

RACIAL ‘BOUNDARY-POLICING’

Perceptions of Black-White Interracial Couples in Los Angeles and Rio de Janeiro¹

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Abstract

As people who cross racial boundaries in the family formation process, the experiences of interracial couples can actually reveal the nature of racial boundaries within and across societies. I draw on in-depth qualitative interviews with eighty-seven respondents in interracial Black and White couples in Los Angeles and Rio de Janeiro to compare perceptions of public stigmatization by outsiders, a term I call “boundary-policing.” I find that couples in Los Angeles perceive gendered, Black individuals as perpetrators of this boundary-policing. In Rio de Janeiro, couples perceive regionalized and classed, White perpetrators. These findings suggest that in the United States and Brazil, racial boundaries are intertwined with class and gender boundaries to shape negotiation of boundary-policing in the two contexts. This analysis builds on previous studies of ethnoracial boundaries by showing how individuals reinforce and negotiate them through interpersonal relations. It demonstrates the similarities and differences in the negotiation and reinforcement of racial boundaries in the two sites.

Keywords: Race, Gender, Interracial Marriage, Boundaries, Brazil, Latin America

INTRODUCTION

When people engage in different forms of boundary negotiation such as cross-boundary relations or changing ethnoracial classifications, outsiders can police boundaries to keep these ethnoracial boundaries intact. Maintaining these boundaries may allow them to hoard resources and opportunities (Tilly 1998) or maintain ethnoracial solidarity (Barth 1969). On the other hand, those who find themselves policed may also reinforce these boundaries to maintain resources, avoid stigmatization, or reveal limits on ethnoracial solidarity. Several scholars have explained ethnic cleansing, mobilization, conflict, and classification through different types of boundary negotiation processes (Tilly 2004; Wimmer 2008a, b). In addition, sociologists have illuminated how members of ethnoracial groups negotiate the behavior of their

Du Bois Review, 10:1 (2013) 179–203.

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doi:10.1017/S1742058X13000118

members in a variety of institutions such as schools (Carter 2005; Smith and Moore, 2000), neighborhoods (Massey and Denton, 1993), and families (Lacy 2007). However, the ways that individuals maintain ethnoracial boundaries through interpersonal relations, including marriage across racial and ethnic lines, is still largely unclear.

In multi-ethnic societies, people negotiate pre-existing ethnoracial boundaries, usually without subsequent mass mobilization or changes in ethnic boundaries. While various forms of policing—from discrimination in the job market to legal segregation—have been identified in the literature (Wimmer 2013), there has been less attention paid to its more subtle, quotidian occurrences. Yet, these forms of boundary negotiations also reinforce and reproduce ethnoracial boundaries.

As a particular form of boundary work (Gieryn 1983), I define boundary-policing as the ways that actors actively stigmatize those who attempt to cross social boundaries. These can range from overt tactics such as distasteful comments or physical aggression to hostile looks and uncomfortable stares. These forms of boundary-policing are ways to discourage cross-boundary interactions to keep social boundaries intact. As individuals who cross social boundaries in the family formation process, interracially married individuals negotiate racial boundaries through their relationships. For this reason, they can experience policing at the hands of friends, families, or even strangers.

Since racial boundaries and categories are both internally and externally determined (Cornell and Hartmann, 1998; Jenkins 2008), examining the perceptions of Black-White couples shows how they themselves negotiate and reinforce racial boundaries in their daily lives. Specifically, examining how they give meaning to perpetrators of racial boundary-policing illuminates the ways they maintain racial boundaries in their lives. In addition, comparing these perceptions across societies can illustrate how couples' understandings of resistance to their relationships are shaped by the larger social context. Rather than assuming that interracial marriage leads to an eradication of racial boundaries, this study illuminates how individuals in interracial relationships may actually reinforce these boundaries in the face of perceived hostility.

I use the notion of boundary-policing to examine how Black-White couples maintain and reinforce racial boundaries in their perceptions of hostility to their relationship. I find that in both Rio and Los Angeles, couples across race and gender categories perceive subtle antagonisms by strangers in the form of “discriminatory looks” by outsiders. In Los Angeles, Black-White couples perceive perpetrators of boundary-policing as Black individuals that are male or female, depending on the race-gender combination of the couple. However, in Rio, couples perceived boundary-policing in the form of regions where they experienced hostility towards their relationship: the southern region of the country and Rio's wealthy *Zona Sul* (South Zone). Both of these spaces were identified as predominantly White,² with perceptions of boundary-policing occurring in ways specific to race and gender. In Los Angeles, Black-White couples use individuals and gender to negotiate racial boundaries whereas in Rio, they use region and class to do so.

This study questions the assumption that interracial marriages lead to an eradication of racial boundaries in the United States. Despite boundary-policing operating in different ways and to different degrees in these two societies, they are similar in that race mixture with blackness as an actual, contemporary occurrence (not as a myth of origin) is stigmatized. Perceptions of Black-White couples suggest that these boundaries continue to remain, despite racial boundary crossing in the family formation process.

THEORIES OF BOUNDARIES AND RACE MIXTURE

Barth (1969) was one of the earliest scholars to theorize on the nature of ethnoracial boundaries, advocating what became known as the constructivist approach. He argued that rather than the cultural material that differentiated ethnic groups, social scientists should be concerned with the inter-relational aspects between groups that stabilized the boundary between them, often despite cultural similarity and close interaction. According to Barth's reasoning, interacting in close proximity to members of another ethnic population does not in and of itself lead to a demise of these boundaries. Rather, ethnoracial distinctions can exist *because* of cross-boundary interactions, including interracial marriage. In fact, as Goldstein's (2003) research in Rio de Janeiro shows, for poor, Black women who pursue older, wealthy, White men, ethnoracial distinctions may be part of the foundation of these unions.

Like other types of social boundaries (Tilly 2004), ethnoracial boundaries divide "us" from "them" and are a way of creating distinction and order in multi-ethnic social spaces. They are both internally and externally determined with actors signaling their identification to members and nonmembers of their racial categories (Cornell and Hartmann, 1998; Jenkins 2008). As actors define others in a particular way, conflicts can arise when the imposition of an ethnoracial boundary negatively affects another's social experiences, potentially causing them to reinforce these boundaries. However, the content of these boundaries can vary with the cultural repertoires and structural resources of different societies (Lamont 1992, 2000; Lamont and Molnár, 2002).

Several race scholars have illuminated how ethnoracial boundaries are maintained and negotiated in people's lives. For example, steering Black and White homebuyers to different neighborhoods is one form of racial boundary-policing that leads to residential segregation (Massey and Denton, 1993). In a study of low-income schools, Carter (2005) shows how students who adopt cultural symbols that do not pertain to their ethnoracial category, such as Whites or Latinos speaking Black vernacular, can experience the negative sanctions of others. In another study, Black students who pledged White Greek organizations or dated interracially sometimes perceived stigmatization by other Black students on college campuses (Smith and Jones, 2011; Smith and Moore, 2000). Furthermore, Lacy (2007) showed how parents steered their children into participating in Black social organizations to maintain perceived characteristics of blackness, despite living in predominantly White neighborhoods. All of these examples involved actors engaging in boundary-policing to surveil or censure the actions of other individuals in order to maintain racial boundaries. There may be a variety of motives for boundary-policing, including structural, psychological, historical, biological, or a combination of these. Across these different motives, the processes make racial boundaries salient for individuals who attempt to cross them.

