

# *Incorporation, Transnationalism, and Gender: Immigrant Incorporation and Transnational Participation as Gendered Processes<sup>1</sup>*

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This article analyzes immigrant incorporation and transnational participation as gendered experiences. The results indicate that the incorporation of immigrants is a complex process affected negatively by class and racial exclusion and positively by their knowledge of U.S. society. The analysis also indicates that incorporation and transnational participation are concurrent and intertwined processes. Our results show that gender matters in the analysis of immigrant incorporation. The experiences of immigrant men and women share a lot in common as they confront similar challenges, but are also affected differently by the most relevant factors in the process of incorporation and transnational participation.

The study of immigration has focused on the paths of immigrant incorporation into the receiving society. This focus, though, is being challenged by two different perspectives. The first is that of gender. There has been a growing emphasis on bringing gender into the core of migration studies as several ethnographic studies show that the perceptions and experiences of incorporation vary by gender (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1999; Pessar, 1999a,b). The second is the transnational perspective. Several studies have shown that first generation migrants maintain multiple ties with their countries of origin while they adapt to the host society. Migrants live their lives across borders, creating a transnational social space (Glick Schiller, 1999; Itzigsohn and Giorguli Saucedo, 2002; Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt, 1999). There is also

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evidence that men and women participate differently in transnational social spaces. Men appear to be more committed to the maintenance of public and institutionalized transnational ties than are women, while women appear more committed to participating in the life of the receiving country (Goldring, 2001; Itzigsohn and Giorguli Saucedo, 2002; Levitt, 2001).

Our purpose in this article is to bring together these three different strands of research on migration – the literature on immigrant’s incorporation, the analysis of gender and migration, and the exploration of the linkages between immigrants and their countries of origin – to provide a better understanding of immigrant experiences. Focusing on the experiences of first generation Dominicans, Colombians, and Salvadorans, we ask whether the processes of incorporation and transnational participation, as well as the relationships between incorporation and transnationalism, are similar or different for men and women. Our starting proposition is that men and women perceive and live their migration experiences differently and, as a result, there will be differences in their incorporation into American society as well as in their involvement in transnational practices.

### *INCORPORATION, TRANSNATIONALISM AND GENDER*

The literature on immigrants’ paths of incorporation is organized around two main positions. On the one hand, scholars argue that the incorporation of post-1965 immigrants may be “bumpy” and take two or three generations, but that it does not differ from the previous experience of European immigrants at the turn of the twentieth century. The end result is convergence into an American culture that is constantly changing due, in part, to the influence of immigrants (Alba and Nee, 1997; Perlmann and Waldinger, 1997). The alternative position argues that immigrants follow segmented paths of assimilation. Middle-class and white immigrants assimilate into the American mainstream, whereas poor immigrants and immigrants of color assimilate into the marginalized sectors of American society (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). Class and race are the key variables that differentiate immigrants’ paths of incorporation. This debate constitutes the background to our study. These theories, however, do not address gender differences in the process of incorporation and do not explore the relationship between incorporation and transnational participation.

#### *Immigration and Gender*

The literature on gender and migration shows that women and men experience differently their encounters with the receiving society. A central ar-

gument of this literature is that the status of immigrant women improves vis-à-vis immigrant men due to women's increased access to resources through employment and protective institutions. Even women in very exploitative jobs are exposed to different patterns of gender relations and might adapt their own expectations to the more egalitarian – or less patriarchal – relationships that they perceive among American couples. Moreover, in the United States, immigrant women may have access to institutional protections – ranging from social security and unemployment compensation to protections for abused women – that are independent from their family status and increase the resources at their disposal (Pessar, 1995; Grasmuck and Pessar, 1991).

Even when not in the paid labor force, migrant women may perceive their roles as wives as more satisfying in the United States than in their countries of origin. Pérez-Itriago and Guendelman (1989) argued that Mexican women in the United States perceived a more comfortable life through the use of appliances and other goods that would be unobtainable in their countries of origin. Moreover, the new context favors men's participation in activities that are traditionally considered women's duties in their countries of origin, such as childcare and household chores (García Castro, 1986; Pessar, 1999b; Pérez-Itriago and Guendelman, 1989). In fact, Pessar (1999b) argues that, for immigrant women, status gains have been more pronounced within the household than in other domains, such as the workplace or ethnic associations.

In contrast, the evidence suggests that, for men, migration implies – at least initially – a loss of status and a threat to their gender identity. Their low occupational status might satisfy the needs within the household, but it weakens traditional gender roles and does not award public recognition. As a result, men desire to return home in order to regain the status and privileges that their migration has challenged. Men also attempt to reinforce their own values and norms as a way of reassuring their identity in an environment that is strange to them (De Snyder and Díaz Pérez, 1996; Goldring, 1991). Given the different gender experiences of migration, some authors argue, women adapt faster than men to the norms and values of the receiving country. Furthermore, immigrant women fear that returning to their countries will result in a loss of their independence and a return to traditional gender roles. Hence, women favor settlement in the host country as a way to protect their advances (Mahler, 1999; Menjivar, 1999; Pérez-Itriago and Guendelman, 1989).

Yet many scholars caution against an overgeneralization of immigrant women's experiences (Tienda and Booth, 1991). Several studies indicate that the effects of migration on gender relations are mediated by class, ethnicity, and gender ideologies. Hence, upwardly mobile Dominican and Cuban women sometimes choose to withdraw from the labor market and embrace the role of housewives and more traditional gender relations. This decision marks the success of the household in achieving middle-class status (Pessar, 1999a). Also, while staying in the United States may be a good alternative for women who have achieved some economic success, poor women may conclude that their meager resources can afford them a better life in their countries of origin (Pessar and Mahler, 2003).

