
Conclusion

Racialization despite Assimilation

This book has addressed the question of Mexican immigrants' and their descendants' integration into U.S. society. One more glimpse into respondents' lives reinforces the point that racial/ethnic identity is a fluid process that is highly contingent upon context and that assimilation pathways are not straightforward but open to voluntary personal switchbacks and vicissitudes driven by external social forces.

Both second-generation Mexican Americans, Lee and Evelyn Morelos reared their son Lance in a primarily middle-class, white Los Angeles suburb. Lance picked up cues about race and class from his neighborhood, in which he "fit." His young mind concluded that to be middle class is to be non-Hispanic white and, conversely, to be working class is to be of Mexican descent. Lee explains how Lance didn't realize that he was Mexican-origin in his youth:

I always loved the green grass. We lived in Los Angeles and this time of year [summer] the green grass dies. So you have to thatch it and put rye and then rye comes up and you have green grass through the winter. [My two sons] were eleven and twelve, and they were working like crazy. Lance comes up to me and says, "Dad, why are we doing all this?!" "I want green grass," I says. "Why don't you hire a couple of Mexicans to do it?" I said to them, "I have. And guess what? I don't have to pay 'em." They didn't even realize they were Mexican! They didn't realize they were Mexican. That's how they were brought up because I was brought up that way. So right there and then I said to myself, "Oh my goodness!" Here we had a beautiful home that was on two acres, a pool, orchards in the back, the whole thing, all surrounded by a community that didn't have minorities. And they didn't go to minority schools, so how the hell were they to know they were Mexican or not?! I never thought of it!

By Lee and Evelyn's own admission, they wanted to raise their children in financially secure neighborhoods with high-performing schools—which translated for them to white, middle-class suburbs. Lee did not want to “forget” his heritage, but he was careful not to “overemphasize” it at home. Lee lays out his philosophy: “I really feel that if you overdo the heritage thing it's not good. You're living here and you should become an American. Don't forget your heritage, enjoy your heritage, but don't overemphasize it.”

Despite this youthful lack of awareness of his Mexican heritage, Lance grew up to portray himself as extremely self-confident and active with regard to his Mexican American background and the Hispanic community. I connected with Lance through a Hispanic chamber of commerce and we met for the interview at his family-owned restaurant in Walnut Creek. Lance, who has olive-colored skin and dark, slightly wavy hair, arrived for the interview in a shiny black Mercedes and dressed in business casual clothes. Even before we settled into the interview, Lance let off steam about a break-in to the restaurant catering van. “This is the second time a break-in has happened in two months—they break the window and steal the windshield wipers. I don't even keep anything of value in the van. Today I come in and on the front windshield there is scrawled writing: ‘Go back to Mexico, Beaner.’” It was quite a coincidence that on the day I intended to interview Lance about the role of race in his life, the opening scene of his business day was a break-in and racist vandalism.

This vignette illustrates the “bumpy” nature of racial identity and awareness. As a child Lance was utterly ignorant of his Mexican American identity, influenced by his non-Hispanic white neighborhood environment, his observations and overgeneralizations about which racial groups have middle-class versus working-class status, and his father's teachings about walking the balance beam of remembering one's heritage without overemphasizing it. Thirty years later, Lance not only identifies as Mexican American but is identified as such by others and is the target of vehement racist vandalism that wrongly presumes that Lance is foreign born. Lance's bumpy road of assimilation moves from nonrecognition to high identification, in part on the basis of his physical appearance and name, which signal to others his Latino identity. Lee's position on ethnic identity is somewhat contradictory: he promoted “becom[ing] an American” and did not push ethnic awareness on his children, yet was surprised and dismayed by their lack of ethnic consciousness in their youth. Lee treats Mexican American identity as a symbolic ethnicity in this narrative, yet his son's experience testifies that Mexican ethnicity is not optional and recreational but rather imposed and sometimes costly.

Two generations of businessmen, the Morelos father and son pair is clearly well integrated into the U.S. economy and occupational structure. Considering their different eras of upbringing and work life, it is perhaps *because* of his successful structural integration that Lee wears his ethnicity lightly and Lance, whose academic and work life succeeded the civil rights movement, feels empowered to wear his ethnicity with dignity (Jiménez 2010; Macias 2006). In sum, we see here how class, historical context, physical appearance, name, and parental teaching all play into the way identity is consolidated. We also observe how these elements become more or less salient during one's lifetime, and how these social forces can channel racial and ethnic identity in different directions, such as from thinned attachment to cultural maintenance.