Scholars of interracial relationship have articulated different forms of boundary-policing that are specific to the lives of Black-White couples (Chito Childs 2005b; Dalmage 2000). However, I use the term boundary-policing as a heuristic for understanding the ways that social boundaries in general are maintained in individuals' lives. Unlike previous definitions, which do not draw on a social boundary perspective, boundary-policing is not specific to the experiences of Black-White couples. As seen in the aforementioned work of race scholars, it is evident in both inter- and intraracial relations. Boundary-policing also can occur in the maintenance of a variety of social boundaries that scholars have examined, such as gender and sexuality (Butler 1993; Cohen 1999; Cole and Guy-Sheftall, 2003; Fenstermaker and West, 2002) as well as some forms of symbolic boundaries (Lamont 2000).³

In societies where racial boundaries are less institutionalized, like Brazil and the post-Jim Crow United States, boundary-policing is particularly useful for describing and understanding the ways that actors negotiate them. Given the interactive nature of racial boundaries, examining the perceptions of those who experience boundary-policing can illuminate how they understand and even maintain racial boundaries in their everyday lives. In the case of Black-White couples, analyzing how they see themselves policed and by whom can illuminate the ways that they negotiate and potentially reinforce racial boundaries in their lives. Rather than making arguments about the thickness or strength of racial boundaries, comparing these processes highlights similarities and differences in racial boundary composition across societies. While boundary-policing may not be a commonplace occurrence, when it does happen, it can show how couples' understandings are shaped by the larger social context as well as illuminate differences and similarities in boundary content.

RACE MIXTURE IN THE UNITED STATES AND BRAZIL

While interracial marriage has been seen as taboo in both the United States and Brazil, it has been far more stigmatized and regulated in the U.S. context. Throughout the history of the United States, racial boundary-policing has been institutionalized through anti-miscegenation laws as well as violence against Blacks. Between the 1660s and the 1960s, forty-one states or colonies enacted laws regulating sex or marriage (Kennedy 2003). While laws protected the bloodlines of Whites from other minorities, Blacks were included in every racial ban across the country. Romantic relationships between Whites and Blacks violated a variety of norms surrounding inheritance (particularly during slavery), sexuality, and White racial dominance overall (Moran 2001). Sexual relations between Black men and White women, whether real or imagined, were used as an excuse for violence against Blacks, as seen in the postbellum practice of lynching, which occurred with frequency until the mid-twentieth century.

Fears of interracial marriage, particularly involving Black men and White women, were dominant in justifications for maintaining Black segregation from Whites (Myrdal 1944). Although, formal and common law marital unions occurred between Blacks and Whites, even in states where interracial marriage was illegal (Davis et al., 1941; Drake and Cayton, 1945; Du Bois 1903; Kennedy 2003), they were still stigmatized and seen as outside of the respectable norm. In 1967, the Supreme Court invalidated remaining state anti-miscegenation laws with the monumental *Loving v. Virginia* . Since then, the number of interracial marriages has nearly doubled every decade (Qian 1997, 2005). Although anti-miscegenation laws ended over forty years ago, all interracial unions account for only 8% of U.S. marriages today (Lichter 2011). Black-White marriages are the least common of interracial marriages with Whites and are the most stigmatized (Golebiowska 2007; Qian 2005). This suggests that racial boundaries between Blacks and Whites remain rigid.

In contrast, race mixture has been a part of Brazil's history since the early colonial period. In the sixteenth century, the goal of the Portuguese was conquest and trade, rather than creating a settler society as in the United States. Hence, few women immigrated to Brazil from Europe and hegemonic sexual relations ensued between masters, enslaved Africans, and indigenous women. Although the Portuguese Crown and the Catholic Church outlawed interracial sex and marital unions (Marx 1998), such laws were largely unenforceable with many Brazilians living

outside their reach. With abolition in Brazil occurring in 1888, later than any other nation in the Western Hemisphere, laws prohibiting interracial unions were eliminated.

In the early twentieth century, Brazilian elites were influenced by Lamarckian eugenics and encouraged interracial unions as a way of decreasing non-White populations (De la Cadena 2000; Skidmore 1974; Stepan 1991). To speed up this “whitening”, the Brazilian government subsidized hundreds of thousands of European immigrants who would help to industrialize the country. Unlike in the United States, where there were great efforts to reduce race-mixing, in Brazil it was encouraged as a form of national policy.

In the 1930s, Gilberto Freyre (1933, 1986) praised the large amount of interracial mating that occurred among Brazilians, popularizing the notion of Brazil as a “racial democracy” (Hasenbalg 1985). Contrary to his peers, Freyre valorized the African cultural heritage in Brazil and rather than seeing race mixture as a whitening attempt, he saw it as the foundation of Brazilian culture. He interpreted interracial mating as evidence of a lack of conflict in race relations in Brazil, particularly vis-à-vis the United States. While it is unclear whether Freyre referred to sexual liaisons, concubinage, or formal marriage (Telles 2004), this ideology of “racial democracy” influenced future race scholars and became part of the Brazilian national creed. Today, marriages across colors comprise only 30% of all marriages (Petruccielli 2001; Ribeiro and Silva, 2009; Telles 2004). While much higher than the United States, these rates are small given the prominence of racial discourse in Brazil suggesting that the majority of people are in an interracial marriage. In addition, these rates include consensual unions or cohabitation alongside formal marriage, suggesting that rates of interracial marriage may be somewhat exaggerated vis-à-vis comparisons with the United States.

Today, post-abolition Brazil and post-Jim Crow United States are both characterized by an absence of legislation prohibiting Black-White marriages. Nevertheless, continuing low rates of Black-White marriage, especially in the United States is partially due to informal boundary-policing. Chito Childs (2005b) found that Black and White community members described potential sanctions from their families and others if they were to become a Black-White couple. In Brazil, studies by Moutinho (2004) and Barros (2003) have demonstrated that Black-White marriages continue to remain taboo in Brazilian society, despite popular ideology. Absent formal institutional impediments, couples can still experience discomfort and hostility in their relationship for crossing the Black-White divide.

Differences in interracial marriage rates illustrate that racial boundaries are gendered, with Black men interracially marrying more often than Black women in both the United States (Qian and Lichter, 2011) and Brazil (Ribeiro and Silva, 2009; Telles 2004). However, these studies fail to capture how intersections of race and gender lead to differing experiences for those couples. Examining the role of race and gender combinations in how individuals perceive boundary-policing shows how these intersections can influence the construction of racial boundaries. More specifically, comparing the experiences of Black male-White female couples with Black female-White male couples in both societies will demonstrate how gender impacts perceptions of racial boundaries and their policing.

METHODOLOGY

Analyzing the perceptions of people in Black-White couples demonstrates how these boundaries are constructed within a given society. I use qualitative, in-depth interviews to elucidate instances when these couples navigate boundary negotiation

processes, including boundary-policing. This study takes a relational and meta-perceptual approach by drawing on the perspectives of both Black and Whites in these relationships as well as analyzing how they both make sense of how outsiders perceive them (Shelton and Richeson, 2006). Comparing the perceptions of U.S. couples with those of Brazilian couples illuminates the differences in how individuals understand racial boundaries in the two societies. While this method does not allow for the adjudication of whether racial boundary-policing *objectively* occurred, it shows how racial boundaries are experienced by Black-White couples and how boundary-policing guides their behavior.