Ménjivar (1999) shows that indigenous Guatemalan women in California are better able to leverage their resources in the household than are mestiza Guatemalan and Salvadoran women. The Californian labor market favors immigrant women over immigrant men, but indigenous and Latino men have different reactions to this situation. The former are more prepared to accept the fact that women have better access to jobs and wages while the latter feel threatened by this situation. Yet, there are also wide variations in women's experiences among ethnic groups. Researchers emphasize the importance of cultural/ideological factors in explaining those differences. Arab-American women, for example, have among the lowest rates of labor force participation, yet there are important differences within the group. Read (2004) investigates whether religion can explain the differences within the group in labor force participation. She concludes that Islam, in itself, cannot explain the low rates of labor force participation among Arab-American women and argues for the need to look at variations in cultural interpretations. She shows that it is the embrace of gender traditionalism that explains differences in labor force participation among Muslim women. Similarly, Moon (2003) shows the importance of gender ideologies in explaining differences in mothering arrangements among first- and second-generation Korean women.

As Pessar (1999b) points out, initial studies on gender and migration were far too optimistic concerning the gains that migration confers to women. Migration can result in the improvement, deterioration, or renegotiation of gender inequalities. The latter can have unexpected consequences. Zentgraf (2002) shows how the reconstruction of traditional gender relations among Salvadorans in Los Angeles leads women to adopt new roles and tasks that enhance their sense of empowerment and self-confidence. Pessar (1999a) concludes that "there is now broad consensus that immigrant

women attain some limited, albeit uneven and sometimes contradictory, benefits from migration and settlement . . .” (p. 586).

### *Transnationalism and Incorporation*

An important body of migration research shows that first-generation immigrants recreate ties with their countries of origin, forming transnational social spaces. Some immigrants forge economic ties with the country of origin as a form of socioeconomic mobility (Portes, Haller, and Guarnizo, 2002). Others create social and cultural ties that allow them to extend the boundaries of their communities of settlement and origin (Itzigsohn and Giorguli Saucedo, 2002; Levitt, 2001). Others participate in the political life of the country that they left behind even while living in a different country (Goldring, 2001; Levitt, 2001).

We identify three explanations for transnational participation. The first, which we call “linear transnationalism,” argues that transnational practices are the result of the ties that link immigrants to their families and places of origin. Immigrants send remittances, travel home, and build ethnic institutions within their countries of reception in order to maintain their social relations with and their involvement in their place of origin (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc, 1994; Glick Schiller 1999). The second, which we call “resource-dependent transnationalism,” affirms that immigrants try to reconstitute their linkages to the country of origin, but they cannot do that immediately upon migrating because they lack resources. From this point of view, the emergence of transnationalism is slow, appearing only when immigrants have enough resources to engage in philanthropic or business projects in the country of origin (Goldring, 1998; Landolt, Autler and Baires, 1999; Mahler, 1995; Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt, 1999).

The third perspective, “reactive transnationalism,” views transnational practices as a reaction to a negative experience of incorporation. The negative experiences can be, on the one hand, the result of frustration with occupational careers or the social status attained in the country of reception. Immigrants who can make monetary contributions to their families or their places of origin enjoy a higher level of prestige in the country of origin than in the country of reception. On the other hand, immigrants can engage in transnational practices as a result of discrimination or a negative perception of the receiving society that leads them to retain an identification with their country of origin. Empirical analysis shows that the three explanations of transnationalism hold some explanatory power (Goldring, 1998; Glick

Schiller and Fouron, 1998; Itzigsohn and Giorguli Saucedo, 2002; Landolt *et al.*, 1999).

Research shows that transnational participation is gendered. Goldring's (2001) study of Mexican migrant organizations from the state of Zacatecas finds that these organizations are mostly arenas of male action. Itzigsohn and Giorguli Saucedo's (2002), analysis of sociocultural transnational linkages among Latin American immigrants also finds that the field of institutional and public transnational activities is mostly a male-dominated area. Goldring (2001) argues that women are more engaged in the social life of the receiving society. She affirms that these differential forms of gender participation in transnational and local politics are related to the fact that men lose social status in the process of migration and, as a consequence, have a stronger orientation towards the community of origin, whereas women do not experience status loss and may experience status gain, and as a result they are much more interested in improving their situations in the country of reception. In other words, for men, transnationalism may be more of the "reactive" type. Women are known to invest their resources in the subsistence of their households before using them for other resources, such as transnational activities. For women, transnational engagement may be a function of resource availability.

The literature on transnational families, however, points to other forms of women's transnational involvement. Hondagnu-Sotelo's (1997) study of transnational motherhood points to a particular form of linear transnationalism. This author shows how Latina immigrant domestic workers who leave their children behind are deeply embedded in family life across borders without necessarily constant movement between locations. This group of women redefines their understanding of motherhood to "encompass breadwinning that may require long-term physical separation" (p. 562). Similarly, Alicea (1997) shows how Puerto Rican women's caring and kin work in transnational families creates transnational communities. The subsistence work of Puerto Rican women is in part a result of the dispersion of their families across borders, but it is also a form of reactive transnationalism in response to the discrimination they confront in the United States.

Finally, the literature on transnationalism suggests that incorporation and transnationalism are concurrent processes. Immigrants become part of the receiving country and its institutions while simultaneously maintaining ties to their countries of origin (Itzigsohn and Giorguli Saucedo, 2002; Levitt, 2001; Morawska, 2003). Research shows that only a small core is intensely and regularly involved in the creation and maintenance of trans-

national social spaces. Yet, around this core there is a broad periphery of people who participate in transnational ties in less regular ways, constituting a transnational social space (Itzigsohn and Giorguli Saucedo, 2002; Levitt, 2001).

