

**Chicana Mothering in the 21st Century:
Challenging Stereotypes and Transmitting Culture***

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MOTHERING AT THE 21ST CENTURY:
IDENTITY, POLICY, EXPERIENCE AND AGENCY

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This chapter examines the experiences of mothering among Mexican Americanⁱ women in the early 21st century. Mexican Americans are a large and growing minority group due to both immigration and fertility rates. Chicana mothering involves acting as a guardian or mediator between racial messagesⁱⁱ from the “outside world” (school, media, inter-racial social networks) and their children. Mothers are responsible for overseeing their children’s growth and development; as minorities, this often requires defusing negative racial messages and replacing them with affirmation.

The family remains a critical site of racial identity development since it is a locale where inter-generational biography-based teaching occurs. Just as racial stereotypes pass from one generation to another, either intentionally or unintentionally (Lieberson 1985), so too do ideologies and resistance strategies. Mothers use their own experience as fodder for the transfer of knowledge and ideologies to their children. Understanding the concrete micro-interactions at home which mothers use to combat racial stereotypes is a necessary and timely subject for inquiry (see Bobo and Fox 2003).

This chapter considers how contemporary Chicanas engage in mothering in a racially charged and racially hierarchized U.S. society. More specifically I ask how Chicana mothers resist racializing images, tropes, and discourses aimed at their children by mainstream society. I find that Chicana mothers engage in three primary and potentially overlapping strategies as they rear their children. Mothers employ two strategies in the public sphere: “gendered encouragement” and “activism,” both of which confront and resist racist and sexist derogatory stereotypes. The third strategy is centered on family life. Inside the home, mothers are instructors of both ethnic traditions and gender ideologies.

The mothering strategies described here are tactical responses to a 21st century system of prejudice and discrimination which is not only interpersonal but also institutional. Over the past couple of decades, racism has become “structured” or “color-blind,” that is, “white privileges...[have become] structured into the patterns of interaction in society so deeply that the overt defense of racial privileges became unnecessary” (Barlow 2003, 31). While face-to-face, overt expressions of racism have not disappeared, civil rights protections and the ideology of multiculturalism have forced racism to go underground and become embedded in discourse and institutional practices (Bonilla-Silva 2003). Given this shift in racial ideologies and systems of domination that evolved toward the end of the 20th century, Chicana mothers have altered their parenting styles to address contemporary concerns. In practice this means that Chicana mothers protect their children by mediating between racializing institutions and their children’s interests. Additionally, many Chicana mothers promulgate racial pride, ethnic traditions, and progressive gender ideologies, all of which elevate their historically subordinated ethnic and gender group’s esteem in the minds of their children. Finally, the second generation Mexican American mothers in my sample experienced upward mobility relative to their parents and this gain in class status also informs their mothering styles.

Families and Race at the Turn of the Century

“Motherhood is a culturally formed structure whose meanings can vary and are subject to change” (Segura 1994, 211). Traditional femininity poses that a woman’s fundamental role is to bear children and take primary responsibility for the domestic sphere. Feminist scholars problematize this formulation, arguing instead that the

experience of motherhood is highly particular and invariably shaped by one's race, class, sexuality, and citizenship status (Rubin 1994; Scheper-Hughes 1992; Collins 1994). Despite this feminist critique, popular discourse in the early 21st century frames motherhood alternately as a romanticized endeavor (as opposed to effortful work) (Gardner 2008) or as such a fundamental and influential role that all mothers are bound to be critiqued for their shortcomings (Bailey 2006).

Prevalent 21st century rhetoric of motherhood notwithstanding, motherhood must be understood in a context that extends beyond the nuclear family unit to include issues of race and class (Pattillo-McCoy 1999). Annette Lareau (2003) argues that families' socioeconomic statuses correlate with their "cultural logics of child-rearing." Different class-based child-rearing practices and philosophies lead to the transmission of advantages or disadvantages to children. While Lareau asserts that class is more powerful than race in shaping family life experiences, I argue that race remains a dominant force in shaping one's life experiences.