This study focuses on two greater metropolitan areas as research sites: Los Angeles, CA and Rio de Janeiro. Los Angeles is an ideal site because it has the highest rates of Black exogamy among major U.S. cities (Batson et al., 2006). Rio de Janeiro is also ideal because it has both large White and non-White populations (Telles 2004), providing opportunity for mating across color lines. Furthermore, in one study of several urban areas, Rio de Janeiro had some of the highest acceptance levels of interracial marriage (Degler 1986). These qualities facilitated finding interracial couples to interview, despite interracial marriages being in the minority.

From August 2008 to April 2010, I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with eighty-seven individuals⁴ in both cities. To recruit respondents in Los Angeles, I asked friends and colleagues about whether they knew any Black-White couples. In addition, trusting my own eyes as a U.S. native, I approached people who I thought were Black-White couples in public places, including grocery stores and shopping malls. In Rio, I recruited respondents by asking a variety of native Brazilians, including friends, professors, street vendors, and housekeepers, if they knew Black-White couples.

As Bernard (1982) famously articulated, in every marriage, there are two relationships: his and hers. However, qualitative studies of Black-White couples often gather data with both partners present. In order to capture both perspectives on being in a Black-White couple, I conducted interviews with each member of the couple separately. This prevented one member of the couple from dominating the marriage narrative, illuminated variation in the intersections of race and gender, and overall allowed for the unearthing of new perspectives of being in a Black-White relationship.

Once I had collected all of my interviews, they were transcribed in their original languages. Using *Atlas.ti*, I examined the data to code instances of hostility or discomfort, race mixing, and racial boundary negotiation in the lives of the couples. To understand the nature of racial boundaries in the public sphere, I analyzed my respondents' experiences dealing with opposition to their relationship from strangers in public.

Sampling, Respondents, and Racial Identification

To recruit potential interviewees, I used a mix of "snowball" and purposive sampling techniques to find cohabiting married couples. Snowball sampling is a technique that is ideal for finding hard-to-reach individuals (Weiss 1995), like Black-White couples, which are the minority of married couples in both countries. Unlike most studies of Black-White couples, I used purposive sampling to capture variation in the experiences of being in a Black-White couple by race and gender combinations and educational groupings. Overall, I have twenty couples involving a Black woman with a White man and twenty-four couples involving a Black man with a White woman. In the United States, interracial marriages are concentrated among college-educated populations, so the majority of the L.A. sample involved both partners having at least some college education. Due to the prevalence of status exchange⁵ (Davis 1941;

Merton 1941) in Brazil (Petruccielli 2001; Telles 2004), I sampled for three different educational attainment groupings: both partners with college experience (eleven), neither partner with college experience (seven), and one partner with college experience (six). Although this sample is not nationally representative of Black-White couples in their respective societies, this study illuminates some of the social processes shaping their lives.

Since race is a social construct, what constitutes a Black-White couple may differ in the two societies. Like most of Latin America, Brazilians understand themselves to be a nation where everyone is reputedly of mixed-race ancestry (Guimarães 2005; Silva and Reis, 2011; Telles and Sue, 2009). Phenotype in Brazil is more important than ancestry in determining a person's racial status. In the United States, hypodescent or the "one-drop" rule has historically been used to define blackness, including for multiracial individuals (Lee and Bean, 2004; Nogueira 1985). In addition, race in Brazil has historically been characterized by a color continuum with more fluid categories. Including people in my sample who appear Black by U.S. standards would not have reflected the reality of race in Brazil.

The term *casais interraciais* [interracial couples] is often used by demographers in Brazilian studies of interracial marriage. Unlike in the United States, labels such as "interracial couple" or "Black-White couple" were not widely used by Brazilians. For this reason, I followed the example of Brazilian scholars who have done qualitative studies of Black-White couples (Barros 2003; Moutinho 2004) and sought out couples involving a Black person married to a White person [*negro casado com branco*]. When selecting people to interview, I relied on the nominations of native Brazilians for my sample. In other words, only Brazilians recommended people who they saw as being in a Black-White couple.

Although Brazil is characterized by a racial continuum, there are three main census color categories that Brazilians fall into: *branca/o* [White], *parda/o* [brown], and *preta/o* [Black]. The Brazilian government and Black movement often collapse the *preta* and *parda* categories into one large *negra/o* category. In Portuguese, *preta* refers to the color black and *negra/o* refers to having primarily African ancestry, although they can overlap in meaning. Despite the Black movement's unsuccessful mobilization to include a *negra/o* category on the Brazilian census (Nobles 2000), it is a term increasingly used by Afro-descendants outside of the Black movement to identify themselves (Silva and Reis, 2011).

My sampling requisite was that people in the couples were identified by other Brazilians as either *negra/o* or *branca/o*. This process of selection allowed me to stay true to local understandings of race and color while providing homogeneity in how outsiders identify and treat Black-White couples in both countries. In this sense, I prioritized the perspective of outsiders in identifying Black-White couples over individuals' self-identification. Since race in Brazil is based on more of a continuum, I also required that people who were identified as *branca/o* self-identify as *branca/o* or *parda/o*. All respondents designated as *negra/os* by native Brazilians had to self-identify as *negra/o*, *preta/o*, or *parda/o*. The overwhelming majority of individuals involved (forty-six out of forty-nine) self-identified *negras/os* married to self-identified *brancas/os*. None of the partners had the same racial identification as their spouse.

In the United States, I asked for referrals of Black-White couples. Individuals in the couples had to self-identify as either Black or White. Unlike Brazil, the majority of U.S. Blacks and Whites do not see themselves as multiracial, despite actual ancestry. In addition, whiteness is more exclusive in the United States and based on perceived "racial purity" whereas in Brazil, whiteness does not prohibit acknowledg-

ing Black ancestry (Guimarães 2005; Telles 2004). For these reasons, as well as to reflect what it means to be a Black-White couple in the United States, people who self-identified as biracial or multiracial were excluded from the U.S. sample.

Reflexivity

Since Black-White couples are highly stigmatized and sexualized in the public imagination (Chito Childs 2009; Hanchard 2000), at both sites I was careful not to appear voyeuristic. As a Black woman, I also had to contend with the stereotype of the “Angry Black Woman” who is hostile to Black men married to White women in Los Angeles (Chito Childs 2005a). I tried to compensate for this by building rapport with all respondents, especially Black male-White female couples. In addition, I started all interviews asking about respondents’ background such as where they grew up, what their schooling was like, and what their parents did for a living. While asking questions that could elicit uncomfortable responses, I smiled and nodded to make respondents feel comfortable. While my race and gender likely impacted responses at times, the rapport that I built at the beginning of the interview allowed interviewees to share perceptions that I would not likely have been privy to otherwise.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Racial Boundary-Policing in Los Angeles

The experiences of Black-White couples are often characterized as being rife with racial tension due to the historical animosity between Blacks and Whites and concerns over the racial identification and well-being of their offspring (Bonilla-Silva 2006; McNamara et al., 1999). However, the couples that I spoke to in Los Angeles made it clear that blatant public opposition to their relationships was rare. There were several reasons that people gave for why they did not often experience opposition to their relationships. Respondents referred to how they encountered more hostile looks in other areas of the country in comparison to where they currently live. Angelinos often cited the racial diversity of the city as a reason why they did not experience opposition to their relationships. For instance, Elizabeth is a White woman who lives with her husband and children in a predominantly White neighborhood.⁶ Nevertheless, she and her husband socialize primarily in church and university settings, which she sees as very multiracial. When I asked her about the hostility that she has experienced, she said:

We haven’t experienced that. It’s been amazing. We go back to where our circle of friends are, and where we live too, ’cause in Los Angeles we’re surrounded by mixtures of people and it’s common. . . .