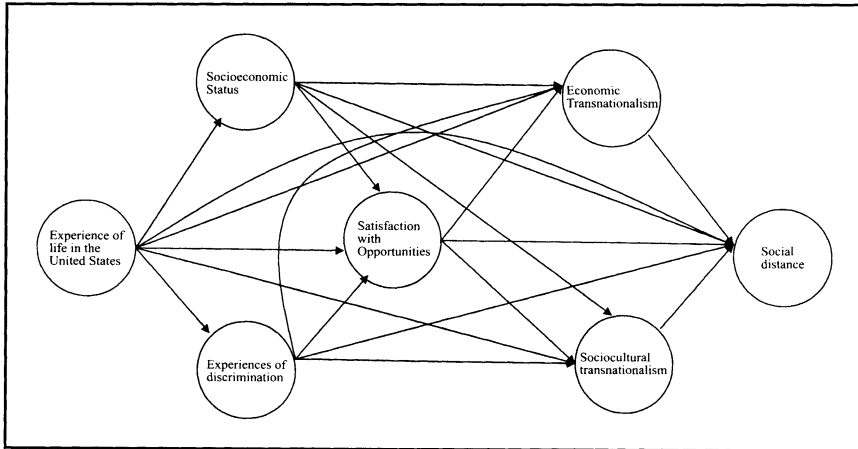
### *EXPANDING THE SCOPE OF IMMIGRANT INCORPORATION ANALYSIS*

The ethnographic studies reviewed above show gender differences in immigrant experiences along a number of dimensions. We build on the results of those studies and conduct a quantitative analysis aimed at deepening our knowledge of immigrant lives in America. We go beyond the existing literature by looking at the intersection of incorporation and transnationalism from a gendered perspective. Figure I presents the conceptual model for our analysis. The model includes seven variables that reflect our understanding of the causal processes that shape immigrant incorporation and the formation of transnational linkages. The seven variables are: 1) exposure to American society; 2) socioeconomic status; 3) experiences of discrimination; 4) satisfaction with opportunities in the United States; 5) economic transnationalism; 6) sociocultural transnationalism; and 7) a measure of the social distance of immigrants from white Americans. We allow for all the latent variables in the model to affect those that are located after it.

The first part of the model includes four variables commonly used in the analysis of immigrant incorporation. Exposure to American society is the only exogenous independent variable in the model. It captures the time dimension of the immigrant experience. We believe this to be a key factor in any process of incorporation, and hence in our model this variable affects all the others. The next two endogenous variables are reports of experiences of discrimination and socioeconomic status. These two variables in turn affect the satisfaction of immigrants with opportunities in the United States. The second part of the model presents the main innovation of our study, which is the relationship between transnationalism, incorporation and gender. This part constitutes the focus of our analysis. We explore how the four initial variables in our model – variables that represent a straightforward model of incorporation – affect transnational participation and the perceived social distance between immigrants and mainstream society.

Recent research has shown that it is necessary to analyze different fields of transnational involvement separately (Itzigsohn *et al.*, 1999). Economic transnationalism refers to immigrants' participation in economic endeavors that take place both in the country of reception and the country of origin. Portes, Haller, and Guarnizo (2002) show that transnational entrepreneur-

**Figure I. Structural Equation Model for Analysis of Gender Differences in Transnationalism and Incorporation**



ship is a distinct path of immigrant incorporation. Sociocultural transnationalism refers to activities that span borders and seek to recreate community institutions and a sense of belonging of immigrants to their places of origin (Itzigsohn and Giorguli Saucedo, 2002; Levitt, 2001).

The final dependent variable of the model is a measure of immigrants' perception of the social distance between themselves and white Americans. Our question here is whether the variables in the first part of the model, as well as the maintenance of transnational links with the country of origin, affect the perceived social distance between immigrants and the American mainstream. Since immigrants from Latin America are considered in the United States to be immigrants of color, racial understandings and perceptions of racial distance are at the core of their incorporation processes. Given the pervasiveness of the racial divide in American life, the segmented assimilation thesis argues that incorporation may mean greater – rather than lesser – social distance between immigrants and white Americans (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). The effects of exposure to American society, discrimination, socioeconomic status, and satisfaction with opportunities will help us examine whether different experiences of incorporation lead to a growth of racial distances and the solidification of the color line and whether this process varies for men and for women. The effect of the transnational variables will allow us to consider whether transnational participation and incorporation are competing or complementary processes.



Building on the theoretical debates and empirical findings reviewed above, we propose seven hypotheses to investigate the relationships between immigrant incorporation, transnational participation, and gender experiences. The first two hypotheses test claims derived from the linear assimilation thesis.

Hypotheses 1: The more exposure to American society, the closer the social distance between immigrants and white Americans. This hypothesis tests the linear assimilation argument that with the passage of time and the increasing acquaintance with American values and norms, immigrants ultimately identify with American society. We expect this effect to be stronger for women than for men, as the literature suggests that in the United States, women have access to resources unavailable to them in their countries of origin and, as a result, they are more prone to want to stay in the United States. Men, in contrast, are more likely to want to return to the country of origin.

Hypotheses 2: The more exposure to American life, the lower the participation in transnational activities. This hypothesis also tests the linear assimilation claim that immigrants ultimately integrate into American society and sever their ties with the country of origin. Following Hypothesis 5, we expect this effect to be stronger for women than for men, as women are expected to incorporate more smoothly into American society.

The next two hypotheses are derived from the segmented assimilation arguments.

Hypothesis 3: The higher the SES, the closer the distance between immigrants and the American mainstream. This hypothesis tests the segmented assimilation argument that claims that the social distance between immigrants and the mainstream depends on the immigrants' class position. We expect this effect to be stronger for men than for women, as the literature suggests that experiences of status gain or loss and the presence or absence of social mobility conditions men's incorporation into American society more than women's incorporation.