Since "every state *institution* is a racial institution" (Omi and Winant 1994, 83, emphasis in original), examining the interplay between larger social structures and individual and family agency is crucial in understanding the development of racial self-understandings. Schools are particularly important in these processes; they are primary sites of socialization outside of the family. Much teaching and learning about social life and national culture takes place in schools (Valdes 1996; Tobin, Wu, and Davidson 1989; Davidson 1996). Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (1977; 1979) argue that the educational system has a chief role in social reproduction and perpetuation of the extant social hierarchy. Schools legitimate the "cultural capital" of upper-class white students,

while simultaneously excluding or marginalizing economically, culturally, and racially disadvantaged groups (Apple 1996; Bourdieu 1977; Bourdieu 1979; Cummins 2001; Giroux 1981; Lareau 1999). Precisely because schools are strong socializing institutions and educational degrees are positively associated with economic gain, they have also been sites of Mexican American political mobilization (Ochoa 2004).

Yet, families also have formative power. Analyzing the practical knowledge, experiential wisdom, and personal perspectives mothers convey to their children is particularly interesting as we attempt to understand the inner-workings of families influence processes of racial identity formation. Families reinforce aspects of identity such as race, religion, or gender (Cohen and Eisen 2000) and mold educational aspirations (Kao 1998; MacLeod 2004). Families and “fictive kin” can also be a wellspring of survival strategies and interdependent support (Stack 1974). Again, this chapter seeks to understand how Chicana mothers can challenge, reshape, and overturn the racial lessons learned by their children in dominant society’s social institutions.

Research Methodology and Fieldsites

This chapter is part of a larger project on multi-generational Mexican American families in California. By far, California has the largest Hispanic population in the U.S (12.5 million), 10.4 million of which are of Mexican descent (data source: 2000 Census). I conducted sixty-seven in-depth interviews in twenty-nine three-generation families roughly split between Northern and Southern California. The bases for the Northern and Southern California fieldsites were the San Francisco Bay Area and Santa Barbara/Los Angeles counties.

I employed a theoretical sampling strategy, followed by snowball sampling. First, I contacted families that fit my racial, ethnic, and generational profile by working through Hispanic Chambers of Commerce, Catholic Churches, and High Schools in various cities in my two selected fieldsites. Once I made contacts in the community, I proceeded with a snowball sampling strategy. The vast majority of the interviews were conducted in person and one-on-one. All respondents were either first generation (Mexican nationals who immigrated to the United States), second generation (the U.S.-born children of the Mexican immigrants), or third generation (the U.S.-born grandchildren of the Mexican immigrants). The vast majority of my interviewees were middle class. This chapter focuses on the experiences and parenting strategies of second generation Chicana mothers (n=14).

Chicana Mothering Strategies

In this section I detail the three main mothering styles I identified through analysis of interview data: two mothering styles are centered in the public sphere and one is focused on the private sphere. The first parenting style is “gendered encouragement” and the second is “activism,” both of which implicitly, if not explicitly, challenge negative stereotypes. Chicana mothers found it imperative to help their children overturn negative stereotypes that are pervasive in public discourse and racialized images. The first parenting style, “gendered encouragement,” refers to both emotional support and practical advice that Mexican American mothers provide their children that is particularly sensitive to gender issues. Most Chicana mothers are alert and responsive to gendered expectations because in their youth they suffered gender

inequality. Their own parents encouraged boys' opportunities (including education) more than that of girls. As a result, these mothers are especially supportive of their daughters in their educational pursuits. Gender is not only a female issue, of course, and these mothers are simultaneously aware of the negative stereotypes cast on their male children and strive to counteract these prescriptions. The second mothering strategy of "activism" is stimulated when mothers observe or fear institutional or interpersonal discrimination against their children. The third mothering style revolves around home life: mothers are "teachers of culture," both in terms of ethnic traditions and gender ideologies. These mothering tactics are not mutually exclusive; mothers can draw on these strategies and use them individually, successively, or in combination with one other.