When Elizabeth refers to the “mixture of people,” she refers to the presence of people of different ethnic and racial backgrounds. She mentions how Los Angeles is a city with ethnic diversity as well as a significant presence of other interracial couples and sees this as preventing her from being seen as an oddity. In fact, respondents who were parents cited their biracial children eliciting positive reactions and validation of their parents’ relationship from strangers in public (Osuji 2011). The lack of opposition to her relationship from outsiders is an example of how racial boundary-policing is not something that Black-White couples experience often or see as salient in their lives.

Roxanne, one of the Black women that I interviewed, discussed her racially ambiguous appearance as one of the reasons why she thought that she did not experience hostility to being married to a White man or being out in public with her daughters:

. . . I never had issues. And I don't know if it had to do with maybe I don't look like I'm fully African American. . . . because a lot of people, I think they assume that I'm Hispanic or South American or something because I'm not that dark, dark . . . That's my only reason.

African Americans in the United States have a wide range of physical traits, including skin tones ranging from light to dark. Roxanne, like other Blacks in my sample, self-identifies as Black or African American and was identified through snowball sampling as the Black person in the Black-White couple. Although she was raised in a Black family with a Black identity, she described how not being a dark-skinned African American makes her appear racially ambiguous. This makes it difficult for outsiders to perceive her as Black and thus to police racial boundaries.

Several Black women that I interviewed referred to sometimes being seen as racially ambiguous despite self-identifying as Black. In contrast, only one of the Black men that I interviewed discussed being perceived as racially ambiguous. In addition, couples who experienced hostility towards their relationship involved dark-skinned men and women who were not racially ambiguous. Although previous scholarship documents ambiguity among some Black women in Black-White couples (Judice 2008), through comparative research, this finding shows how ambiguity leads to more facility with negotiating racial boundaries for Black women in comparison to Black men. Surprisingly, none of the respondents in Rio referenced this ambiguity in explaining a lack of opposition from strangers.

Although blatant hostility was not salient for the Black-White couples that I interviewed, further probing revealed that the majority of L.A. respondents had experienced overt, *episodic* hostility from strangers. When they discussed these experiences, they sometimes recalled incidents that had happened years ago that had stood out in their minds. My interviewees' recollections of instances of hostility showed how experiences with boundary-policing were different depending on the gender-race combination of the couple. These experiences, although rare, were more common in Los Angeles than in Rio de Janeiro.

When asked about experiences with hostility in public, L.A. couples discussed experiences that they had had with particular types of individuals that harassed them. All of the U.S. respondents across race and gender combinations described how both Black and White strangers give them odd looks. In Los Angeles, respondents emphasized the characteristics of the perpetrator while in Rio de Janeiro, the characteristics of individuals showing objection or hostility were not obvious.

Black Men with White Women

In Los Angeles, there were gendered patterns of perceptions of opposition in public spaces. White women often named Black women as the main perpetrators of overt hostility to their relationship. For example, Allison and Yuri are a White female-Black male couple who live in a racially diverse neighborhood. Allison recounted an experience she had visiting Yuri early in their relationship in Inglewood, a predominantly Black neighborhood. She said that from the time she was on the bus until she arrived at his front door, she was harassed by a group of Black female adolescents.

One particular time, [three Black girls] were on the bus . . . they were making comments like 'White people' this and 'White people' that and I didn't say nothing . . . then I went to pull my things [together] and they were like 'Oh we scared her. Let's get off the bus with her' . . . Well, sure enough they got off the bus with me . . . They followed me to his house the entire way . . . And the entire way they were saying 'Oh you gonna walk through a Black neighborhood . . . you know, just going on and on and on about 'Who could you possibly be coming to see? Look at you . . . You don't know nothing about this neighborhood . . .'

While there may be a variety of ways to interpret the girls' behavior, Allison perceived this incident as threatening and subsequently told her boyfriend to meet her at the bus stop when she went to Inglewood to visit him. In this instance, Allison experienced Black women as threatening her due to her relationship with Yuri, although he was not present during the incident and it was not clear that they knew about the relationship. Rather than interpreting the incident as racial hostility for being a White woman in a Black neighborhood, Allison interpreted the incident as an example of hostility towards her relationship. Later in the interview, Allison admitted that it had been several years since she had been in a predominantly Black social setting, possibly suggesting a subsequent avoidance of them.

Allison echoed what several White women told me during the course of their interviews: When they do face opposition from strangers, it is from Black women. U.S. scholars in other cities have also found that Black women are perceived as a source of harassment for Black male-White female couples (Chito Childs 2005a, b), although there have been some critiques of this perspective (Jeffries 2006; Morgan and Bennett, 2007). Nevertheless, Allison's comments suggest that individuals in Black-White couples may use gender to understand racial boundary-policing. In addition, her lack of time in predominantly Black social settings suggests that avoidance may be a tactic to prevent further incidents.

Natalie, a White woman, and Jerry, her Black husband, live in a predominantly White neighborhood. Natalie mentioned an incident while attending her husband's predominantly Black church, where they worshipped:

Some of the older sisters were conversing about how they didn't understand why he couldn't have found a sister at his [church] to have a relationship with. . . . I understand; he was considered quite a catch at his hall, so . . . A lot of the little girlies had crushes on him, so it was like I can kind of understand.

In her husband, Natalie sees herself acquiring something that was highly desired in their religious community. Her understanding of the women's reactions may be influenced by her romantic interest in her husband in assuming that other women also found him desirable. However, her understanding was seemingly substantiated by the reactions of Black women in her church. The incident she described made Natalie so uncomfortable that it led her and her husband to leave his predominantly Black church. She described her new church as being racially diverse with other interracial couples, so she no longer has to worry about racial boundary-policing by Black women. By leaving this predominantly Black church to attend a racially diverse one, Natalie and Jerry avoided the potential for racial boundary-policing by outsiders. This was similar to Allison, who mentioned later in her interview that it had been several years since she was in a public, predominantly Black social setting.

Both Allison and Natalie's comments demonstrate something that was repeated in many of my interviews with White women. There was a cognizance of the "marriage squeeze" in which Black women, particularly in highly educated circles, outweigh the number of "marriageable" Black men (Crowder and Tolnay, 2000; Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan, 1995; Wilson 1987). Ethnoracial competition often emerges during struggles for scarce resources, including housing, jobs, and marriage partners (Barth 1969), particularly when change enters racially ordered systems (Olzak 1992). For this reason, some White female respondents see their Black husbands as highly sought after in the marriage market, and thus see themselves in competition with Black women. On the other hand, group position scholars offer added nuance to explanations for ethnoracial competition by arguing that it is the result of collective narratives surrounding in-group membership and ranking in the social order vis-à-vis out-group members (Blumer 1958; Bobo and Hutchings, 1996). The history of legal prohibition of Black-White marriages in the United States, the overall social norm of *intraracial* marriage, and interracial marriage and dating patterns that alienate Black women (Clarke 2011; Feliciano et al., 2009; Qian and Lichter, 2011) together suggest that Black women are ranked higher in the queue of marriage partners for Black men than are White women. As people who challenge this social norm, White women who marry Black men experience racial alienation, as do Black women who understand Black men as rightfully "belonging" to them. The perceptions of some White female interviewees demonstrate the role of perceptions of ethnoracial competition in the lives of Black-White couples. While scholars have debated Black women's reactions to Black male-White female intermarriage, they have often downplayed the role of ethnic competition and White female versus Black male perspectives on this phenomenon.