Hypotheses 4: The more experiences of discrimination reported, the larger the social distance between immigrants and white Americans. This hypothesis addresses the segmented assimilation claim that the incorporation of immigrants depends upon their position in the American racial hierarchy. We expect that this effect is stronger for men than for women, as they lack the compensatory mechanisms women have through their gains in social status.

The following hypotheses investigate the determinants of participation in transnational activities.

Hypothesis 5: The higher the SES, the more participation in transnational linkages. This hypothesis tests the resource-dependent transnationalism argument. We expect this effect to be stronger for women than for men, as the literature suggests that women's transnational participation is more of the resource-dependent type than is men's transnational participation.<sup>2</sup>

Hypotheses 6: The more experiences of discrimination reported, the greater the participation in transnational activities. This hypothesis tests the "reactive transnationalism" thesis. We expect this effect to be stronger for men than for women as the literature suggests that men's transnationalism is more of the "reactive" type than is women's transnational participation.

Our last hypothesis investigates the effects of transnational participation on the perceived social distance between immigrants and white Americans.

Hypotheses 7: Transnational participation will have no effect on the social distance between immigrants and white Americans. This hypothesis derives from our claim that incorporation and transnational participation are concurrent processes. For men, participation in transnational linkages, by strengthening the sense of effectiveness and the status of immigrants, fosters immigrants' engagement with the receiving society and thus decreases social distance. We hypothesize that women's main form of transnational engagement is resource-dependent, so their participation in transnational life will be an extension of their incorporation in the receiving country.

We test these hypotheses using separate structural equation models (SEM) for men and for women. The experiences of men and women are not homogeneous, and our analysis shows how class and experiences of racialization affect the incorporation path and transnational involvement of immigrant women and men. Yet, we are also able to compare the two models and explore whether –in spite of the within-gender differences – the experiences of men and women differ in patterned ways.

<sup>2</sup>The literature on transnational families would predict a linear transnational involvement for women. Unfortunately, we cannot test this thesis in the frame of this analysis. Still, we want to see if the resource-dependence hypotheses has explanatory value in understanding women's transnational involvement.

## *DATA AND METHODS*

### *Data*

The data used for this study come from a survey conducted within the framework of the Comparative Immigrant Enterprise Project (CIEP). This project involved a survey of first generation immigrant households among three Latino immigrant communities – Dominicans, Salvadorans and Colombians. Dominicans were interviewed in Providence and New York City, Colombians were interviewed in New York City, and Salvadorans were interviewed in Washington, DC, and Los Angeles. These sites were chosen because they were key sites of residential concentration of these immigrant groups. The survey was conducted in the winter of 1997–98.

Resource limitations prevented citywide surveys. Instead, the majority of the respondents were selected using a three-stage sampling strategy. In the first stage, key areas of residential concentration of Dominicans, Colombians, and Salvadorans were identified within each city. In the second stage, a random sample of blocks was selected in those areas. These city blocks served as primary sample units (PSUs). In the third stage, a systematic random sample of households was conducted within each block using a fixed sampling fraction, thus insuring identical probabilities of selection for eligible households (Kish, 1965). Close to two thirds of the sample (62.3%) was selected using the method described above. About one third of the sample (37.7%) was selected through referrals and snowball chains with different points of entry. The reason for the purposive selection of one third of the sample was that the primary focus of the survey was to study transnational practices. The referral section of the sample attempted to reach people who engage in transnational practices in order to ensure that there were enough cases of transnational migrants in the sample. The random sample was conducted to avoid the problem of sampling on the dependent variable. First generation immigrants who self-identified as heads of households were interviewed. The survey gathered information about demographic characteristics, immigrants' experience since arrival to the United States, and participation in transnational activities. Table 1 shows the distribution of the 1,202 immigrants in the sample by national group, by type of interview and by gender.

### *Analytical Approach*

This study's analytical approach combines the logic of deductive quantitative studies and theoretically informed case studies. Following the former, we

**TABLE 1**  
**DISTRIBUTION OF THE SAMPLE BY COUNTRY OF ORIGIN AND TYPE OF INTERVIEW AND BY GENDER**

Country of Origin/ Type of Interview	Men	Women	Total
Colombians			
Block sample	74	86	160
	46.2%	53.8%	100%
Referral	88	63	151
	58.3%	41.7%	100%
Total	162	149	311
	52.1%	47.9%	100%
Dominicans			
Block sample	101	193	294
	34.4%	65.6%	100%
Referral	97	27	124
	78.2%	21.8%	100%
Total	198	220	418
	47.4%	52.6%	100%
Salvadorans			
Block sample	165	130	295
	55.9%	44.1%	100%
Referral	131	47	178
	73.6%	26.4%	100%
Total	296	177	473
	62.6%	37.4%	100%
Total			
Block sample	340	409	749
	45.4%	54.6%	100%
Referral	316	137	453
	69.8%	30.2%	100%
Total	656	546	1202
	54.6%	45.4%	100%

attempt to systematically test hypotheses through the use of sophisticated statistical techniques. Yet our sample is not representative. The random sample was conducted in neighborhoods of high immigrant concentration; hence it does not include those who live outside of those neighborhoods. The transnational sample was reached through a snowball sampling design to capture a wide range of transnational practices.

There is no known universe of transnational immigrants from which to draw a representative sample. Hence we cannot generalize the results of our analysis. Yet what we lose in generalizability we gain in in-depth exploration of the relationship between incorporation, transnationalism, and gender. The logic of the theoretically informed case study tells us that an in-depth exploration of theoretical propositions can help us to better understand the social processes of interest and build better theories (Paige, 1999). In this case, even though we cannot generalize from our sample, our data allows us

to explore issues that we could not explore using the existing large representative samples (such as the General Social Survey) or the census. Our data allows us to explore a complex model that brings together variables related to gender, incorporation, and transnational processes to different theoretical frameworks.