Before moving into mothering strategies, it is noteworthy that these Chicana mothers espoused an ardent belief in the "American Dream." Chicana mothers perceive education as a means to attain the American Dream (namely financial gain, upward mobility, and a mark of overall success). Studies demonstrate a strong correlation between educational attainment, occupational status, and earning potential (Bowles, Gintis, and Groves 2005; Card 2001). These women's belief in education as a vehicle to attaining the American Dream is well-founded; in fact, all of the families interviewed followed a pathway of upward mobility through the three generations.

Lance Morelos' mother, like most second generation Chicana mothers, saw education as offering a ladder toward upward mobility. Lance recalls his mother's words:

My mom, since I was in high school, would say, "I don't care if you get a degree in underwater basket weaving, get a degree." So we always lived in a very good

area, which was predominantly a white area, in the smallest house, because they had the better schools. And [my parents] knew that. And so there would be nine of us in a three bedroom house for a lot of years until my dad really started to prosper. The goal was “education, education, education.” We all went to Catholic school. My parents were in debt most of their life because of it. ... My mother always said, “Location, location, location.” The best schools are the best opportunity.

Here, education is touted as both instrumental in achieving success as well as symbolic of past and future accomplishments. As mentioned, the educational attainment in all the families interviewed rose with each succeeding generation. Ruby Castillo captures her family’s three generation upward educational trajectory:

Education was not a big part of our family. Mom had 3rd, 4th grade education and dad had the same. ...So in the family [education] was never really pushed, stressed, but I felt that I needed to pursue a higher education so I pushed myself. ...Get an education. I saw that as a pathway to get out of poverty.... In my kid’s generation, unfortunately, they don’t know any struggles. I had to struggle if I wanted to get ahead, I had to take it upon myself to get educated and to get out and to work to buy my own clothes, etc. And I say that unfortunately, because I don’t see their inner passion. For example, the son at University of California, Santa Barbara [is] so used to having everything...taken care of from food, roof over the head...[us] paying for [his] education.... When I saw his [application] essay, there was nothing about a struggle. [It was] “I want to be God, I want to be President,” that type of essay.

While Ruby had to seek out educational opportunities and funding sources, she “pushed” herself to do so and now, at forty-six years old, she is a self-employed business owner.

While part of the impact of her children’s more coddled lifestyle may be the undesirable attribute of entitlement and loss of character-building challenges, her ability to coach her children throughout the college process speaks to the cultural and economic capital that a college degree bestows.

While belief in the American Dream is an ethos rather than a mothering strategy, it does inform how Chicana mothers consider and enact their responsibility as parents.

These mothers have seen the American Dream achieved (or at least in progress) in their

own families yet they are also wise to racist realities whereby people are differentially rewarded for the same work or are met with differing opportunity structures. It is, in part, the collision of a tightly-held American Dream ideology and racial/ethnic discrimination and stratification that engenders the Chicana mothering strategies depicted here.

◇ *Gendered Encouragement*

In Mexican immigrant families of the 1970s, male children were often offered opportunities and resources for school or other activities at the expense of female children. As a consequence of having been explicitly discouraged, these second generation Chicanas developed a strategy of “gendered encouragement” when mothering their own children. Yolanda Segura recalls how her father ridiculed her desire to go to college:

I never finished my college education and part of that was because of opportunity and environment. ...When I started to go to college right after high school, my dad sort of ridiculed it and was you know, “What do you need that for? ...You don’t need that.” And not having good study habits or really not knowing how to survive in college and not having the right people to guide me to was what deterred me the most.

Yolanda particularly remembers how her race and gender influenced her experience. She connects how her parents enacted societal assumptions about Mexican immigrants and their families thus influencing her gendered upbringing as a “Mexican girl”:

There was always the people out there that just made assumptions about your skin color and your country;...that we weren’t smart enough. ...Certainly some of those [assumptions] were internalized by my parents bringing us up because there was this sense of you had to be humble and...being a Mexican girl...that you had your place in life.