Stella, a White woman in her mid-twenties, lives in a predominantly White neighborhood with her Black husband, Edward. Stella described going out to a restaurant in Los Angeles with her husband and another White woman-Black man couple in another predominantly White neighborhood. Stella described types of individuals (Black women) that engaged in racial boundary-policing, saying:

. . . we walked by a group of Black girls, and . . . these two girls were looking right at us and the one girl goes, 'That's such a shame.' And I was kinda like 'Edward, did you guys hear that?' Maybe they're talking about something else, and so again, I don't know that they were particularly—I mean they were looking right at us, and so maybe it was just—and I'm sure we probably stood out more because there was two of us. . . . But then I was kind of uncomfortable. . . . and I don't know if Edward feels the same way when we pass White guys—but sometimes when we do pass Black girls or Black guys or anybody, sometimes I do get a little self-conscious because I feel like, I wonder if they think I shouldn't be with him. Or if the Black girl is thinking 'oh, I'm stealing a guy from [her]'—like stealing a good guy because I mean sometimes you hear that on TV shows or whatever the case is, Black girls saying 'Oh, White girls steal all the good Black guys.' So sometimes I do have that in my head.

Previous scholars have illustrated how some Blacks see couples involving Black men and White women as Black men valuing whiteness (specifically White femininity) over blackness and Black femininity, using romantic relationships to acquire resources and status, and distancing themselves from Black communities (Chito Childs 2005a; Wilkins 2012). While it is impossible to know exactly what the woman meant when she said "That's such a shame," Stella's reflections show how she sees Black women

policing her relationships through rude comments. Stella's unprompted remarks suggest that she pays a lot of attention to Black people and their reactions to her relationship with Edward. By focusing on Blacks, particularly Black women, White women may have more opportunities to perceive opposition from them rather than Black men or Whites in general and the forms of opposition that these other groups may engage in. Her comments provide an example of how U.S. Whites harbor fears of rejection by ethnic minorities in interracial interactions because of their skin color (Shelton and Richeson, 2005). However, Stella's comment shows that this fear of rejection occurs at the intersection of race and gender since she understands perpetrators of racial boundary-policing to be Black women.

Stella's husband, Edward, recalled the same situation. While he named Black women as the perpetrators of the hostility in this incident, he did not reference being cognizant of Black women's reactions on a regular basis. Describing the same incident Edward said, "And I heard them say it, but it was kinda funny to me. So, my initial reaction was to laugh. My friend's reaction was a little more confrontational." For this reason, he followed his friend, Sam, a former college football player, to confront the table which was filled with both Black men and women. Describing his friend Sam's response, he said:

He had some four-letter choice words with them. They—well, they didn't say anything. The guys they were with said something to Sam . . . And so it kinda got a little serious, but at the same time I'm 6'4" and he's a lot bigger than me, and they were at a table with these little guys, and so we calmly went over . . . and basically asked if we had a problem or something. And it was very clear that they didn't have a problem, and that they were really wanting their women to sort of be quiet because I think that . . . I don't think that we were a problem that they wanted to have.

In this situation, Edward emphasizes his and his friend's response to the same situation that his wife, Stella, described. Interpersonal interactions, including those involving people of different races, are shaped by the beliefs that people have of each other as well as how they think they will be perceived (Shelton and Richeson, 2006). Edward's and his friend's physicality were factors in how he experienced their reaction to the situation, in which there is a subtext of the threat of physical violence. Previous studies of Black-White couples have largely neglected the role of heteronormative masculinity in the meanings that partners, particularly Black men, give to their relationship. Several men that I interviewed, both Black and White, discussed physical threats as a factor in why they did not perceive as much opposition as their wives did. This may reflect gendered psychological distinctions in which females perceive the same aggressive behaviors as more problematic and distressful than their male counterparts, especially when the aggressor is female (Basow et al., 2007; Crick et al., 2002; Crick and Nelson, 2002; Paquette and Underwood, 1999). Edward and Stella's different perceptions of the same situation illustrate how race and gender intersect to produce very different interpretations of racial boundary-policing. Physicality as one aspect of heteronormative masculinity may explain these gendered differences in which Black men perceived racial boundary-policing differently from their White wives.

Allison, Stella, and Natalie's comments demonstrate how White women's understanding of this boundary-policing is one that is explicitly Black and female. Part of this process involves highlighting incidents of blatant opposition from Black women as well as avoiding racial boundary-policing by not spending time in predominantly

Black spaces. Their Black husbands, however, cited Black women in specific incidents yet did not perceive Black men or women as constant perpetrators of hostility to their relationship. Intersections of race and gender influenced how individuals in these couples perceived their ability to negotiate racial boundaries, including their perceptions of racial boundary-policing.

Black Women with White Men in Los Angeles

Unlike couples involving Black men with White women, when I interviewed couples involving Black women with White men, Black men were cited as sources of overt forms of opposition. For example, William and Betty are a White male-Black female couple that live in a predominantly White neighborhood. Betty is a dark-skinned immigrant from Belize who came to the United States as a teenager. In their interviews, both mentioned similar incidents of harassment they experienced from Black men in Berkeley, CA. William said:

. . . Let's see, there was one time where we were actually in Berkeley and we were walking on Telegraph Avenue and a man said, it was something along the lines of 'What do you think you're doing? You think you're too good that you have to be with a White boy?'

Betty discusses the same incident as well as a separate occasion of hostility:

We were just crossing the street from the university and a guy started yelling. I don't remember what he was doing and he was yelling at me and then another time at a club and this guy realized that we were together and he said—he's Belizean—and he said, 'What are you doing with him?' . . . This was also in Berkeley. We got dirty looks . . . we were scared . . .

Although these incidents did not happen in Los Angeles, they were striking because they occurred in a city known for its history of progressive politics (Lipset 1971). Betty was the main target of this opposition because she had crossed a racial boundary by being romantically involved with a White man. Similar to other Black female-White male couples, although she cites Black men as perpetrators of hostility to her relationship, she did not perceive them as a constant threat in public. This was different from the experiences of White women who perceived Black women as constantly enforcing racial boundaries.

Born in the United States, Uchenna is a dark-skinned, Black woman of Nigerian descent. She lives in a predominantly Black neighborhood with her White husband, Charles. Uchenna recounted hostility that she and Charles experienced when they were picking up their marriage license. She said that while they were sitting and waiting at the courthouse, a young Black couple stood in line and the man kept staring at her and Charles. She said:

I didn't think anything of it and I just smiled back at him and then his face turned. It went from kind of this bland look on his face of just kind of staring at me to this strange stare with some ugliness to it . . . And then he was saying something to her, to the woman he was with, and she was saying, 'Oh, just be quiet, just be quiet. Leave it alone, leave it alone.' Then he started getting louder in what he was saying, and then I was able to hear him after a while and everyone in the room was able to hear him. Then I started hearing him say, 'What does she

think she's doing? What does she think she's doing sitting up here with some White man? She should be ashamed of herself. She should be ashamed of herself. She can't possibly be a real sister if she's up in here with this White man.' . . . And all of a sudden I turned around and I'm like, "Are you talking to me?" And he was like, 'There's nobody else in the room that I would be talking to.' And I looked at him and then I got out of my seat and Charles yanked my arm back. He was like, 'Babe, leave it alone.' I'm like, 'No, no, no, no, I'm not leaving this alone.' And his girlfriend or wife or whoever he was with, the woman he was with was hanging on to him and going, 'Don't start nothing up in here. Leave those two alone. Leave them alone.' And he was still yelling at me, 'You should be ashamed of yourself! You should be ashamed of yourself! You're not a real Black woman if you're hanging out, you're about to marry a White man!' . . . And so at that point I guess the people behind the counter realized that it was getting a little heated . . . so the security folks came in and asked them to leave.

