
Tortillas in the Shape of the United States

Marriage and the Families We Choose

Marriage is a central component of assimilation. Marriage patterns, in particular frequency of intermarriage, are a basic yardstick used to measure assimilation. Marriage has historically been understood as a way to preserve or alter the racial makeup of society. Antimiscegenation laws that banned interracial marriage and interracial sex were enforced until ruled unconstitutional in the 1967 Supreme Court decision *Loving v. Virginia*. “Anti-miscegenation laws . . . were both a response to increased immigration from Asia [and Latin America] and a reflection of persistent concerns regarding racial purity and the nature of American citizenship” (Sohoni 2007: 587). While marriage patterns have been the subject of heated popular debate and legal battles, we know less about the role marriage plays in the subjective experience of race among the marital partners and their children, which is the subject of this chapter.

Intermarriage¹ is a measurement of social distance between groups in that it is a legally recognized union that codifies a socially sanctioned heterosexual family, including children who may be adopted or born into the family. Intermarriage of majority and minority group members signals acceptance of an out-group (Bean and Stevens 2003: 152; Rosenfeld 2002). Marriage in general and intermarriage in particular are traditionally viewed as indicators of assimilation. I argue that marriage is particularly important because it can motivate either thinned attachment or cultural maintenance tendencies. Rather than merely be seen as an indicator of an outcome (assimilation), marriage should rightfully be viewed as a factor that drives the direction and speed of assimilation. This chapter asks, How does marriage—both within and outside of the Latino group²—contribute to the process of Mexican-origin people’s integration into U.S. society? In other words, how does marriage

influence ethnic culture retention, transmission, and change? I argue that marriage (that is, whether one marries a coethnic or a non-Hispanic white)³ heavily influences the process of assimilation.

Considering the complex and strong force that marriage exerts on the ethnic culture of families and its multigenerational ramifications, marriage may best be viewed as a “bump” in “bumpy-line” assimilation. Herbert Gans (1992a: 44) argued for “replac[ing] what has often been described as straight line theory with bumpy line theory, the bumps representing various kinds of adaptations to changing circumstances—and with the line having no predictable end.” As will be uncovered in this chapter, marriage is a critical juncture that precipitates both redirections and recommitments to American and Mexican cultures. As families consider “what kind of families they will be” at the point of marriage and cohabitation, we can see how marriage is highly imbricated in ethnic culture, identity, and assimilation.

Recall that in the two previous chapters a family with intermarriage at the second generation was highlighted as a prime example of thinned attachment whereas a family with an intramarriage at the second generation was used to illustrate cultural maintenance. I chose those families because they demonstrate key features of each typology and because they were representative of other families in their respective incorporation trajectories. Marriage is a key factor in shaping thinned attachment and cultural maintenance outcomes.

The table below illustrates the marriage patterns of the second-generation Mexican American cohort. All first-generation immigrants in my study married either Mexican nationals or Mexican Americans. As we saw in chapters 2 and 3, parents raise their children with varying degrees of commitment to their ethnic heritage, and the children accumulate their own formative experiences as they grow to adulthood. Due to heightened structural and spatial integration, marriage in the second generation is increasingly with the dominant racial group. Population studies have found that intermarriage rates rise with each generation (Bean and Stevens 2003; Murguía 1982; Schoen, Nelson, and Collins 1977), Mexicans most commonly intermarrying with whites (Jiménez 2004). The number of intermarriages between Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites is on the rise, from 527,000 in 1970 to 1.4 million in 2000 (Rosenfeld 2009: 70).

We see from table 4.1 that there is a clear pattern of in-marriage for both men and women, particularly for those who are enacting cultural maintenance. Out-marriage was the less common option, with all but one of those people on a thinned attachment course. While intermarriage increases with each generation, this process is slow, with nearly two-thirds

TABLE 4.1
Second-Generation Marital Patterns by Thinned Attachment and Cultural Maintenance Lifestyles and Gender

	<i>Thinned Attachment</i>		<i>Cultural Maintenance</i>	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
In-Marry (Endogamy)	1	5	11	8
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Out-Marry (Exogamy)	1	2	-0-	1

* Data from one second-generation respondent (female) is missing.

of fourth-generation Mexican Americans marrying endogamously (Telles and Ortiz 2009: 265).