Yolanda grew up in a traditional home and also describes her marital home as “very traditional.” She is the full-time mother of three girls and her husband, a high level executive of a large public relations firm, is the sole income earner. Not wanting to continue a cycle of gendered disadvantage, Yolanda was committed to encouraging her three female children in their academic lives. She adopted a parenting style that reflected the way she *would have liked to be* supported:

For my kids, I want...to offer opportunities that I didn't get.... Because I had these strong male figures in my life that tried to push me down...I try to make [being a woman] as positive as possible. Not only being a woman but being a woman of color....

Yolanda hopes that by treating her children differently from how she was treated that she can modify their experience.

Chicanas' natal family life or exposure to negative stereotypes are not the only inspirations for mothering tactics. For example, Beatrice Madrigal instructed her daughter, Reyna, to get a college education in order to become economically independent. Beatrice struggled to support her family after her divorce because of her limited education. What came across most clearly in Beatrice's interview was not her sense of race but her gender awareness and strength as a woman. Reyna learned by example as she watched her mother become strong, independent, and assertive:

[My mom]...taught us to be responsible people.... When she broke up with my father—I might have been like twelve—she started teaching us how to be really independent and not to rely on anyone. And to take care of yourself and...I think that is why I went off to college.

JMV: Really?

Reyna: Yeah, because she was a stay at home mom and when my dad left she had to go to work because my dad didn't give her any help or support. ...That is what

she has taught us: “Well, you need to work to take care of yourself.... You should go out to college.” ...She started talking about “so you don’t have to rely on a man,” and then she talk[ed] about what had happened to her.

The lesson that passed between the generations of Madrigal women is not about race or ethnicity, but about gender and economic independence. The lesson that Reyna learned was indeed the one her mother intended to relay. Beatrice remarks on how *her mother* instructed her at the time of her divorce: “I fell apart for a week. And then my mother would say, ‘you’ve got to get yourself back on your feet.’ And I did. I didn’t have no income coming in—their father didn’t give me any money. And when he did it was like \$25 for two...what can I do with \$25 for two?” Indeed, the intergenerational lessons these Chicana mothers are passing along are about female endurance, independence, and a mothering strategy that is both strong and caring.

Chicana mothers also coached their sons in how to handle the negative stereotypes with which they are confronted. These mothers were very realistic in the goals of social decorum, good grades, and propriety they established for their children. Tyler Mendoza, a third generation man, refers to his mother’s motivation for him to rebut society’s low expectations:

[She] always pushed school, school, school, school. So I had to do better in school[.] ...C’s were not that good, you get A’s and B’s. C’s meant that you could do better. So, they always pushed from day one that I had to do better in school. I knew I had to try harder.... I had to try harder and prove that I wasn’t one of those dumb lazy Mexicans or the ones that are going to drop out and get somebody pregnant[.]

Tyler’s mothers’ guidance is clearly imbued with an awareness of the negative images of Mexican-origin boys: that they are dumb, lazy high school dropouts who will impregnate

a teenage girl. Tyler's mother strictly counsels him in how to avoid that downhill path: get good grades and disprove negative stereotypes with upright behavior.

Similarly, Tina Acevedo's message to her son Tom about the importance of education is linked with encouraging him to invalidate negative stereotypes by living up to a higher standard. She instructs her son: "Hold your head up high, be on honor roll. Show people what you're made of. The stereotype that we're all dropping out of school or not showing up, that doesn't fit this family. That's not tolerated. We have a standard that we follow." This pragmatic recommendation administered to boys to stay in school reflects Chicana mothers' resistance against prejudiced notions about their Chicano sons. Regarding both daughters and sons, these Chicana mothers proffer practical advice that is both gender and race sensitive and serves to both caution and fortify their children.