Given the steady increase of racial and ethnic minority populations in the United States, the standard of a middle-class, white American mainstream is changing. While some meet this changing demographic profile with grave concern over the "browning" of America, we need to address this issue using life stories and experiences rather than ideological positions. This study of middle-class, multigenerational Mexican American families has showed increasing American identification over time, even as "American" is an increasingly hybridized term. It has also demonstrated that Mexican-origin families can be educationally, financially, and occupationally successful *and* either loosely or strongly adhere to their ethnic heritage. Given the significant influence of gender, skin color/physical characteristics, and name, this study calls into question the utility of discussing topics like race, immigration, and assimilation without considering these essential elements.

The question of whether Mexican Americans are a race or an ethnic group is not resolved by middle-class status; experience of Mexican heritage as imposed versus optional depends on gender and personal attributes such as phenotype and name. "Thinned attachment" results from both personal choice and one's social and institutional surroundings. Gender, family teachings, marriage, phenotype, and religion can all contribute to thinned attachment. Even in thinned attachment, ethnic identity persists, however "distilled" it may be, and can be (re)ignited by oneself or others. Gender, family teachings, marriage, phenotype, religion, as well as the civil rights movement and era of multiculturalism make possible the cultural maintenance trajectory. Multicultural ideology, which gained support following the civil rights era, "helps lift the stigma placed on Mexican ethnicity, making it a desirable and even a rewarding aspect of identity for Mexican Americans" (Jiménez 2010: 103). Marriage with other Mexican Americans was the most common family form, which led to cultural maintenance, whereas the less common

occurrence of marriage with a non-Hispanic white led to thinned attachment. Gender, patriarchy, and interest in ethnic culture all played a strong part in family formation. Women were motivated in one of two ways (that are in tension with one another): some avoided partnerships with Latino males for fear that they would be oppressive, whereas others felt a gendered responsibility for maintaining ethnic culture in the home and viewed the cultural similarity they shared with Latino men as a virtue.

While family teachings tend to flow “down” the generational ladder from older to younger generations, the reverse can also be true as a younger person who is sparked to reignite a cultural connection can pass this knowledge and excitement to older generations. Discrimination, which is a means of racialization that even middle-class status cannot neutralize, affects all three generations of Mexican-origin families and is deployed on the basis of skin color, physical characteristics, and name. Historical moment contextualizes each of the three generations, influencing each generation’s reaction to discrimination, which ranges from avoidance among the immigrants to attitudinal/ideological and behavioral resistance strategies among the U.S.-born generations. While schools are both racialized and racializing, historical context, gender, and parental ideologies and actions mediate their impact. The middle-class families boasted educational gains over the three generations, yet in this process, the U.S.-born generations educated in the United States were subjected to the predominant racialized and racializing practices of their time. The second generation experienced a Jim Crow style of education that was largely separate and unequal—boys were funneled into remedial classes or out of school entirely—whereas the third generation was subjected to educational tracking and institutional racism, which were only partially destabilized as a result of affirmation action. The Mexican American third generation demonstrates a variety of social experiences, ranging from flexible ethnicity to racialization. This youngest generation displays norms of masculinity that are broadening to embrace emotional sensitivity and gender equality. Mexican American identity is not yet symbolic but carries emotional and practical costs that prevent it from being merely another colorful ancestry that is seamlessly woven in the tapestry of U.S. society.