Marriage is a useful barometer of integration, especially when we view “intermarriage patterns as *reflecting* and *generating* processes of incorporation” (Bean and Stevens 2003: 196, my emphasis). Understanding marriage as an entryway to the incorporation patterns I have identified (thinned attachment or cultural maintenance) hinges on viewing marriage as an input or a cause. However, marriage or marital choice is also an effect in that “more than likely, intermarriage is selective of those who are already more assimilated” (Telles and Ortiz 2009: 281). For instance, Chicanos most likely to marry Anglos were those with anglicized forenames (John instead of Juan, Martha instead of Marta) (Murguía 1982). Since identities and relationships are dynamic, gender ideologies, cultural toolkits, and religion can both influence a marital choice *and* be an outgrowth of a marital choice. In-marriage has consequences for language, cultural behaviors, religion, racial self-titles, and phenotype that predispose married couples and their offspring toward a cultural maintenance pathway. These same factors, if valued highly, may predispose an individual to select a spouse who mirrors him or her on these racial and cultural elements. The same logic applies to out-marriage and the (preexisting or subsequent) tendency toward thinned attachment. In this way, marriage is best viewed as a feedback loop, a part in a motor that perpetuates (or changes) cycles of thinned attachment or cultural maintenance. However, marital choice does not strictly determine a family’s incorporation trajectory, or vice versa, as marriage and integration processes are complex. A constellation of factors can influence the incorporation pathway and racial identity development of a family, yet marriage is among the most influential.

Marriage is a gateway to assimilation trajectories. As a critical juncture in people's lives, marriage is a decisive point of change. Marriage partners will either match or disagree with one's own ethnic background and/or cultural commitments. The ethnic culture that a marital partner brings into the home will have consequences for the way ethnic identities and attachments will be defined and the way everyday life will be organized. Marriage marks a key moment of negotiation and redefinition of family life as a couple embarks upon "settling down," an identity-defining exercise in which they decide what their adulthood will look like and consider (and practice) how they will rear children. Certainly, a marriage decision does not restrict one to a particular cultural life course, but it does influence the way one arranges one's life and teaches one's offspring.

Family ideologies and teachings tend to be envisioned as moving one way "down" the generational ladder from parents to children. The parent-child nexus is the most frequent site for storytelling that teaches the younger generation (Thorne 2000: 54). Yet, the passage of didactic teaching is not limited to a one-way flow from parent to child, teacher to pupil (Mannheim 1936). The accumulated experiences of the younger generation, if communicated to the older generation, can in fact alter the older generation's thoughts and actions. As an example, a younger generation's marital choice may revivify ethnic attachments that, in turn, may work their way "up" the generational chain and influence older generations' cultural practices.

In this chapter I first consider how intramarriage with a fellow coethnic tends to result in ethnic re-identification or cultural resurgence. These are deeply gendered processes in which women predominantly reported an inclination to learn about their native culture—a culture shared with their marital partner. This process of cultural relearning affects the life of the re-identified wife/mother as well as the lives of her children, her spouse, and, surprisingly, her parent(s). This renewed cultural commitment and learning can stall cultural assimilation without inhibiting structural assimilation. Next, I discuss how the racial/ethnic background of a marital partner and his/her ideology and general cultural orientation impact Mexican American and non-Hispanic white intermarriage relationships. Incorporation patterns and racial identity formation are such complex processes that marital partner is influential but not deterministic. Finally, the concluding section argues in favor of a "bumpy-line assimilation" that acknowledges the presence of detours, branches, and reversals on the road of assimilation—a road without a predestined or final destination.

Moving up the Generational Ladder: Intramariage and Cultural Resurgence

Beatrice Madrigal, a 62-year-old second-generation woman, lived behind a meat packing plant in southern California where two of her aunts worked when she was young. Beatrice's mother was born in the United States and her father came over the border with his family with legal papers in 1926 when he was in sixth grade. A divorced mother of two daughters, Beatrice is on an assimilationist pathway despite the fact that she lives in a predominantly Mexican town. While she is conversant in Spanish and fluent in English, she feels that her cultural background is empty and insignificant. She remarks that, in terms of Mexican culture, she "[has] nothing to pass on to [her] kids." Indeed, her parents did not encourage her to retain Mexican traditions: "[My mother] would say, 'if you want to learn how to play castanets, if you want to learn how to do folklórico, then that would be fine.' But she didn't say, 'we come from here, this is our ancestry.' No, no, none of that." Beatrice's parents focused on financially providing for the family and were indifferent about passing on an ethnic culture. They did not talk about life in Mexico because they relocated to the United States in order to have a better life, and focusing on a prior era in Mexico diverted their attention from "making it" in the United States.