◇ *Activism in Schools*

High school aged Mexican Americans complained of being (nearly) trapped in tracking systems. Those who escaped had parents who rigorously supervised their schooling and engaged the school administration when necessary. Seventeen-year-old third generation Andrew Rosenberg refers to the racialized sorting patterns that organize student placement in high school classrooms:

"Oh, he's Mexican—put him in that class." It's really...how it is. It's really bad.... But if you're Mexican and you walk into a class of all white people, it's like—oh, this is the GATE [Gifted and Talented Education] class. I don't belong here. When really a lot of those Mexicans who are in the normal classes should be in the GATE classes. And some of the people who are in GATE classes shouldn't be at all...most of them are just cheating their way through....

Andrew comments on the critical role that his mother's involvement in school activities had on his education:

I think my parents accelerated my education. They put me in a math program when I was a kid, so it made me really strong in math. They had me play sports—soccer. And they had me play instruments—I played piano and saxophone. [I've been] pretty lucky.... My mom was always on the PTA [parent-teacher association]. I feel like I could have just...been pushed to the bottom.

With parents—in particular, a mother—actively overseeing his schooling, Andrew escaped being racially tracked and relegated to remedial classes.

Students' relationships with school administrators mirror the racialized tracking system. Third generation nineteen-year-old Veronica Guzman tells me about how she and her dark-skinned brother have a markedly different relationship with their high school Vice Principal than does their light-skinned, dark-blonde haired sister:

My sister, she's light skinned, she looks American, but she's a Mexican American. The Vice Principal thought she was white. They [the administration] didn't know that my brother and sister and I were related. And they would send information for her in English and for my brother they would send it in Spanish. She's blonde and according to them she's a *guera* [white woman] and he's *mexicano*, Mexican. The vice principal treated her differently because she was a blonde, she was a *guera*. When they found out she was Hispanic—a Mexican—it wasn't the same anymore.

After Veronica's mother, Gloria, spoke to the principal the situation improved. Gloria engaged in her children's school affairs with confidence and pride: "I am there because my mother could not be there because of her not knowing English." Her own immigrant mother's language deficit and inability to advocate on her behalf during her schooling incites Gloria to vigorously monitor and, when necessary, intervene in her children's education.

Mothering as activism in schools is one distinct way that these mothers help their children navigate racialized social institutions. These Chicana mothers see a role for themselves as advocates for their children in a primary U.S. institution in which they are embedded—schools. These mothers attempt to counteract institutional prejudice and discrimination by “cultivating” (Lareau 2003) or defending their children. Next we move on to how Chicanas mother in the domestic arena.

◇ *Mothers as Teachers of Culture*

Mothers are active at mothering both in public and private spaces. Turning from the public to the domestic, this section examines mothers as teachers of culture. Mothers are teachers or “carriers” of culture in two chief arenas: ethnic traditions and gender ideologies and roles. “Women are often constructed as the cultural symbols of the collectivity, of its boundaries, as carriers of the collectivity’s ‘honor’ and as its intergenerational reproducers of culture” (Yuval-Davis 1997, 67). In fact, women carry a particular ‘burden of representation’ (Yuval-Davis 1997, 45) as symbolic bearers of collective identity. As such, mothers are imagined to literally and figuratively “reproduce” cultures.

Chicana mothers see themselves as instrumental in protecting, passing on, and changing culture. They preserve and transmit cultural elements they appreciate and yet they see a responsibility to change those elements they find troubling, such as unequal gender roles (machismo, patriarchy, or the “cult of masculinity”). Cultural elements Chicana mothers want to retain include the value of family, a sense of roots or heritage, Mexican cuisine, and Catholicism.

Gloria Guzman: “We come from a mariachi background. I noticed that Veronica was a natural dancer. [Veronica danced Ballet Folklórico—traditional Mexican dancing—for years.] ...I did that too. My [grandmother], even though she was seventy, eighty, ninety, would dance folklórico. She would dance Jarabe Tapatío with my grandpa. [I want my children to] remember where they come from and not to forget who they are. And to speak Spanish.”