This study is based on the analysis of a survey; hence it does not have the depth and thickness of the ethnographic description. Yet, it goes beyond the typical – and existing – case study analyses in that it uses formal methods of hypotheses testing and analyzes a database that includes a variety of groups and geographic locations. Three different immigrant groups in four different cities were included in the survey, and this gives us some confidence in the robustness of our results. By testing theoretically informed propositions on a sample drawn from different places, we gain some confidence that our findings can be indicative of the broad trends of incorporation and transnational participation among first generation Latino immigrants. This study is a first quantitative test of the relationship between incorporation, transnationalism, and gender across multiple geographical locations. To the extent that these issues have been addressed thus far, they have been analyzed either separately or from an ethnographic perspective.

### *Method of Data Analysis*

The model we analyze was estimated using a latent variable structural equation model (SEM). The basic latent variable SEM is compounded by a measurement model and by the structural causal model. The former assesses the relation between the measures (observed variables) and the theoretical variables using the same logic as confirmatory factor analysis (Maruyama, 1998). The latter explores the causal relationships between the unobserved (latent) variables. For the analysis of latent variables, two measurement models are used, one for the exogenous variables and one for the endogenous variables:

$$Y = \Lambda_y \eta + \varepsilon \text{ for the endogenous variables}$$

$$X = \Lambda_x \xi + \delta \text{ for the exogenous variables}$$

where:

- $\Lambda_y$  is an observed endogenous variable,
- $\Lambda_x$  is an observed exogenous variable,
- $\eta$  is a latent endogenous variable,
- $\xi$  is a latent exogenous variable, and
- $\varepsilon$  and  $\delta$  are the residuals in the measurement models.

The structural model is the regression part of latent variable SEM (Maruyama, 1997). The equation for the structural model in its matrix form is:

$$\eta = \beta \eta + \Gamma \xi + \zeta$$

where:

$\beta$  is the matrix of regression weights interrelating endogenous variables,

$\Gamma$  is the matrix of regression weights relating exogenous variables to endogenous variables, and

$\zeta$  is the vector of residuals for the endogenous latent variables.

The use of a latent variable SEM is adequate for the analysis intended in this study for several reasons. First, as mentioned above, it allows for investigation of the direct and indirect casual pathways of the experiences of immigrants in the United States, their transnational practices and their integration to U.S. society (measured through their relation with mainstream Americans). Second, the main interest of this article is to explore whether the casual pathways operate differently by gender. The use of multi-group analysis in the estimation of the SEM allows us to test simultaneously whether the influence of the independent variables on Latino immigrants' integration patterns and transnational practices is statistically different for men and women. The multi-group analysis involves fitting an identical model with data from different samples (in this case, both men's and women's samples), making it possible to compare how the two groups are affected by the same structural model (Maruyama, 1998).<sup>3</sup> The model used to test the hypotheses is portrayed in Figure I above.<sup>4</sup>

The model estimated in this study is over-identified, which means that

<sup>3</sup>Our analysis also indicates that the differences in the variance/covariance matrices for immigrant men and women are statistically different, demonstrating that the comparison between the two gender models is relevant.

<sup>4</sup>A weakness of our model is that LISREL does not handle well dichotomous variables. As a result, we could not use a number of dichotomous control variables such as country of origin, city of residence, or whether the respondent was contacted through the random or the purposive sample. Our model allows for the correlation between the error terms of two sets of latent variables: socioeconomic status and reported experiences of discrimination and between the error terms of economic and sociocultural transnationalism. This means that although in the model these are endogenous variables, we recognize there may be other factors not included in the model that affect both sets of variables. This is permitted in structural equation modeling, and it is a sensible assumption that improves the fit of the model. On the other hand, following one of the assumptions of structural equation modeling, we do not

there is a sufficient number of observed relationships to estimate the parameters of the model. Two commonly used goodness-of-fit indicators suggest that the model fits the data adequately. First, LISREL experts consider that a ratio between the model's chi-square and the degrees of freedom ( $2/df$ ) smaller than two indicates that the model fits the data well. In our model the ratio is 1.86 ( $332.988/179=1.86$ ). A stronger indicator of the goodness-of-fit of the model is the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) provided by LISREL (*see* Murayama, 1998:240). This index ranges from 0 to 1, and the closer to one, the better the fit. A CFI of 0.95 shows a very good fit of the model to the data. Our model's CFI is a high 0.962.

The logic of the causal model was explained above, and its results are analyzed in the next section. The next paragraphs briefly describe the measurement model used for the analysis. The model depicted in Figure 1 includes two variables related to transnational practices: economic transnationalism and sociocultural transnationalism. Economic transnationalism measures whether the respondent has participated in economic transactions in the country of origin and how frequently this participation has occurred. Sociocultural transnationalism measures participation in a number of transnational practices that build community relations across borders and that are based on a common sense of social and cultural belonging. The items used to construct these two latent variables – as well as those used in the seven latent variables in the model – are presented in Table 2.

There are two latent variables regarding immigrants' attitudes toward American society: satisfaction with opportunities in the United States and a measure of social closeness. Satisfaction is a perfectly measured latent variable based on an index of satisfaction, which summarizes immigrants' satisfaction with job and opportunities in the United States. The latent variable for social closeness was built using immigrants' responses about the relationship between their group and white Americans (whether these relationships were distant, friendly and/or cold). This variable is constructed using elements from Portes and Bach's (1985) perception of society and discrimination index. We use three items from this index that measure perceptions of the relationships between the respondent's immigrant group and white Americans. We focus on white Americans as they constitute the mainstream of this society. Distance or closeness to white Americans indicates the social distance from the dominant group, that is, distance from the center of

allow for any correlation between the error terms of the observed variables in the measurement model.