Like all immigrants I interviewed, Beatrice's parents came to the United States in order to capitalize on the greater opportunities and to build a better life for their children. Holding on to the American Dream of upward mobility, Beatrice's parents bought a house because they saw home ownership as the capstone of middle-class achievement. Her motto to her two daughters was, "Buy a house, buy a house, buy a house," which they both succeeded in doing. Educational achievement is also part of the American Dream; both of Beatrice's daughters graduated from college and one went on to law school. Beatrice has worked at the same elementary school—currently as a schoolyard monitor—for twenty-two years. Displaying her hearty work ethic, she wants to achieve upward mobility for herself and her family without government aid: "We're proud Mexicans, we don't want handouts."

Similar to Tamara Rosenberg in chapter 2, Beatrice explicitly did not want to marry a Mexican because she wanted to avoid the patriarchal tendencies that she saw in the Mexican community. Casting aside these intentions (and probably also finding her choices restricted because of living in a largely Mexican town), she ended up marrying a Mexican man. However, he eventually left her for another woman. Beatrice reflects,

BEATRICE: I wasn't looking to marry in the culture. I wanted somebody not in the culture.

JMV: How come?

BEATRICE: Because of a few things I'd seen, I said, "Gee, if I marry into the culture, this is the way it's going to be." [The] father has the say, that father is the law . . . it doesn't make a difference what [the] mom says. When I saw [that] happened [at his] house I said, "Oh, I don't think I want to marry a Mexican." What happened with his parents, he also followed that pattern. It's like, "Wait on me, I come first." Oh my god, what did I do? When I married my husband and started having my family, he wanted his plates first and then my kids. He played that macho "me first."

JMV: What were some of the things you wanted to avoid when you were in your not wanting to marry a Mexican phase?

BEATRICE: I tried to avoid the demanding man: "Do this." I used to see the man not letting the woman work. Why not? Because she's supposed to be home taking care of the kids. What happens if you don't have any kids? Then stay home and take care of the house. Oh God. [A friend] said, "Just go with your feelings, with the flow." Well, the flow got me a Mexican. What I didn't want to get into, I got into.

Despite her intention to out-marry, Beatrice married a Mexican man who only confirmed her fears of male domination and female subordination. In spite of her marriage with a coethnic, she retained her assimilationist sentiments, never teaching her children Spanish or imparting Mexican traditions.

Reyna, Beatrice's 35-year-old daughter, ties the origins of her mother's assimilationist tendencies to her grandmother's acculturation goals and perceived discrimination. Reyna comments,

My grandparents probably said, "I want my daughter to do well in the United States and we need to become more Americanized." And so I think my mom learned that from my grandparents. . . . [And] because of the discrimination that occurred . . . in the 1950s my mom dropped off her cultural values. . . . She didn't want me to experience [discrimination] so I think that's why she said, "I'm going to try and acculturate my daughters as much as I can."

As a protective move against racism, Beatrice raised Reyna without the trappings of Mexican culture. Reyna believes that her mother raised her speaking English in the home because of her own experience of discrimination based on speaking Spanish in school:

Spanish is [my mom's] first language and they held her back [in school] and she said they would be scolded if they spoke Spanish [in class]. They sent letters home to my grandmother saying, "Try not to [speak Spanish], your child needs to learn English." And so my mom probably thought, "I don't want my children to grow up like that. I want them to . . . be like everyone else." So I think that is why she didn't [teach] us Spanish.

Reyna's parents did not teach her Mexican culture. Reyna considers:

Religion—which is important to a lot of Mexican families—we didn't practice a lot of traditional Mexican holidays that deal with Catholicism, like the day of the Virgin of Guadalupe [patron saint of Mexico]. . . . My mother-in-law [celebrates] Mexican holidays that are tied in with Catholicism. My parents didn't teach any of that to us. What else did they teach us? Nothing. Mariachi music? No. . . . The food became more Americanized. . . . They didn't know about Mexican history [or] Chicano history . . . so they didn't teach any of that to us.