Understanding the Bumps in the Road of Assimilation

Multigenerational families are a powerful unit of analysis in that they reflect historical moments, reveal family dynamics, and refract racialized and gendered discourses and identities. First, I analyzed generations “horizontally,” as I considered all first-, second-, or third-generation respondents, respec-

tively. “Generation styles” (Mannheim 1936) develop out of sociopolitical contexts that bear marks of an era and are imprinted upon human lives and identities (Cohen and Eisen 2000; Takahashi 1997). “Each generation . . . has a memory bank of images and code words” (Gillespie 1995: 12), causing each generation to respond to the same phenomena in a patterned fashion. Generations are embedded within particular historical eras, and these periods exhibit dominant racial paradigms and attendant “common sense” understandings about race (Frankenberg 1993; Haney López 1996; Omi and Winant 1994). For instance, the power of phenotype, gender, and name to shape life experience and influence identity claims was consistent in all three generations. The political climate changed in each generation, however, moving from ideologies of Americanization in the immigrant generation to Jim Crow and the civil rights movement in the second generation, and finally to affirmative action and multiculturalism in the third generation. Tracing life experiences across family generations sheds light on the formative power that intergenerational family communication, institutions, historical movements, and micro-interactions all have on racial/ethnic identities and incorporation patterns.

Second, I analyzed interviewees’ narratives “vertically,” as I considered grandparent-parent-child links, paying special attention to generation within families. My research design specified both generation-in-a-family and nation-of-birth such that family generations map perfectly onto generation-since-immigration (Telles and Ortiz 2009). (The first-generation immigrants were all grandparents, and the second and third generations were immigrants’ U.S.-born children and grandchildren, respectively.) Intergenerational family memory, as shaped by historical period and life experiences, significantly influences the ways in which Mexican immigrants and their descendants incorporate into U.S. society. The experiences and memories of one family generation often become the memories and struggles of the next generation. Parents pass more than genes and didactic lessons on to their children. Through personal narratives, parents convey who they are, what they have been through, how they struggled, what they achieved, and what their dreams have been. These lessons, directly or indirectly relayed, are formative for children. These intergenerational lessons, often about gender issues, racial strife, and struggle for class mobility, are socializing stories. Just as knowledge about ancestors is a primary factor influencing racial/ethnic ancestry choice (Waters 1990: 36), so too is intergenerational transfer of knowledge formative for people’s larger sense of identity and orientation to their community and nation.

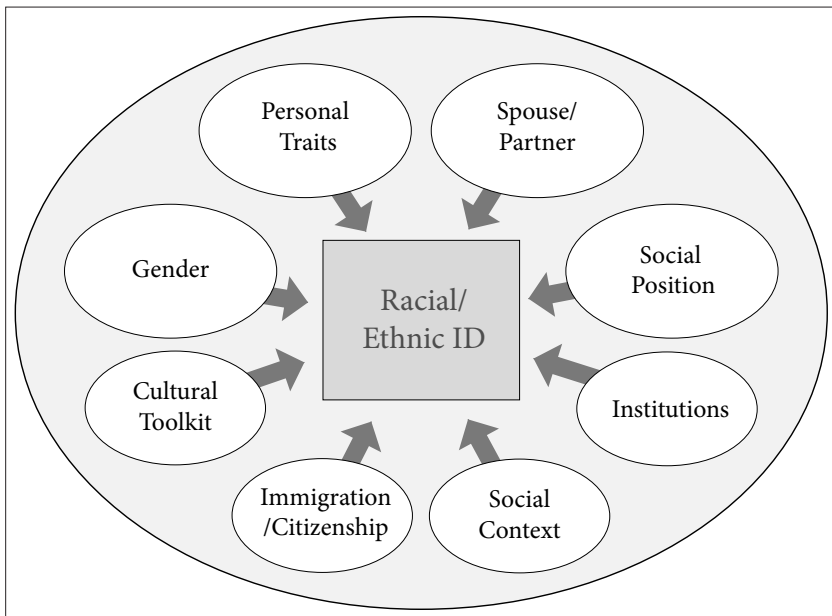


Figure 8.1

My study extends current scholarship on Mexican Americans, immigration, assimilation, and identity formation by interviewing not just the Mexican immigrants but also their children and grandchildren born in the United States. In comparison with my methodology, which focuses on race, ethnicity, family, and generation, other studies on Latinos typically concentrate on only two generations (which are most often disembedded from family units), study a single generation or cohort, or use the community as a site of investigation. I refine assimilation and segmented assimilation theory by highlighting the experiential level of immigrants' incorporation and demonstrating that incorporation is a "bumpy" process. Several factors drive incorporation patterns and contribute to the way immigrant families conceive of their racial/ethnic identity (see figure 8.1). According to my interviewees' life stories, the following elements are of primary importance.