**TABLE 2**  
**SELECTED INDICATORS FOR LATINO IMMIGRANTS IN THE U.S. BY SEX<sup>a</sup>**

Indicators	Measurement Units/Categories	Men	Women	Total
Indicators of exposure to American society:				
Time in the United States	(years)	15.4	14.8	15.1
Stage in the life course at arrival	Before adolescence (11 years or less)	2.6%	3.7%	3.1%
	Adolescence (12 to 18 years)	18.1%	16.7%	17.5%
	Young adulthood (19 to 35 years)	64.9%	62.3%	63.7%
	Adulthood (35 years or more)	14.3%	17.4%	15.7%
Indicators of socioeconomic status:				
Education <sup>b</sup>	No education	2.6%	3.9%	3.2%
	1 to 5 years	9.3%	14.7%	11.7%
	6 to 12 years	43.8%	46.7%	45.1%
	13 to 17 years	29.0%	28.2%	28.6%
	18 or more	15.4%	6.6%	11.4%
Occupational scale <sup>b</sup>	Unemployed/not working	5.3%	21.6%	12.7%
	Laborer	31.9%	35.2%	33.4%
	Semi and skilled worker/self employed	20.4%	19.4%	20.0%
	Professional/ administrator/ business owner	42.4%	23.8%	33.9%
Indicator of experience of discrimination:				
Has experienced discrimination <sup>b</sup>	Never	51.5%	59.7%	55.2%
	Sometimes	32.3%	27.1%	30.0%
	Frequently	16.2%	13.2%	14.8%
Indicators of economic transnationalism: <sup>c</sup>				
Took clothes, shoes, appliances for sale to country of origin	Never	89.4%	91.7%	90.5%
	Occasionally	7.2%	5.7%	6.5%
	Regularly	3.4%	2.6%	3.0%
Brought clothes, food and others from country of origin	Never	85.6%	86.6%	86.1%
	Occasionally	11.0%	10.5%	10.8%
	Regularly	3.4%	2.9%	3.2%
Invested in properties or real estate in country of origin <sup>b</sup>	Never	66.5%	81.0%	73.1%
	Occasionally	21.5%	13.8%	18.0
	Regularly	12.0%	5.2%	8.9%
Traveled carrying documents or remittances of other migrants	Never	85.9%	88.4%	87.1%
	Occasionally	11.3%	8.8%	10.2%
	Regularly	2.8%	2.8%	2.8%
Indicators of sociocultural transnationalism:				
Participated in a hometown association <sup>b</sup>	Never	67.5%	81.5%	74.0%
	Occasionally	17.8%	10.6%	14.6%
	Regularly	14.5%	7.9%	11.5%
Sent money for projects in hometown <sup>b</sup>	Never	67.7%	83.2%	74.7%
	Occasionally	20.6%	10.8%	16.1%
	Regularly	11.7%	6.0%	9.2%



**TABLE 2 (CONTINUED)**  
**SELECTED INDICATORS FOR LATINO IMMIGRANTS IN THE U.S. BY SEX<sup>a</sup>**

Indicators	Measurement Units/Categories	Men	Women	Total
Participated in sport clubs linked to country of origin <sup>a</sup>	Never	59.5%	78.9%	68.3%
	Occasionally	21.2%	13.7%	17.8%
	Regularly	19.4%	7.3%	16.7%
Indicators of social distance with white Americans: <sup>c</sup>				
Relationships between white Americans and your group are usually distant <sup>a</sup>	(index – range 1 to 4)	2.15	2.07	2.12
Relations between white Americans and your group are usually friendly	(index – range 1 to 4)	2.42	2.37	2.40
Relations between white Americans and your group are usually cold	(index – range 1 to 4)	2.14	2.07	2.11
Indicator of satisfaction with opportunities in the U.S.: <sup>b</sup>				
Index of satisfaction with opportunities <sup>d</sup>	(index – range 0 to 2)	1.07	0.92	1.00
N		656	546	1,202

Notes: The difference between men and women responses was significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

<sup>a</sup>Chi-square testing for the difference between the distribution of the selected variable for men and women significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

<sup>b</sup>The items used to measure economic and sociocultural transnationalism were chosen because their high loads in the measurement model. We decided not to use other possible indicators because the analysis showed them to be weakly related to the latent concepts.

<sup>c</sup>In the following items, a higher score indicates less social distance between Dominicans and White Americans.

<sup>d</sup>This index was constructed adding up the results of the following three questions:

1. Does your occupation match your education and skills?
2. Does your current occupation satisfy your aspirations upon arrival to the United States?
3. Given your education and skills, do you consider that you have had enough opportunities to progress in the United States?

political, economic, and symbolic power in America. The items were coded so that a higher score indicates less distance from white Americans.

Socioeconomic status was measured via a combination of educational attainment and current occupation in the United States.<sup>5</sup> The latent variable related to experiences of discrimination is a perfectly measured variable which uses the response of immigrants about whether and how often they have experienced discrimination in the United States. Finally, exposure to American society and culture was measured by the time spent in the United States and the respondent's stage in the life course upon arrival. The longer

<sup>5</sup>Many first generation immigrants were educated abroad and, given the lack of recognition of foreign credentials, have occupational statuses that are below what they could expect given their level of education. Still, their studies abroad are part of the human capital they bring with them. Human capital, in turn, affects the process of incorporation and also the status of the individual. Hence we believe ours is an appropriate measure of immigrants' socioeconomic status.

an immigrant has resided in this country and the earlier in life he or she arrived, the more that person is acquainted with the norms and values of this country, its rules of social interaction, as well as with its subtle and not so subtle forms of social exclusion.

## *RESULTS*

We turn now to the analysis of the model's results. The theoretical focus of our study lies in the analysis of effects of the variables in the first part of the model on transnational participation and social distance.<sup>6</sup> The key results of our analysis are presented in Table 3.