Adele Mendoza: “Mostly we’d be with family celebrating Christmas, holidays, birthdays, weddings, with aunts and uncles. We try to keep that going. The...tradition I carried on was probably the tamales. We do that every year. My mom taught me so we try to keep the family [making tamales for Christmas] at least one day out of the year.”

Family, food, music, and dance all come across strongly in the narratives of Chicana mothers. Stay-at-home mothers have more time to spend actively “cultivating” their children than do working mothers and fathers. Yolanda Segura had the “luxury of being home” with her children while her Puerto Rican husband worked full-time. This had the effect of Yolanda actively transmitting more knowledge about Mexican culture to her children than her husband could spend representing Puerto Rican ways:

I love being Mexican.... I love speaking Spanish. I love the culture and the food. And so I’ve passed it on to my [four] girls...and how important family is. My husband is...Puerto Rican-American; he was raised in the United States, very, very *Americano* in his ways. I was able to stay home with our girls so [I’ve passed on] all my traditions. And so they consider themselves *Mexicanas* first before they consider themselves Puerto Ricans. They just don’t know about [Puerto Rican culture] as much as they know about being Mexican....

Racial pride is a subtext of these narratives that promote cultural preservation and appreciation. Indeed, instilling in children cultural knowledge and a sense of racial pride is common among minority parents of various races (Feagin and Sikes 1994).

Motivated by racial pride, Elena Vargas cites not only cultural elements she wants retained but also reminds her offspring that much of the American Southwest was part of Mexico before the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed in 1848. Elena remarks:

[I want] people [to] remember to keep speaking Spanish. To be proud of their culture and how it all started—that we were all Indians in the beginning in Mexico...how we lived here in California, this was our place.... And to remember...the importance of the family—that’s more important than things and accomplishments.... It’s so important to keep that family thing going and not forgetting where you came from. Keep speaking Spanish and buying Mexican food and making it at home and having trinkets and mementoes around and having pictures of your grandparents and pictures of Mexico.... Just keep that tradition going and not forgetting where your roots come from.

More explicitly, Elaine Morelos counsels her son Lance on the subject of racial pride.

Her advice is not connected with the historical legacy of Mexicans in the U.S. Southwest that predate the annexation of those states; rather, her guidance is about fending off racial discrimination. Lance, whose natal family is “very proud” of their Mexican heritage, recalls his mother’s pragmatic words:

My mom used to say, “Everybody’s shit stinks. Nobody is better than anybody else. And you remember that.” I used to say, “Mexican? Oh, the upper-echelon?” I used to say that all the time when I was in high school and college. “Mexican? Oh, the upper-echelon?” And it used to kind of off-set people. Because if people saw that you were proud of your heritage, they’d let you alone.

As “symbolic center[s] of the...household” (Gillis 1997, 236), Chicana mothers are concerned with representing and continuing Mexican culture. As such, they select cultural elements they find particularly meaningful and actively use them in their domestic life and attempt to pass them on to the next generation.

Mothers not only transmit “ethnic” culture, for they also transmit “gender” culture (Chodorow 1978). We see this in the earlier section on “gendered encouragement” where Chicana mothers attempt to balance gender power dynamics by especially encouraging their daughters in academic pursuits and consistently emboldening their sons to disprove deleterious stereotypes. Chicana mothers, through words and behavior, instruct their

children on gender issues. Yolanda Segura teaches her children about racial diversity and challenges standard Eurocentric notions of beauty:

I remember reading books to [my girls]...the traditional classics [like] Snow White. I would call it Snow Brown and I would [say] she lived in Mexico.... Whenever we would play Barbies, it would be "I'm Teresa, *no hablo* English [I don't speak English.]" I always told my girls, "Look it how beautiful you are. Your color.... Be proud of who you are...." I would see billboards and it would be [white] models. I would tell my girls "I know no one that looks like that...this is the real world. This is what we look like."

Part of Yolanda's mission as a mother is to socialize her girls to be proud of their racial and cultural heritage and to be critical of mainstream beauty ideals that do not reflect their own image.