Uchenna describes how on what should have been a happy occasion, she was targeted by a Black man who opposed her marriage to a White man. While Black women are commonly perceived as aggressors against Black male-White female couples, the few Black female-White male couples that recounted incidents of overt hostility named Black men as their perpetrators. Although these experiences of hostility were rare, they demonstrated that these Black women did not see themselves as free to cross racial boundaries through intermarriage without being policed by Black men. Despite these incidents with Black males, Black wives and White husbands did not cite Black men in general as constant perpetrators of hostile racial boundary-policing and did not refer to being aware of the reactions of Black men in public. White male and Black female interviewees diverged from the experiences of some White female respondents, who revealed a fear of rejection because of their racial group membership (Shelton and Richeson, 2005). Nevertheless, gender categories informed how Black women and White men perceived racial boundaries in their lives.

Surveys of attitudes towards Black-White unions cite Blacks as being more open to these relationships than Whites (Lewis and Yancey, 1995), with 16% of Whites saying that they "strongly disapprove" of these relationships (Bobo 2004). Yet, the experiences of the couples I interviewed seem to suggest the opposite—that Blacks are more opposed to these types of relationships. This may be related to controlling images of Blacks as hostile in society (Collins 2000) as well as social psychological processes in which actions by Blacks are perceived as more hostile than the same actions by Whites (Correll et al., 2007; Plant and Peruche, 2005). It may also be related to Whites' disapproving of marriage with Blacks for themselves while being more accepting of it for non-related outsiders (Herman and Campbell, 2010). Both explanations would result in fewer accounts of Whites engaging in boundary-policing for these respondents.

One explanation that couples gave for this disconnect was that Whites do not use overt tactics to demonstrate their hostility. The couples that I spoke to referenced hostile looks as the primary tactic that Whites used for demonstrating disapproval. Uchenna said, ". . . White people tend to speak under their breath or things like that, and it's not as in your face as it is with African Americans. African Americans tend to want you to know what they're thinking when they're thinking it." Uchenna's comments reflect an awareness of "aversive" (Gaertner and Dovidio 2005; Kovel 1970; Pearson et al., 2009) or "colorblind" racism that has become prevalent over the last fifty years (Bonilla-Silva 2006). Unlike overt forms of racism that were more common in the pre-Civil Rights era, in these new forms of racism, Whites racially

discriminate in more subtle and indirect ways. Prior examinations of Black-White couples have overlooked the more aversive ways that Whites express hostility towards Black-White couples in public spaces. In contrast, couples in this study saw Blacks as practicing more overt forms of racial boundary-policing whereas Whites were seen as acting covertly in showing their disdain for their relationship.

Mark is a White man who lives in a predominantly White neighborhood with his wife, Kelly, a light-skinned Black woman. Mark met a White man in New Orleans where the man and his friends used racial epithets to describe Blacks. On a later, separate occasion, there was a family gathering which this same acquaintance attended. Mark described an incident at the gathering in which he perceived the man expressing covert hostility to his relationship with Kelly. Mark said,

And I'm sitting there talking to him, and [Kelly] walked up, and he said, 'I got to go.' And he walked away. Turned around and walked away. And of course, I knew why.

Afterwards, he said that as far as hostility, "We've never had any, ever. Nothing." Mark's comments reflect that boundary-policing by Whites may be very subtle such that they are not always perceived as hostility. The covert nature in which many Whites are seen to police racial boundaries may be one of the reasons why couples perceive more hostility from Blacks. Nevertheless, Mark and Uchenna's different approaches to understanding Whites' behavior directed at their relationships may be grounded in differences in perceptions of aversive racism, with Blacks forming more negative impressions of these incidents (Dovidio et al., 2002).

Boundary-Policing in Rio de Janeiro

Perceptions of racial boundary-policing were very different in Rio de Janeiro. Despite imbalanced sex-gender ratios there that put *negras* at a disadvantage, (Berquó and Loyola, 1984), none of the couples that I spoke to mentioned Black women as a source of hostility to their relationships. In fact, racialized and gendered individual distinctions were not mentioned by any of the race-gender combinations in terms of overt hostility. This was partly because couples expressed that they never experienced outright hostility from strangers.

There were a variety of ways that Black-White couples in Rio understood this lack of opposition in their lives. When I asked them to explain this lack of opposition, many said that they do not pay attention to the reactions of outsiders to their relationship. Bárbara is a *branca* who recently moved with her husband, Brício, from a predominantly White neighborhood to a racially diverse one. She said, "... I do not see it in our relationship, and do not see it in the eyes of the people who live among us." In other words, Bárbara, like other Brazilians in the study, either do not pay attention to public reactions or the hostility simply does not exist.

Another way that couples explained the lack of hostility was by discussing how racism is a problem in Brazil, but that it is very covert. For instance, I had an interview with Ursulina, a *negra* who lives in a largely non-White, multiracial neighborhood. I asked about her understanding of acceptance of Black-White couples:

People say, 'Oh, here in Brazil, there is no prejudice, color issues, these things,' but there is prejudice. There are people who still criticize those who marry Whites. There are people who criticize those who marry Blacks. This thing still exists, but it is very under the table. They don't openly say it like in other

countries where it is said openly. People say, 'I don't like it, I don't like Whites,' isn't it like that? And here it's not . . . it's very under the table. People don't say it out loud like that. . . . No one yet has come up to me and said 'Oh, you married a White person,' or whatever, or somebody . . . coming up to him and saying [this]; he never said this to me. That's why I say that here it's not declared openly.

Later, Ursulina explained that she has never experienced hostility to her relationship with a White man in Rio de Janeiro. Her understanding is that in the abstract, there are people who are hostile to Black-White unions, yet they do not openly state their opposition. Judging by how she rhetorically asks me for confirmation, she contrasts this to her understanding of the United States where people are supposedly more vocal about their opposition to such couples. Given the previously mentioned experiences of couples in Los Angeles, she seems correct in her assessment. However, she says that this does not mean that there is no opposition to these relationships in Brazil. She understands her lack of perceived hostility to her Black-White relationship in Brazil in terms of aversive racism in the Brazilian context.

The Southern Region and Boundary-Policing Outside Rio

Instead of focusing on individual level characteristics in terms of racial boundary-policing, *Cariocas* [people from Rio] regionalize hostility to Black-White couples by locating it outside of Rio de Janeiro in the south of the country as well as inside of the city in the *Zona Sul*. In both cases, *Cariocas* understood facing discomfort mostly due to their moving in particular regions that they read as White and less to White individuals within these regions. This was different from Los Angeles, where couples mainly described opposition in terms of the race and gender of individuals. In addition, like other countries in Latin America, region often maps onto the phenotypic characteristics of its inhabitants in the minds of Brazilians to a greater extent than in the United States (Wade 1997). As seen in the research of O'Dougherty (2002)—in which São Paulo middle-class Whites avoided downtown due to perceiving it as largely non-White and full of migrants from the Northeast (*nordestinos*)—this phenomenon is not particular to Rio. Given the moderate levels of segregation of many of Brazil's cities (Telles 2004) region strongly informs ideas of race both within and outside of cities.