The single cultural ritual Reyna recalled engaging in was making tamales at Christmastime. Rather than pass on language skills or cultural knowledge, Beatrice instilled the importance of family in her daughters, a value she claims as distinctive but that, in reality, is one not solely prized by Mexicans. When I asked Reyna what her mother taught her about what it meant to be Mexican American, she cited the emphasis on family: "What my parents taught me about being Mexican wasn't so much about the food you eat or . . . the history of Mexico. They taught us that family is really important . . . ; family is going to be there for you. Friends come and go but your family doesn't."

Lacking Mexican-specific cultural moorings intensified Reyna's sense of living between two worlds: "I have no identity. I'm in between. I don't fit here and I don't fit in either culture. So I'm looking for something." She filled this void by seeking out Mexican cultural knowledge and relationships: "I'm just trying to recapture everything. Go back to where my grandparents came [from]." Reyna, who was not raised speaking Spanish and is not conversant in the language, encountered Mexican immigrant students in college, some of whom chided her for not speaking Spanish well and, on that basis, questioned her ethnic authenticity (see Vasquez and Wetzel 2009). Interactions with first-generation Mexicans her own age cut both ways: while they sometimes drove a wedge between herself and more recent arrivals, interactions also provided opportunities to learn more about her ancestral culture.

Reyna “recaptured” a meaningful ethnic identity by marrying a Mexican national. She met her husband, Rudy, in college in southern California. Rudy immigrated to the United States with his family when he was eight years old. Like most respondents who married other Mexican-origin people, Reyna felt cultural comfort with her partner and relished the opportunity to learn more about her background through him. Because of her internal motivation to “recapture everything,” it was very important for Reyna to marry within her ethnic culture. Marriage to Rudy reinvigorated Reyna’s sense of Mexican identity, supplied her with practical knowledge about Mexican food preparation and traditions, and provided a sense of roots.

Yet gender ideologies and national context complicate this picture. While there is intranational variation in gender ideologies and practices (Barajas and Ramirez 2007), Mexico is generally understood to be more patriarchal than the United States. The level of a society’s industrialization has consequences for gender egalitarianism; egalitarian attitudes toward women are more widespread in postindustrial societies than in less modernized countries. Thus, a move from Mexico to the United States yields changes in attitudes, mores, and laws that reflect socioeconomic development and cultural modernization, including increased gender equality (Inglehart and Norris 2003; Norris and Inglehart 2001). Within multigenerational families that experienced a migration from Mexico, “traditional gender attitudes lessen with generation-since-immigration and from parents to the children” (Telles and Ortiz 2009: 205–6).

For all that Reyna learns from her husband’s Mexican family, her life is conditioned by America’s egalitarian gender ideals, which are generally more democratic than those predominant in Mexico. Reyna was born and raised in this national context, and Rudy, while born in Mexico, spent most of his youth and young adulthood in the United States.⁴ Because he was raised primarily in the United States, Rudy’s gender ideals were heavily influenced by his new country of residence. Indeed, international migration has been shown to refashion gender ideologies and gender strategies among adult men and women alike (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Smith 2006b) but arguably has an even greater impact among youth still in their formative years.

Like national context, the passage of time and the period into which generations are born alter gender norms. Reyna, a 35-year-old, third-generation Mexican American woman, was raised in a U.S. context that had already experienced first- and second-wave feminism. Given this sociopolitical environment, it was “natural” and socially acceptable (and even promoted) for her to pursue an education and a profession. Contrast this with the gender

expectations of Rudy's older Mexican parents. Reyna's interactions with her parents-in-law are complicated due to their conflicting gender ideologies and expectations, which are conditioned both by generation and by national context.

Specifically, Reyna's Mexican-national in-laws expect her to enact an ideal of traditional womanhood (subservience and service to men), a gender outlook and practice that she does not normally embrace. They expect her to behave according to a submissive female role that the traditional patriarchal family system assigns to her. Although she and Rudy's gender strategies correspond and are relatively egalitarian, she feels she is negatively evaluated by her husband's family and constrained by their gender rules. In direct opposition to the gendered and racialized expectations of a Mexican-origin woman, Reyna refuses to serve her father-in-law dinner first or to make herself invisible in the kitchen at family gatherings. While she is happy with the role she has outfitted for herself on an everyday basis with her marital family—she is a college-educated wife, mother, and career woman—when that role is set in relief against traditional patriarchal expectations, she becomes unnerved, believing that her in-laws think she is an “oddball” for being an “aggressive working woman.” Reyna explains her position and feelings:

Another uncomfortable experience as a woman has been—I love my husband's family—but it's a little uncomfortable there because I don't fit the typical . . . I don't want to say the typical Mexican woman from Mexico. . . . There's some [women] that do have careers but from where [Rudy's] family is from, a poor community, a little *puebla* [town], I can't identify with them at all. . . . We don't have a lot of similarities. . . . The women are very passive . . . they're very dependent on the man and I'm not used to that.