While Yolanda was rearing four daughters with the goal of positive self-images, twenty-eight year old Araceli Treviño was raising her two sons with the goal of dismantling strict gender roles. She calls herself a "non-traditional woman in a Mexican family," adding, "I don't cook." Araceli is trying to teach her two sons to be part of a vanguard of youth who will dismantle machismo:

I don't want [my boys] to have the whole macho mentality.... I don't think there is anything wrong with having a boy that is really sensitive. I get frowned upon from so many Mexican guys that I hang out with. "He's going to be a sissy or he's going to be gay." And I'm like, "just because he's sensitive or just because he doesn't want to tackle you doesn't necessarily mean gay." I want them to know that it's okay to own up to their feelings; it's okay to cry and it's okay to be sad....

Araceli is trying to equalize "feeling rules" (Hochschild 2003) and change masculine socialization through her androgynous childrearing techniques (Beauvoir 1978; O'Reilly 2004).

Conclusion

Despite marked power asymmetries, Chicana mothers can counteract the racializing messages of public discourse and institutions. Mothers are profoundly important in shaping their children's experiences and understandings of race, ethnicity, and gender. Further, mothering strategies often reflect mothers' own experiences in their respective social locations and natal family systems.

The families discussed here all experienced significant upward mobility over the three generations interviewed, beginning with the immigrants. The second generation Chicana women who are the focus of this chapter all came from poor families. This disadvantaged socioeconomic status in combination with growing up in a particular historical moment translates to having been socialized by parents who were operating in a different context and with different priorities. As with poor families more generally, the priority of the immigrant generation was to address the daily needs of their families (Hill 2005, 152). Once the second generation achieved middle class status (as did all women described here), their tactics for personal, familial, and social advancement changed. No longer overwhelmed by economic needs, these Chicana mothers are liberated to turn their attention to challenging negative stereotypes, being activists on the part of their children, retaining cultural traditions, and endorsing anti-racist and anti-masculinist discourse and practice.

My findings add to Lareau's (2003) assessment that her middle class respondents displayed a "concerted cultivation" logic of child-rearing wherein parents actively "develop" their children, often by utilizing parent-child conversations. Emphasizing the race and gender dimensions, Chicana mothers train their children to challenge negative

stereotypes through the mothering techniques of “gendered encouragement” and “activism.” Furthermore, mothers “teach culture” by transmitting—and sometimes revising—ethnic traditions and gender ideologies. These Chicanas use three primary mothering strategies that bridge public and domestic spheres in order to carefully chart a productive and ethnically-aware course into adulthood for their offspring. While commitment to preserving ethnic traditions varies, Chicana mothers are teaching lessons about how ethnic background is an important dimension of social life, at the very least because of how their children are likely to be perceived and treated.

As with the change in racial ideologies, gender ideologies in the U.S. have also changed in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, now offering rhetoric of gender equality. Chicana mothers consider their personal background, social context, and historical context—or “interpretive backdrop” (Vasquez 2005)—as they fashion their mothering strategies. Acutely aware of their own parents stifling their educational opportunities and conscious of how Mexican-origin men are anticipated to fail in numerous aspects, these mothers responded with “gendered encouragement,” supporting their children in gender-specific ways and teaching them to far exceed low expectations. Thus, we see Chicana mothers promote more egalitarian gender ideologies to both sons and daughters. As “families are often the linchpin of gender inequality” (Hill 2005, 152) with changing mothering styles underway we may be in the midst of a sea-change where Mexican American youth of both sexes are socialized with goals of gender parity, racial equality, and educational achievement in mind.

Notes

ⁱ I use Mexican American and Chicano/a interchangeably.

ⁱⁱ Whether Mexican Americans, or Latinos generally, are a race or an ethnic group is a fraught question in the social sciences, politics, and within the group itself. I use “race” namely because Latinos are often treated as a separate racial category and my interviewees referred to their experience as one of a subordinated racial group rather than one that is merely distinguished by ethnicity or culture.