The first two hypotheses test arguments derived from the linear assimilation thesis. The results support the first of these hypotheses but not the second. Exposure to life in the United States leads to a reduction in the social distance between immigrants and white Americans even when controlling for the effects of class and race on incorporation. For both men and women, the indirect and total effects of this variable are positive and significant. The direct effects are also positive but nonsignificant, suggesting that the effects of this variable are mediated by other processes that take place once a migrant becomes acquainted with American life. In line with our expectations, the total effect of this variable is larger for women than for men, providing qualified support for the claim in the gender and immigration literature that exposure to life in the United States provides immigrant women with greater access (relative to immigrant men) to material and institutional resources that are not available to them in their countries of origin, and as a result they are more likely to want to stay in this country. Yet, the model's support for the thesis of gender differences in incorporation needs to be qualified. A chi-square comparison of the parallel coefficients for the two models is not statistically significant. Although the coefficients vary in the hypothesized relationship, there is not statistical support for the claim that the coefficients are statistically different from each other. Hence, we need to be very cautious in our assertions concerning gender differences.<sup>7</sup>

Our second hypothesis is not supported by the results. Exposure to life

<sup>6</sup>Due to space limits we do not present the results of the first half of the model. They are available upon request.

<sup>7</sup>This combination of differences in strength and significance which supports our claim and a lack of statistical difference between the coefficients that weakens our arguments applies to all the results of the analysis.

**TABLE 3**  
**DIRECT, INDIRECT, AND TOTAL EFFECTS OF LATENT VARIABLES IN SEM MODEL ON TRANSNATIONAL PARTICIPATION AND SOCIAL DISTANCE (NON-STANDARDIZED RESULTS)**

Independent Variables	Social Distance					
	Men			Women		
	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect
Economic transnationalism	.068	—	.068	.087	—	.087
Sociocultural transnationalism	-.008	—	-.008	-.002	—	-.002
Satisfaction with opportunities	.084 <sup>a</sup>	.001	.086 <sup>a</sup>	.053	-.001	.051
Experiences of discrimination	-.161 <sup>a</sup>	-.012	-.174 <sup>a</sup>	-.105 <sup>a</sup>	-.007	-.111 <sup>a</sup>
Socioeconomic status	.047	.020 <sup>a</sup>	.067 <sup>a</sup>	.045	.021	.066 <sup>a</sup>
Exposure to life in America	.065	.149 <sup>a</sup>	.214 <sup>a</sup>	.167	.175 <sup>a</sup>	.343 <sup>a</sup>
	Economic Transnationalism					
	Men			Women		
Independent Variables	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect
Satisfaction with opportunities	.012	—	.012	-.014	—	-.014
Experiences of discrimination	.059 <sup>a</sup>	-.002	.057 <sup>a</sup>	.020	.002	.022
Socioeconomic status	.042 <sup>a</sup>	.003	.045 <sup>a</sup>	.078 <sup>a</sup>	-.004	.074 <sup>a</sup>
Exposure to life in America	.099	.050	.148 <sup>a</sup>	.313 <sup>a</sup>	.071 <sup>a</sup>	.384 <sup>a</sup>
	Sociocultural Transnationalism					
	Men			Women		
Independent Variables	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect
Satisfaction with opportunities	-.072	—	-.072	.031	—	.031
Experiences of discrimination	.097 <sup>a</sup>	.013	.110 <sup>a</sup>	.066	-.005	.060
Socioeconomic status	.156 <sup>a</sup>	-.016	.140 <sup>a</sup>	.204 <sup>a</sup>	.009	.212 <sup>a</sup>
Exposure to life in America	.165	.081	.246	.051	.258 <sup>a</sup>	.309 <sup>a</sup>

Note: <sup>a</sup>Coefficients significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

in America has positive, and sometimes significant, effects on transnational participation. Overall these results indicate that contrary to the expectations of the linear – or bumpy – assimilation thesis, the passage of time and acquaintance with American norms, values, and resources do not diminish immigrants' links with their country of origin. On the contrary, to the extent that this variable has an effect on transnational linkages, it has a positive effect. Also against our expectations, overall the positive effects are stronger for women than for men. Moreover, in the case of economic transnationalism, the three effects – direct, indirect, and total – are significant for women and only the indirect effects are significant for men. In the case of sociocultural transnationalism, the indirect and total effects are significant in the women's model and the three effects are nonsignificant in the men's model. To the extent that incorporation into American life means access to more resources that in turn allow for increased transnational participation,

these results support the argument that women's transnational engagement is dependent in the accumulation of material resources.

The next two hypotheses test claims made by the segmented assimilation thesis. Both hypotheses are supported by the data. A higher socioeconomic status leads to less social distance between immigrants and white Americans. The strength of the effect of these coefficients is similar for men and women, and the total effects of this variable are positive and significant for both genders (although the indirect effects of the variable are only statistically significant for men). The direct effects are positive and nonsignificant, indicating that the effect of this variable is mediated by other variables further in the model, most likely satisfaction with opportunities. These results indicate that, against our expectations, there are no relevant differences in the effect of socioeconomic status on incorporation for men and women.

The results also support the fourth hypothesis. The more an immigrant encounters experiences of discrimination, the larger the social distance between immigrants and the mainstream. For both men and women, the direct and total effects are negative and significant, indicating that encounters with the American racial system affects the process of immigrant incorporation. As we expected, the coefficients are stronger for men than for women, as women may find some compensation for their low position in the American system of ethnoracial stratification by an improvement in their gender position (Mahler, 1999; Menjivar, 1999; Pessar, 1999b). However, the interpretation of the results concerning gender differences are subject to the qualifications reported above concerning lack of statistically significant differences between the coefficients for the two models.