In my family you have potluck [parties] because nobody should have to be stuck in the kitchen cooking. Men and women mingle. And in my husband's family, women are in the kitchen and the men are outside. And when the women are finished cooking, they feed the men and they stay in a group. Why are the men over here and the women over here and that's the whole night of the party? And I don't understand that; I just don't like it. Things [like] that do get me very upset and I don't want to say anything because that is the way they are raised and it works for them. Men will tell their wives, “Get me this, get me that.” . . . Why can't you just get up yourself? And my father-in-law, I love him to death but he's very *macho*. . . . I feel uncomfortable—he's always telling his wife what to do and “get this for me.”

Reyna contrasts her social position and gender ideologies with those of women and men where Rudy's family comes from. As a U.S.-born, third-generation Mexican American working mother of two children, Reyna has far more progressive gender ideologies than her in-laws. These conflicting gender ideologies and practices put Reyna in a tricky position as she tries to remain true to herself while also wanting to be accepted by her husband's family. Reyna prefaces the following vignette by telling me that she and her husband are egalitarian when it comes to who serves whom at the dinner table—either they will serve themselves or they take turns serving each other, offering to replenish each other's plates if one gets up for a second serving. Reyna sketches a picture of clashing gender roles and expectations when she is with her parents-in-law:

One time we were at a barbeque and the food was right here and [my father-in-law] was sitting right here and everybody got up and fed themselves. My father-in-law was sitting there . . . and sitting, and sitting. My mother-in-law asked him what's wrong, and he goes, "Who's going to feed me?" And then my mother-in-law said, "Your daughter-in-law." And I was sitting next to my father-in-law and I was all, "The food is right there." And he didn't even look at me. . . . That just makes me uncomfortable. And so as a woman I just feel they expect women to act a certain way and I don't do it so it's uncomfortable to me. A lot of times I want to stand up for the women.

Raised in a post-second wave feminist sociopolitical environment in the United States, Reyna asserts her equality, even among her husband's natal family, which adheres to far more traditional gender roles than she does. Reyna's father-in-law, who has much to gain from enforcing traditional gendered power relations, polices her conduct and tests her. He tries to publicly shame Reyna by showing how she does not submit to the gendered rules he thinks suitable for a Mexican-origin woman. However, all he succeeds in doing is to make Reyna uncomfortable and demonstrate that she is a different kind of Mexican-origin woman than those who typically surround him. As this illustration makes clear, there are multiple ways one can "be" a Mexican-origin woman, and this social location is invariably influenced by nation of birth, upbringing, generation in the United States, age, class status, education, and employment status.

Reyna "goes back" to her ancestral culture through her husband and his immediate family members, yet this process includes disputes over gender

roles. All of Rudy's natal family members are Mexican nationals and have transported Mexican customs, beliefs, and ideals with them to their homes in East Los Angeles. Reyna credits her husband with fostering her journey of "return":

When I met [my husband] in college . . . he'd [say], "You never had this?" I would tell him the way my mom made it and he would say, "That's not the real way. Come to my house." And so I would visit him and his mom would cook . . . and share what my culture was really about. They would invite me to *posadas* [Christmas festivals]. Those were good experiences.

Reyna constantly learned about her heritage through attending family gatherings with her husband. Through going to a baptism on a ranch in the San Bernadino area where they had a rodeo, she learned a bit about her husband's early life on a ranch and the lifestyle he had in Mexico.

Reyna's desire to fill the void of her cultural knowledge was so strong that she actively sought to marry a Mexican. Unlike some who saw Mexican culture as containing negative elements to avoid, by marrying a coethnic Reyna saw an opportunity to (re)learn positive cultural features that she felt were woefully absent in her life. Reyna articulates her long-standing desire for intramarriage:

I think I knew that I would always marry someone of my culture because I knew we had to have commonalities. . . . My husband knew about certain music . . . or whatever and he could relate to this area. After I took the Chicano studies class is when I said I want to marry someone [Mexican]. Especially someone that had an interest in their culture. He's from Mexico and that is what I want to learn about—to know my culture—so he could help me. He could share some things about Mexico, what I was missing. You know, the food, the history. And just us being in MEChA [a Mexican American/Chicano student organization] too . . . we had the same ideals.