More so than in Los Angeles, couples said that opposition to their relationships is not a problem in their daily lives because the more potent form of racism is located outside of Rio de Janeiro. I found this especially among couples involving Black men with White women. Several individuals emphasized that Brazil is a racist country and that the South is particularly so. The South, comprising the states of Rio Grande do Sul, Paraná, and Santa Catarina, is where immigrants from Germany and Italy settled in droves and where there is a much smaller Afro-Brazilian population than in Rio (20% and 44% respectively) (IBGE 2005–2006). For example, Nicolas, a *negro* living in a predominantly non-White neighborhood, said of hostility to Black-White couples:

It happens there in the South because that's where the first colonies, the Dutch colony, the Portuguese, the Italians, all in the South. And I had a trip there, I was dating a blonde girl, she was blonde with blue eyes . . . and we went to a wine festival. If you had seen how the people looked at me, you know, even men, angry . . . mostly the men They were very angry, you know . . . They think that mixing the races [is bad]. They still have this . . . some colonies still have this.

And it was really funny because when we would pass by them, you know, the eyes followed us. She is very blonde, with blue eyes and me, a *negão*.⁷

Nicolas suggests that race mixing in the South is not as valorized as it is in Rio. His quote illuminates how he understands boundary-policing of Black-White relationships in terms of region. It is assumed that the men that he references are White, even though he does not say so. Apart from emphasizing the men as being angry about his being with a White woman, he emphasizes being in the South and the region's whiteness as explanations for hostility.

Daisy is a *branca* living in a multi-racial neighborhood in the West Zone (*Zona Oeste*) who also mentioned how the South was a site of opposition to her relationship with her now husband. However, similar to Nicolas, no one said anything, they just stared at them. Daisy recalls:

Once we were travelling to the South and at that time, we weren't married yet, we were single, but people stared at us when we were together . . . because in the South, the majority is real White, you know? So, they stared at us.

Daisy implicitly contrasts the South, where real whiteness is supposedly found, with Rio de Janeiro. Although she was able to enter this "real White" region, she did so with some discomfort. She does not individualize the action of the perpetrators, but rather sees an entire region as being hostile to her relationship due to their own whiteness. Daisy and Nicolas implicitly describe the South as a part of the country with less racial mixing than Rio, seeing it as on the other side of a racial boundary. They use the whiteness of the South to explain the reactions to their relationship. Their comments show how they use region, not individual characteristics, to draw racial boundaries.

The *Zona Sul* and Boundary-Policing Inside Rio

Many *Carioca* couples that I spoke to also regionalized hostility to Black-White couples within the city. Lower-educated and higher-educated individuals across race-gender combinations pointed to the predominantly White and wealthy *Zona Sul* of Rio de Janeiro as a site for experiencing hostility towards their relationship. The *Zona Sul* is where the world famous beaches of Copacabana, Ipanema, and Leblon are located. Rather than discussing gendered individuals, they spoke about classed regions within the city in their construction of racial boundaries. More so than the United States, class is salient in Brazilian conceptions of race (Bailey 2009; Silva 2011) and has a long history of being understood as the sole source of racial inequality (Fernandes 1969). This in part reflects the Brazilian reality of a lack of *pardos* and *pretos* in the Brazilian middle class, who are instead concentrated among the poor and working classes (Telles 2004). For this reasons, elite areas of Rio are also White areas. The overwhelming majority of my sample did not currently live in the *Zona Sul*, a possible reason why hostility was not a part of their lives. However, almost all of them had spent time there and many pointed to that region of the city as a site for racism.

In my interview with Sérgio, a *negro*, I asked him about the last time that he had experienced opposition or discomfort due to being in his relationship with his White wife, Hilda. Despite living in a distant, multiracial, working-class suburb of Rio, he named a place in the *Zona Sul*:

It was when we went to a mall in Gávea. . . . the people stared at me kind of, in a weird way . . . because there it is a mall for White people. It's a place for White people. It's like this, due to Gávea being a locale where only rich people live and here in Brazil, a majority of the rich people are White, you can make the association that who is rich is White. And in this place where only rich people live, the majority of the people that are around the mall are rich and are White. So, they looked at me. We were walking, the people kept looking at me weirdly, you know. But they didn't get to saying anything. They just stared.

Sérgio understands the *Zona Sul* as a place where things like odd looks happen. His comments show how for him, and most of the individuals in my sample, racial boundary-policing follows a territorial logic. Unlike couples in Los Angeles, Sérgio does not name types of individuals as perpetrators of hostility. Instead, similar to other *Carioca* couples, who mentioned the Southern region of the country, he talked about a specific zone where hostility to his relationship is frequent. In addition, he emphasizes class as a part of his understanding of the racial hostility he experienced. Furthermore, like several individuals who recounted instances of discomfort or hostility in their relationship while in public, he interpreted this as hostility towards him specifically, the Black person in the couple.

Bárbara is a *branca* who used to live in *Laranjeiras*, another predominantly White, upper middle-class neighborhood. She and her *negro* husband, Brício, recently moved to the North Zone, which is predominantly non-White with working-class and lower middle-class families. When I asked Bárbara about her experiences of hostility towards her relationship with Brício, she said:

. . . in the *Zona Sul* we encounter prejudice . . . absolutely. When we moved to *Laranjeiras*, a woman was very rude with Brício . . . saying that he did not live there, that he was 'there working for someone, you know?' To serve someone. She ordered him to move his car quickly from where it was because it was disturbing her. But she said it in a tone like, 'I am above you. . .' he stuck his nose up at her, because he is stuck up. He stuck his chest out and said that he was going to move the car when he could move the car, you know. I had gone up with the groceries and he was waiting for me to come down to move the car. There was another episode also. This same woman was in the elevator and we were about to take the elevator and she waited until we had gone up before she would go up. . . . We entered the elevator and she walked out. . . . Brício stuck his nose up, inflated his chest, and entered and did not even give her a glance.

Bárbara interpreted this woman's hostility towards her husband as opposition to their relationship. These instances with this woman in their apartment building frame her understanding of the *Zona Sul* (where *Laranjeiras* is situated) as a region of the city that is hostile to Blacks in general. She understands this incident as hostility to her relationship with a Black man.

Eloíza is a *negra* living with her husband, Vitor, a *branco*, in a multiracial, bohemian neighborhood in the center of town. When asked about the last time that she experienced public hostility due to her relationship, she referred to an incident with a beggar:

One day me and Vitor . . . I don't know if it was Copacabana or Ipanema. There was a beggar . . . she was lying down [on the street] . . . she saw that we were passing by. So we were not going to walk over her. She stared at us and then she

turns and says: ‘What a beautiful man! With this horribly ugly woman—and Black too!!’

Eloíza interpreted the situation, which took place in *Zona Sul*, as an example of public hostility to her relationship, following the same patterns as other Rio respondents. As a beggar, the perpetrator’s class status was apparent. Unlike the respondents in Los Angeles who also recounted incidents of overt hostility, Eloíza did not emphasize the race and gender of the beggar.