The next two hypotheses test claims from the literature on immigrant transnationalism. Hypothesis 5 tests the "resource dependent" transnationalism argument, and it is supported by these results. Transnational participation increases as the socioeconomic status of immigrants improves. This is true for both sociocultural and economic transnationalism. In both cases the direct and total effects are positive and significant. According to our expectations, the SES coefficients for women are larger than the coefficients for men. This supports our assertion that women's participation in transnational activities is more dependent on the presence of resources beyond those necessary for household subsistence than is men's transnational participation.

The data also support the hypothesized gender difference concerning

reactive transnationalism. Experiences of discrimination in general lead to increased transnational participation. Yet, for both economic and sociocultural transnationalism, the direct and total effects of discrimination are larger and statistically significant for men and nonsignificant for women. These results support the argument that “reactive transnationalism” is a cause of men’s transnational participation, but it has a weaker effect on women’s transnationalism. The direction and differences in the strength of the effect of the coefficients that affect economic and sociocultural transnationalism for men and women correspond to our theoretical expectations and to the empirical findings in the literature on gender and transnationalism (Goldring, 2001; Itzigsohn and Giorguli Saucedo, 2002).

The results also provide support to our last hypothesis. Table 3 shows that participation in economic transnational activities has a positive effect on incorporation but that this effect is very small and not significant. The effect of participation in sociocultural transnational activities on social distance is negative, but it also nonsignificant, and it is almost negligible, very close to zero. What these results suggest is that transnational engagements do not have a clear direct effect on the process of incorporation into American life. Participation in economic or sociocultural transnational practices does not increase or decrease the social distance between immigrants and white Americans. Furthermore, the results indicate that there are no differences between men and women in the effects of transnationalism on social distance.

Overall, the model’s results suggest that incorporation and transnational participation are concurrent and intertwined social processes. They are positively affected by three of the four variables in our model: exposure to life in America, socioeconomic status, and satisfaction with opportunities. The more a person is acquainted with American society, the higher his or her socioeconomic status, and the more his or her satisfaction with opportunities, the lower the perceived social distance between immigrants and white Americans and the more transnational involvement by the same immigrants. The main difference in the causal factors is the effect of experiences of discrimination. The more an immigrant encounters discrimination within the United States, the higher the social distance with white Americans and the greater the transnational involvement, and the latter effect, as we expected, is particularly strong for men and nonsignificant for women. The effect of discrimination, however, does not translate into a negative effect of transnationalism on incorporation.

*REVISITING IMMIGRANT INCORPORATION*

The analysis presented in this article shows the complexity of the experiences of first generation Latin American and Caribbean immigrants. First, our analysis finds support for the claims of segmented assimilation scholars. Indeed, class and race affect the attitudes of immigrants toward the mainstream society. Incorporation into the lower socioeconomic segments of the American occupational structure and experiences of racialization increase the social distance between immigrants and white America. At the same time, our findings also support the arguments of the linear or “bumpy” line assimilation thesis. Exposure to American society does indeed reduce the social distance between immigrants and white Americans. This is true even – or at least – within the span of the experiences of the first generation.

Are the incorporation experiences of immigrant men and women different? Our analysis suggests that the experiences of immigrant men and women have a lot in common. This makes sense considering that all immigrants have to confront the same kind of problems: making a living, learning the language, coping with discrimination, and securing the future of the next generation. Yet, our results also indicate that the structural barriers of class and race – those that constitute the basis for the segmented assimilation thesis – are more salient for men than for women. There are also important differences in women’s encounters with the American class and race stratification system. Overall, however, the analysis presented in this article supports Pessar’s (1999a) assessment that first generation immigrant women experience some – albeit uneven and contradictory – gains in gender status.

Discussions over paths of incorporation, however, do not exhaust the analysis of immigrant experiences. The same factors that promote incorporation –*i.e.*, exposure to American life, increased socioeconomic status – also promote transnational participation. On the other hand, factors that hinder the process of incorporation, namely the encounter with the American racial system, also push immigrants towards transnational participation. Incorporation and transnational participation are concurrent and intertwined processes. Our analysis also found the expected differences in the causes of transnational participation for men and women. Men’s transnational involvement is more likely to be of the reactive type, related to the difficulties or the discrimination they encounter in the incorporation process. Women’s transnational participation is more likely to be resource-dependent. There are, of course, plenty of differences in the forms and causes of transnational participation of men and women. Men also have to overcome resource

limitations to their transnational participation and women face discrimination and marginalization that may lead them to engage in transnational activities. Moreover, both men and women engage in transnational linkages as part of their social and cultural commitments to their places of origin. This is particularly true in the case of transnational families. Yet, our results support the thesis that there are some recognizable patterns in the overall causes of transnational participation among men and women.

What do these findings tell us about the future of immigrant incorporation? The incorporation and transnational involvement of first generation immigrants are complementary rather than competitive processes. Furthermore, it is often the most incorporated immigrants, those that participate actively in American political and economic life, who are also involved in transnational activities. The reason for this is that these immigrants are usually the people who have the necessary resources to participate in transnational life. The point that needs to be stressed is that transnational participation does not diminish immigrants' drive to incorporate into American society.

What are the likely paths of immigrant incorporation? Much has been written about the attitudes and aptitudes of individual immigrants or immigrant groups, yet it is clear that we need to focus our attention on the structural context in which the immigrants find themselves. If immigrants are afforded opportunities – educational, occupational and political – the trend towards reducing social distance will prevail. If, on the other hand, immigrants are pushed toward marginalization and exclusion, the effects of class and race will increase the social distance between immigrants and mainstream Americans as predicted by segmented assimilation theory. Furthermore, it is important that we bring in gender to the analysis of the possible futures of immigrant incorporation. The daughters of immigrants grow up within the American system of gender inequality and hence do not experience the relative improvement in their gender position that their mothers encountered. Thus the successful incorporation of immigrant women and their daughters is related to the availability of institutional mechanisms that specifically further gender equality – in addition to social and racial justice.

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