By marrying Rudy, Reyna attempted to "recapture" Mexican identity for herself. Now she enacts Mexican practices in order to pass them on to her children: "I try and be around people that can teach me and so then I could teach my children. If I don't, they'll just forget who they are or who their grandparents were or how we got here." With the help of her husband, Reyna is reviving Mexican traditions and the use of Spanish in her children, the fourth generation. Reyna discusses what she wishes to transmit to her children:

I would like to teach them everything that I had learned in my Chicano studies class. . . . I would like for them to learn Spanish. My husband was speaking to them but because his friends speak English and I speak English . . . they prefer English. . . . I would like them to know about cooking certain foods but mostly about the history . . . their ancestors, even up to the Mayans and the Aztecs.

As a mother, Reyna is concerned with raising her children with the cultural knowledge that she lacked as a child but that she felt was important to her identity.

As the Madrigal family illustrates so well, ethnic re-identification may have the consequence of stalling or even reversing acculturation processes. It is not coincidental that Reyna's "retraditionalization," or study and adoption of cultural practices, followed the "symbolic moment" of marrying her Mexican national husband (Kelly and Nagel 2002: 276, 280). If "symbolic moments" . . . provide the impetus, emotional power and motivation for individuals to begin a journey of ethnic re-identification," Reyna's marriage to Rudy certainly qualifies as such a moment (Kelly and Nagel 2002: 282). This critical juncture that prompted ethnic re-identification also reinvigorated ethnic traditions in generations both younger and older than Reyna. The "retraditionalization" that affects Reyna, her mother, her daughters, and perhaps even her husband, keeps Mexican traditions alive in a way that wholesale assimilation would not support. As Kelly and Nagel (2002: 277) found among Lithuanian Americans and Native Americans, "ethnic re-identification can slow [assimilation] by injecting resources, energy and meaning into ethnic institutions, practices and affiliations."

Individual ethnic renewal involves "matters of personal identity and the groups with whom one identifies and associates" and may be motivated "during the course of bringing up and socializing children" (Nagel 1996). A person who was not previously ethnically identified can experience a surge of interest in acquiring knowledge for the purpose of rearing children. Nagel (1996) refers to this as "reverse cultural transmission" or "reculturation," where "the passing on of family history and traditions to one's offspring can prompt a non-ethnically-identified parent to learn about his or her ethnic ancestry and take on a new ethnic self-awareness." Desiring to teach their children about their ethnic roots motivates these parents to return to or rediscover their ethnic ancestral heritage. This process of becoming more ethnic is inspired by the younger generation in that parents desire to provide a refurbished and stronger ethnic identity than they themselves had in their youth.

It is typical to think about passage of knowledge “down” the generational ladder from parent to child, yet the two-way dynamism of family interactions challenges us to consider the effects that the junior generation has on the senior one. We infrequently consider the cultural knowledge that moves “up” the generational ladder from child to parent. Through her marriage to a Mexican national, Reyna not only restored her knowledge of Mexican culture and equipped herself to transmit this knowledge to her children but passed this on to her mother as well. Reyna’s mother, Beatrice, readily admits learning Mexican cooking fundamentals from her daughter’s mother-in-law. Beatrice comments on how she learned how to cook Mexican food from both her mother-in-law and her daughter’s mother-in-law:

When I married I didn’t know much about cooking. I learned [how to make tortillas] from my husband’s mother. . . . They looked like the shape of the United States, but they were edible. My mother never did that. . . . I’m gradually going back to the way my ancestors cooked. . . . I don’t know how that kicked in. Maybe that’s part of my Mexican coming out: make tortillas, tamales, *taquitos*, or *horchata*. I learned from Rudy’s mom because I didn’t know how to make *horchata*. It’s her that’s helping me go back and do it the way my ancestors did it. . . . When my mother passed away I thought, “Oh God, who’s going to make tamales?” . . . Part of me, that Mexican part, wants to be that Mexican, I don’t want to lose it. I felt I was getting too Americanized. . . . Being around Rudy’s mother—she’s from Mexico and became a citizen—how she cooked didn’t change, she still has that technique. She stretches the tortilla like this, then she throws it, then she turns it [demonstrates with hand motions]. I’m learning through her the Mexican way.