- Spouse/Partner
- Personal traits (phenotype and name)
- Gender
- Social position (class position, status position)

Of secondary importance are the following social traits and institutions.

- Cultural toolkit (i.e., English language ability, Spanish language ability, American traditions/cultural fluency, Mexican traditions/cultural fluency)
- Social context (geography, demographic context)
- Institutions (e.g., church, school, work)
- Immigration/Citizenship status (whether one is an immigrant or U.S. citizen)

To be sure, the dimensions of legality/illegality have profound effects on life chances and outcomes (De Genova 2005; Gonzalez 2008; Zhou et al. 2008). Citizenship is not prominent here because it was not central to my analysis; the first-generation immigrants I interviewed either were documented workers or were naturalized U.S. citizens by the time of the interview. Two other elements that provide the larger context in which life unfolds, as illustrated in figure 8.2, include the following.

- Family members' ideology, practices, and teachings
- Historical period

While the elements pictured here may be considered “inputs,” variability occurs as factors align differently for people and as they negotiate—resist, challenge, partially accept—these influences, making their life, incorporation, and racial/ethnic identity formation a dynamic process.

Figure 8.2 illustrates the way I conceive of the transmission of knowledge across generations. Note that each “wheel of racial identity formation” pictured above is duplicated for each of the three generations: grandparent, parent, and child. The generations are linked by a porous two-way arrow of “ideologies, practices, and teachings,” showing how parents and children, as well as grandparents and grandchildren, are connected. The arrow is dashed rather than solid to indicate that there is slippage between the “ideologies, practices, and teachings” that are taught and the lessons learned. The arrow connecting the family generations (first to second, second to third, and first to third) has two tails on it, showing that “ideologies, practices, and teachings” can flow both “down” the generational ladder (from parents to children and grandchildren) and “up” (from children to parents and grandparents), as seen in the Madrigal family in chapter 4. The arrow at the bottom labeled “historical time” indicates that all of these racial-identity-creation and intergenerational-transmission processes are embedded within historical periods.

