. *The Marriage-Go-Round: The State of Marriage and the Family in America Today*; Alfred A. Knopf: New York, NY, USA, 2009.
57. Cherlin, A. The Deinstitutionalization of American Marriage. *J. Marriage Fam.* **2004**, *66*, 848–861.
58. Roberts, D. *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*; Vintage Books: New York, NY, USA, 1997.
59. Marsh, K.; Dickerson, N. Racial and Ethnic Differences in Women's Marriage, Household Composition and Class Status. *Race Gend. Class* **2011**, *18*, 14–30.

60. Eccles, J. Understanding Women's Achievement Choices: Looking Back and Looking Forward. *Psychol. Women Q.* **2011**, *35*, 510–516.
61. Yin, R. *Case Study Research*; Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, 2002.
62. Strauss, A. *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*; Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, 1987.
63. Connell, R.; Messerschmidt, J. Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept. *Gend. Soc.* **2005**, *19*, 829–859.

© 2015 by the authors; licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).