This incident illustrates how the beggar’s comments pin Eloíza and Vitor as opposites based on their levels of attractiveness and that Eloíza’s race (not Vitor’s) makes them incompatible in her eyes. In her interview, Eloíza later discussed the woman’s comments as rooted in racialized understandings of beauty in which Whites, especially with light-colored eyes like her husband, are considered attractive and Blacks are seen as ugly with undesirable physical traits.⁸

Hypersexualization in Rio de Janeiro’s *Zona Sul*

Interviews with Black Brazilian women illuminated how race and gender intersected to affect perceptions of hostility to their relationship in the *Zona Sul*. Several Black women expressed concern over being mistaken for prostitutes when venturing into that region of the city. None of the White women that I interviewed or the men of either color reported this fear of being mistaken for a prostitute. Copacabana, Ipanema, and other areas of the *Zona Sul* are known for sexual tourism between White *gringos* and Afro-Brazilian women. Similar to Nagel’s (2003) argument that sexuality is a core element of racial and moral boundaries, the meaning of Black female-White male pairings in Rio is so overlaid with stereotypes about sex tourism that it impacts the experiences of couples who have nothing to do with the industry. Despite the *Zona Sul* being only a small part of the city, it framed understandings of hostility to relationships involving Black women married to White men in sexualized ways.

Delfina is a *negra* who lives in the *Zona Sul*. Her husband Afonso is Italian, potentially making them the typical *gringo*-prostitute pairing in the eyes of the outside world. Due to these perceptions, she said:

I have to go out looking really nice . . . When we go out, I can’t wear tops that stop [mid-riff] or really short shorts because then everyone will think that I’m his prostitute.

As a response to stigmatization (Fleming et al., 2011; Mizrachi and Herzog, 2011), Delfina’s comments show how she negotiates her presentation of self to others to avoid being mistaken for a prostitute. Since she lives in the *Zona Sul*, it is difficult to use avoidance of the region as a tactic in dealing with these incidents. Changing the clothes that she wears is much easier than finding another place to live.

Eloíza, previously mentioned in the incident with the beggar, discussed walking with Vitor in the *Zona Sul* on another occasion:

I’m loving, but I’m not that cheesy. I hate that, I never liked cheesy boyfriends and [my husband’s] like that. . . . So when we’re walking on the street, he tries to take my hand . . . this makes me uncomfortable, walking hand in hand, so I give him my [index] finger to hold. So, I told him one day, ‘Vitor, when they see me and you holding hands, people will think I’m one of your whores.’ He said, ‘That’s absurd. Really!’

Eloíza describes another tactic that many Black women in my survey mention; to make light of their perceived involvement in sexual tourism through jokes. Humor allows her to approach an uncomfortable subject in a way that is not disparaging to her.

The experiences of these Black women demonstrate how despite being married to a White man, they are not able to navigate certain spaces in Rio the same way that White women or Black men are. Despite never facing overt hostility to their relationships, the way my Los Angeles couples have, *negras* in Rio were impacted by racialized and gendered meanings of their relationships with White men. Due to the prevalence of the sex tourism industry there, the *Zona Sul* takes on a different type of hostile meaning for these Black female-White male couples in which racial boundaries are not only spatialized and classed, but also sexualized.

CONCLUSION

Through interviews with Black-White couples, especially those in Rio de Janeiro, I find that many do not experience racial boundary-policing of their relationships. In Los Angeles, couples attribute this to the racial diversity of the city. In addition, racial ambiguity emerged as a theme among Black women in these couples. Nevertheless, when couples do perceive hostility to their relationships, Los Angeles couples point to Blacks as perpetrators of boundary-policing in a way that varies according to the gender-race combination of the partners.

For White women, perpetrators of racial boundary-policing are specifically raced and gendered in the form of Black women. In contrast, Black men in these same relationships do not see Black women as a constant threat. On the other hand, couples involving Black women and White men experience episodic harassment from Black men, yet do not see them as constant sources of hostility. While Blacks may indeed be more vocal in their opposition to these couples, differences in perceptions of racial boundary-policing are likely explained by gendered and racialized perceptions of threat and aggression from outsiders. At the same time, covert forms of hostility from Whites in the post-Civil Rights era mean that they are identified less often as perpetrators of boundary-policing. These negotiations ultimately reinforce racial boundaries, sometimes to the extent of engendering avoidance of unfamiliar Black social settings.

Black-White couples in Rio de Janeiro mostly perceived a lack of overt hostility to their relationships. Opposition towards the Black-White couple is sometimes understood as racial hostility towards the Black person in the relationship. However, couples demonstrate a regionalized understanding of boundary-policing occurring outside of Rio in the country's southern region and within Rio in the city's wealthy, predominantly White, *Zona Sul*. The *Zona Sul* becomes a site of hypersexualization for Black women married to White men, demonstrating how race and gender intersections matter for understandings of racial boundary-policing. Racial boundaries are reinforced by these couples who experience hostility and engage in a variety of strategies to offset stigmatization.

After incidents of boundary-policing, there is evidence among some U.S. White female respondents of a subsequent avoidance of predominantly Black social settings. While the research on integration of Blacks into White extended families has been a useful contribution (Osuji 2011), further research on how Whites integrate into Black social worlds (and vice versa) could shed light on the potential for the eradication of racial boundaries through interracial marriage.

As one of the few qualitative comparative studies of race in the United States and Brazil, this study goes beyond quantitative studies documenting racial inequality in the two societies by illuminating race as a contemporary lived experience. Comparing and contrasting the experiences of Black-White couples in these societies shows how other social categories can become salient in negotiating racial boundaries. While some scholars have examined the inter-locking nature of social boundaries (Wilkins 2012) more research is needed to assess how they operate in everyday life to reinforce racial and other social boundaries. Future studies should examine how other social boundaries such as gender, class, and space can be complicit in the maintenance of racial boundaries in everyday life. The concept of boundary-policing can illuminate the ways that this happens. Namely, examining how the public deals with people who fall outside of social norms can show the material that comprise these social boundaries as well as its significance. This can expand social science understandings of how social boundaries work and how they are policed to maintain segregation and inequalities overall.

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NOTES

1. The author is grateful to Edward Telles, Stefan Timmermans, Mignon Moore, and M. Belinda Tucker for their generous suggestions for this article. The author would also like to thank Andreas Wimmer, Angela Paiva, Sabrina Pendergrass, Anthony Ocampo, Jenee Slocum, Graziella Silva, and Tianna Paschel for their insights. Thanks to colleagues in the University of Pennsylvania Department of Sociology, the UCLA Department of Sociology, the UCLA Interdisciplinary Relationship Science Program (IRSP), and the UCLA Center for Brazilian Studies for opportunities to present earlier versions of this paper. Support for the data collection was provided by the National Science Foundation, the UCLA Latin American Institute, and the UCLA Bunche Center for African American Studies through the Institute of American Cultures. An earlier version of this article was presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association in Atlanta, August 14, 2010.
2. I use “Black” and “White” for consistency when referring to the English translations of *negra/o* and *branca/o* from the Portuguese.
3. Similar processes may be involved in symbolic boundaries, however here I am concerned only with social boundaries.
4. In total I conducted individual interviews with members of forty-four couples. For one of the Brazilian couples, I was only able to interview the wife, a *negra*.
5. This refers to Blacks having higher levels of education (or other forms of social status) than their White partners to compensate for low racial status.
6. The names and identifying characteristics of respondents have been changed to protect their anonymity.
7. The term *negão* literally means big, Black man, which is the way that Nicolas was referring to himself. The term can also connote physical strength and sexual virility, which may or may not have been a part of his using the term to describe himself.
8. None of the Black people that I interviewed referred to being seen as too attractive for their White partners, whether by strangers or otherwise.

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