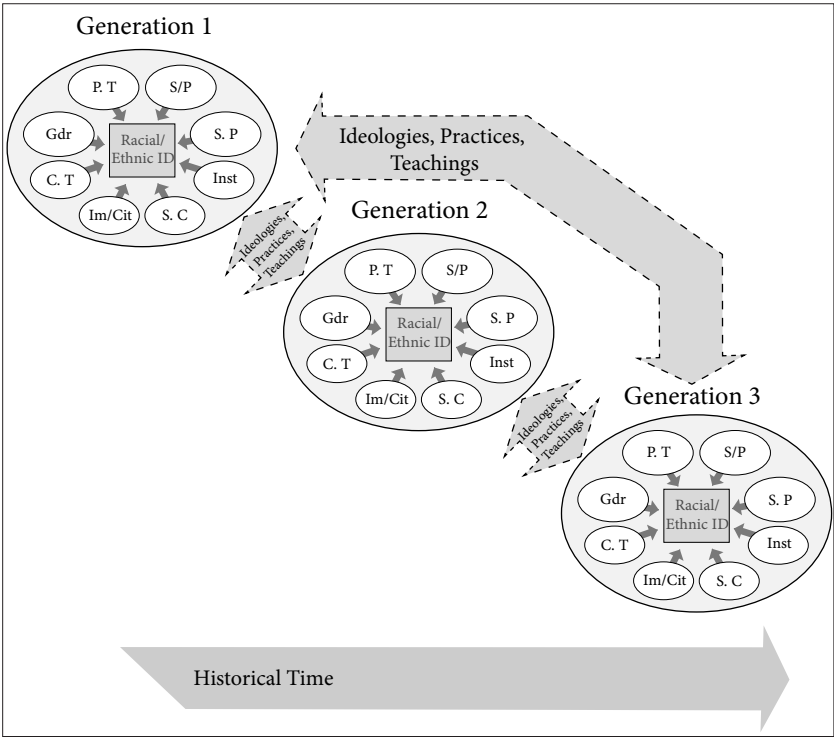


Figure 8.2

Over three generations, families can express thinned attachment, in which racial/ethnic background is not central, or can live out cultural maintenance, in which Mexican-oriented traditions and communities are integral to everyday life and identity. Historical context shapes the experiences of each generation, which, in turn, affects both junior and senior generations in the family. Racism is historically dependent, having “changed over time, taking on different forms and serving different purposes in each time period” (Lipsitz 2006: 4). This historically dependent experience with race creates the “interpretive backdrop” (Vasquez 2005) against which both antiracist and identity-making strategies are crafted. The grandparents, parents, and children in this book tell us that intergenerational family memories, communication, and practices are foundational to one’s racial identity formation in that they provide a template to be stylized, a void to be filled, or grievances to be rectified. These families demonstrate that race, ethnicity, identity, and culture are not meaningless abstrac-

tions but are significant concepts that are created through the institutions of family and society, and in conjunction with historical social movements.

Given that this book focused on families who were middle class by the third generation, this evidence suggests that Mexican Americans *can* be upwardly mobile and structurally assimilate. While some people are accepted more readily (largely due to phenotype, education, or income level) (Telles and Ortiz 2009), a contingent of second- and third-generation Mexican Americans remains racialized despite assimilation. My findings are that integration in language, education, income, occupation, and civic participation occur over generations and yet Mexican-origin people may live out their ethnic heritage by choosing either to loosen or to tighten their grip on Mexican culture. Considering the diversity of cultural orientations and identity constructions, a “multi-directional cross-cultural acculturation” (Moya 2000: 88) seems to be occurring wherein white, middle-class American values are no longer the singular pinnacle of achievement.

The Immigration Debate Revisited: Revising Assimilation Theory

A portrait of Mexican Americans as a racialized and disadvantaged group (Acuna 2000; Almaguer 1994; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Telles and Ortiz 2009) coexists with an image of Mexican Americans as an assimilating ethnic group (Alba 2006; Alba and Nee 2003; Perlmann 2005; Skerry 1993; Smith 2003; Smith 2006a). Federal and state policies, such as affirmative action, suggest a racial status for Mexican Americans, as do scholars who find persistent subordination and disadvantage (Acuna 2000; Almaguer 1994; Gómez 2007; Ortiz 1996; Telles and Ortiz 2009). On the other hand, political elites, analysts, and scholars have contended that Mexican Americans are just like other immigrant ethnic groups. Some add the caveat that since Mexican immigrants tend to arrive with little education and wealth—their starting gate is set further back—they may take an extra generation or two to catch up to the assimilated outcome of the European immigrants who arrived at the beginning of the twentieth century. Making sense of those dual perspectives is challenging because they appear to be polar opposites, yet in reality, both ring true. As we have seen, at least among families who achieve middle-class status, a segment of that constituency remains racialized as nonwhite while another portion—those who bear physical resemblance to white ethnics, do not have Hispanic first and last names, and display American cultural behaviors—is less often, if ever, reminded of their outsider status. Thus, the process of racialization as nonwhite versus the process of social whitening is not uniform, even among the middle class (Vasquez 2010).

Nativist rhetoric turns a blind eye to the multiple ways in which Mexican Americans are integrating into, contributing to, and are undeniably a (native-born) portion of the population. Fearful racist, classist, and xenophobic contingents view Latinos as “separatists” and a multiethnic society as inherently “fragile” and “combustible.” This vision harkens back to the era of the Anglo-conformity brand of straight-line assimilation that required “forsaking old loyalties . . . [and] melt[ing] away ethnic differences” (Schlesinger 1998: 17). Those who believe that the Latino presence in the United States is undermining American culture are quick to forget that the United States is a nation of immigrants—aside from Native American nations, that is. Those who romanticize a golden era of Anglo unity and dominance overlook the centuries-long presence Mexicans had in southwestern territories now under the U.S. flag, as well as erase the contributions of Latinos to “American” culture. Obscured by the ideological rhetoric surrounding immigration is the fact that the “demand for Latino immigrant labor in the United States has become *structural* in character” (Cornelius 2002: 167). Latinos and other racial minorities tend to be scapegoated as eroding a coherent, common American culture (Gitlin 1995; Huntington 2004a; Huntington 2004b; Schlesinger 1998), when U.S. culture is in fact a nonmonolithic, regional, highly hybridized conglomeration. Those who speak of the bygone golden age of American identity are glamorizing a fictional consensual identity and continuing the invisibility of racial minorities (and women) whose existence is subordinated by an exclusionary master narrative. Rather than viewing multiculturalism as the splintering or “disuniting” of America (Gitlin 1995; Huntington 2004a; Huntington 2004b; Schlesinger 1998), Americans need to recast their understanding of the meaning of “American” and embrace those who exist on its territory, participate in its various institutions, and co-create its culture and future.

One problem with the classic assimilation perspective is that it “tends to de-emphasize the kinds of power differentials that have historically been so crucial in structuring . . . inequality, placing a group’s attempts at becoming like the majority group at center stage to the neglect of the structural barriers that might prevent it from doing so” (O’Brien 2008: 14). In this way, the supposed success or failure of immigrant groups’ integration has been placed on the groups themselves, without regard for the context into which they were received. We have seen how strong an impact racializing institutions, racial discourses, and interpersonal prejudices have on individuals’ access to precious resources, sense of self-identity, and sense of group position or worth. The onus is not merely upon immigrant groups but upon American society to admit newcomers to the national community and change the out-

dated image of an Anglo-Saxon Protestant nation so as to accurately reflect the existing racial, ethnic, and national-origin diversity.

My research supports “new” assimilation theory’s argument that assimilation is an incremental process, propelled by both quotidian and key decisions and experiences (Alba 2006). When a generational approach is taken (i.e., controlling for birth cohort and generation simultaneously), the picture becomes clear that linguistic, educational, occupational, and income (in terms of wages) assimilation is occurring (Alba 2006; Perlmann 2005; Smith 2003; Smith 2006a). Richard Alba (2006) argues that “it is the diversity within groups of patterns of incorporation into American society that needs recognition today,” and this book shows that diversity of incorporation. One can be both assimilated in terms of education, occupation, language, culture, *and* be highly or minimally affiliated with Mexican-origin culture and identity.

The older straight-line assimilation theory is unrealistically linear, proposing a strict step-wise process. Straight-line assimilation theory assumes that assimilation would “inevitably end with the eventual total disappearance of all traces of ethnicity after several native born generations” (Gans 1992a: 44). Herbert Gans (1992a: 44) instead argued in favor of a “*bumpy line*” theory, the bumps representing various kinds of adaptations to changing circumstances—and with the line having no predictable end.” My empirical work confirms and extends Gans’s bumpy-line assimilation theory. There is more than one destination for immigrant ethnic groups, and there are multiple paths by which to get there. Families travel various routes that are not always straightforward in order to reach their middle-class and structurally integrated status; some desired Anglo-conformity from the point of immigration, others held on to notions of cultural pluralism that were supported by the civil rights era, and still others made decisions in one generation that they revisited and renegotiated in the next.

Several social forces, as detailed above, are the “bumps” that influence the speed, direction, and forks in the road of both assimilation and racial identity formation. This list of factors—topped by spouse/partner, personal traits such as phenotype and name, gender, and social position—steer the direction of cultural assimilation and racial identification. Notably, the cultural destination is not predetermined in bumpy-line assimilation, allowing for structural assimilation that is complemented by thinned attachment, cultural maintenance, or an in-between status. Bumpy-line assimilation implies that assimilation is a condition that is dynamic and in flux as opposed to an end point. Considering incorporation patterns and racial/ethnic identity as a bumpy process allows for trajectories that are charted and recharted

throughout one's life course and open to development over multiple family generations.

As segmented assimilation propounds, race is central to integration possibilities. My data clarify that race works *in tandem with* other elements that influence incorporation processes and racial identity formation. Contrary to segmented assimilation's prediction about the Mexican-origin population at large, there is at least a segment of this ethnic group that is not downwardly assimilated into an already stigmatized subgroup. Since I studied families that had managed to enter the middle class, I did not study the marginalized subpopulation that segmented assimilation theory describes (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Rumbaut and Portes 2001). While my sample was structurally assimilated into the U.S. mainstream, they were not necessarily assimilated in terms of identification, marriage, and culture. These findings problematize assimilationist notions that suggest an eventual, necessary, and desirable outcome of wholesale integration. "Bumpy-line" assimilation—where the points detailed in the "wheel of racial identity formation" drive integration trajectories—holds that the process of assimilation is highly uneven, susceptible to turns, reversals, accelerations, and decelerations (Gans 1992a).

The family history narratives that I gathered for this book support elements of the various theories of assimilation listed above as well as develops them. The multigenerational family life histories support "new" assimilation theory by showing clearly that integration occurs gradually and over successive generations. Also supported is the insight from segmented assimilation theory that race, along with human capital and neighborhood context, is critical to incorporation. Beyond this agreement, my data illustrate that prior studies have underestimated the critical nature of gender, phenotype, and name, and have overlooked the branches and reversals that can occur over both lifetimes and family generations.

The findings concerning gender and gender ideologies (which, in turn, affect mate selection) suggest that assimilation theory to date has undervalued the crucial role that gender plays in social integration and racial identity formation. Many women spoke fervently about their desire either to grow closer to or to detach from their Mexican heritage; in the case of women who were retreating from Mexican culture, this language was often code for patriarchal gender relations. In both cases, gender and gender ideologies motivated marital choices, family dynamics, and childrearing practices that shaped the gender and racial identities of both parent *and* child generations.

Middle-class, multigenerational Mexican American families can be simultaneously structurally assimilated and yet range from thick to thin Mexican

cultural attachment. Their degree of affiliation can change over their lifetime, and one individual's experience can permanently alter the trajectory of other family members, older or younger, by virtue of communication, sharing, and teaching that crosscut family generations. There is a spectrum of possible reactions that follow upward mobility, from "some people of Mexican origin . . . [who] minimiz[e] social distance between themselves and majority whites [to] others [who] . . . although participating in the larger American society . . . maintain a cultural pluralistic point of view and choose . . . biculturalism" (Murguia and Forman 2003: 70). Among the middle-class Mexican American population in Los Angeles, orientations to the American mainstream range from straight-line assimilation to incorporation into a "minority middle-class culture" (but not downward assimilation) (Vallejo and Lee 2009). The processes of upward mobility and structural integration in the United States do not entail the disposal of a minority culture. An immigrant ethnic group enacting an array of cultural incorporation options (thin to thick ethnicity) proves that lingering sending-country cultural attachments do not undermine structural assimilation.

Regardless of degree of Mexican cultural attachment, these middle-class, multigenerational families are undoubtedly structurally incorporated—a finding at odds with assimilation theory's precept that native culture must be jettisoned in order for one to be integrated. Structural incorporation does not necessitate abandonment of an ethnic culture and wholesale adoption of American culture. My findings also conflict with segmented assimilation theory's prediction that the Mexican-origin population would most likely undergo downward assimilation. While that may be true for some, that pessimistic picture does not capture the variety of class and ethnic experiences of Mexican American families. That said, seamless incorporation into the American mainstream is not a foregone conclusion for Mexican Americans of all phenotypes, names, genders, and cultural behaviors. Indeed, barriers to integration persist, including institutional and interpersonal discrimination that racializes those perceived as Mexican Americans *despite their assimilation*.

Upwardly mobile Mexican Americans who are perceived as racially "other," despite their success in mainstream institutions, face the constraint of racialization. Mexican Americans are restricted by the way others perceive, treat, and racialize them. Regardless of how Mexican Americans may choose to identify, outsider perspectives that classify them as nonwhite or "off-white"¹ (Gómez 2007) severely limit the possibilities of being liberated from racializing interference. Some scholars promote curtailing racial identity politics in order to foster assimilation (Skerry 1993), yet this option is not

solely up to Mexican Americans but is partially dependent on the way the U.S. mainstream reacts to and treats this population. The lives of Mexican Americans, and Latinos at large, are structured by the racializing experiences they undergo in public spheres. Honoring the potency of human agency, these racializing experiences can be at least partially offset by the racial lessons taught within families, individual resistances, and collective social movements.

These findings suggest that race-based policies such as affirmative action remain necessary measures to counteract historical and contemporary exclusionary mechanisms. Scholars have argued that “inequality [is the] . . . socially constructed and changeable consequence of Americans’ political choices” (Fischer et al. 1996: 7). Intentional policies and reward structures can be changed to produce more equitable outcomes (Fischer et al. 1996). If the state has historically deprived U.S.-born Mexican Americans of actionable citizenship rights and continues to deprive Mexican immigrants of fair working conditions and living wages, the state should be responsible for devising a remedy. While some politicians, journalists, and scholars call for the eradication of race-conscious policies (such as affirmative action), race has historically shaped state policy (Oliver and Shapiro 1995), and race-conscious policies are necessary to counteract the ways in which racial discrimination continues to disadvantage racial minorities.

The literature on immigration recognizes that federal and state aid to immigrants facilitates their settlement in the United States (Garcia 1996; Reitz 1998; Zhou and Bankston 1998; Pedraza 2007). While having the education and skills that match the needs of the labor market is key to successful adjustment to a host country (Steinberg 2001), federal and state immigration policy that grants work visas with a path to citizenship would be the first step to incorporating Mexican immigrant laborers who build lives in the United States. If the government can support the inclusion of Mexican laborers—rather than perpetuate their alienation—the force of one racializing agent will be curbed.

The middle-class composition of my respondent pool offers a natural extension for future research in that incorporation patterns and racial identity formation probably vary by class. My sample of middle-class families is clearly marked by an upwardly mobile class experience. Other families remain in the lower class, so comparing middle-class families with lower-class families would be an important extension. A class comparison could better determine who achieves upward mobility, how this is accomplished, and how class affects incorporation patterns and racial identity.

In the future, scholars could continue to carry out research on other racial or ethnic populations to discover to what extent my findings regarding middle-class Mexican Americans are relevant to other groups. Empirically testing the robustness of my theoretical contributions by studying other populations would test the limits of the generalizability of my study and uncover the theoretical insights that are applicable to other groups. Another important line of future inquiry would be a regional comparison. California has a particular history and demographic mix, especially as it relates to the Chicano Movement and past and continuing Mexican immigration. A comparison with other regions, such as southwestern and midwestern states with sizeable Mexican American populations and/or immigration flows, would be fruitful. The topics of immigration and Mexican Americans are brimming on the national consciousness and are particularly prominent on the minds of Californians. In the last several years, newspaper headlines about Mexican immigration, Mexican guest worker programs, Border Fence Bills, and Minutemen militias have been abundant. In the four months following the May Day 2006 national rally that called for immigrants' labor rights, a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, living wages, decriminalization of immigrants, and demilitarization of the U.S.-Mexico border, coverage in the *Los Angeles Times* was plentiful. Various headlines read, "The Protests of Allegiance," "A Real Fence for a Real Problem," "How L.A. Kept Out a Million Migrants," "Those Are Dollars, Not Pesos—Keep Them Here," "Can-do Spirit Fuels Immigrants," "Get Out, but Leave the Quesadilla," "Governor [Schwarzenegger] Refuses Bush Request for Border Troops," "One More Embrace, Then Slam the Door," and "Borders without Visas." An interstate or regional comparison would illuminate the ways in which my findings are specific to California and underscore the conclusions that are transposable to other locales.

Mexican-origin families are undergoing an assimilation pattern that is bumpy in that trajectories are uneven, non-stepwise, and subject to both volitional and structural accelerations, stalls, and turns. Physical appearance, gender, and name affect reception and treatment in America's institutions and social circles. Family units use biographical narratives, teaching strategies, and defensive techniques, in particular around the axes of race and gender, to organize social identity and fend off racializing treatment outside the home. In a context where race remains eminently important, the prospect of Mexican Americans' racial/ethnic identity entering a "twilight" (Alba 1985), as it did for white ethnics, is dubious. Due in part to continuing Mexican immigration that allows for the public to view and treat the Mexican-origin

population as “a permanent immigrant group” (Jiménez 2010: 259), as well as due to the way the United States rewards its members using a color-coded schema where whiteness is superior and nonwhiteness or “off-whiteness” (Gómez 2007) is devalued, racial and ethnic heritage will continue to mark Mexican Americans to the degree it is perceived. Despite claims to the contrary, the United States remains a racially conscious, hierarchical environment. As debates about the importance of race and structures of privilege and oppression carry on, the U.S. racial hierarchy continues to dole out high rewards and pernicious costs across generations.