This passage illustrates the desire to learn traditional ways when one realizes that they are at risk of dying out when an older generation passes away. Instead of succumbing, Beatrice actively worked to acquire customary ways of cooking by seeking instruction from her daughter’s mother-in-law. In this way, culture not only moves “down” through generations but laterally through marital partnerships and then “up” through generations. Incidentally, as Beatrice undergoes this elective ethnic renewal or “retraditionalization,” her point of reference remains the United States, as is evident in her quip that her homemade tortillas come out in the shape of the United States—her American hands produced imperfectly shaped but edible tortillas, a hallmark Mexican food staple.

Women, far more than men, reengaged with Mexican culture in adulthood, often in connection with marrying a Mexican national or Mexican American. It is revealing that young adult women (engaged or newly married) more often described a willful reconnection with Mexican culture. Women are traditionally viewed as carriers of culture. Women, imagined as wives, mothers, and keepers of traditions, carry a particular “burden of representation” (Yuval-Davis 1997: 45). A number of married and engaged women strengthened their attachment to Mexican culture upon marriage with a Latino man or upon bearing children.

Twenty-five-year-old, third-generation Samantha Diaz deepened her connection to Mexican culture after beginning a relationship with her Mexican American fiancé, Roberto. While Roberto is also third-generation Mexican American, he maintained Mexican culture more strongly in his life than had Samantha. Samantha highlights how her relationship with Roberto marked a turning point in her cultural life: “For me, it just makes things a lot simpler . . . [to have found] someone of the same race and same religion.” Samantha continues to explain how her bond to her Mexican background has changed due to her relationship with her fiancé:

SAMANTHA: Another landmark that had to do with race was when I started seeing my fiancé. I dated white boys previously and I saw that [Roberto and I] had a connection and I related to him so much more than I had anybody else. I go to family functions with him because I connect: we’re loud, we like to laugh, our religion is the same, [and] our ideas are the same. I really didn’t think it would make that big of a difference but being the same race has a pretty good plus side. If I were to be with someone else, I know it could fit, but there are just certain things with me and my boyfriend that just fit so much better.

JMV: How has your affiliation changed since seeing your Mexican boyfriend?

SAMANTHA: I think it’s changed in that I’ve become more open minded. It’s simple things. I’ll even try salsa when I didn’t like it before. I didn’t like hot food before and that’s typical Mexican—salsa and hot foods go hand in hand. I’m interested in Roberto’s friends and their lives and habits and will ask them about it. I’m interested because I see that that’s what I’m supposed to be, but . . . I’m different still. I’m third generation, I’m pretty far back, and I’m me.

Here we see Samantha become more “typically Mexican” in that she now eats salsa and seeks out information about Mexican cultural ways. Yet, she

struggles with a tension about precisely what a Mexican is “supposed to be.” She acknowledges that thinking about Mexicans as monolithic is fallacious and eclipses the lives of people like her who are later generation. Despite this internal questioning about authenticity, Samantha has clearly used Roberto and his friends as resources who supply her with intimate knowledge about Mexican culture. Significantly, Samantha’s relationship with her fiancé prompted her to learn more about her Mexican background than ever before. No doubt enjoying their cultural similarity for its own sake, Samantha is also, intentionally or unintentionally, positioning herself to fulfill the female-designated role of being a “bearer of culture” as a prospective wife and mother.

Further along in her relationship with a Latino man than Samantha, Yolanda Segura, a 48-year-old second-generation Mexican American woman, is wife to a Puerto Rican man and mother of four daughters. Yolanda had the “luxury of being home” with her children while her husband worked full-time. As a stay-at-home mother, she actively spent time “cultivating” (Lareau 2003) her children as she transmitted Mexican cultural knowledge to them. Yolanda remarks on her childrearing practices:

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. So they consider themselves *Mexicanas* first.

Acutely aware of popular depictions of beauty and the “aesthetics of racism” (Harris 2009: 2), Yolanda teaches her daughters about racial diversity and challenges standard Eurocentric notions of attractiveness:

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 Inglés*. [I don’t speak English.]” I always told my girls, “Look at how beautiful you are. Your color. . . . Be proud of who you are. . . .”

As a mother and “bearer of culture,” Yolanda socializes 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.

Because women are viewed as symbolic bearers of collective identity, Samantha's and Yolanda's heightened identification with Mexican culture during their courtship, marriage, and childbearing years is particularly meaningful in terms of how gendered roles and responsibilities carry forward cultural ties.

Intermarriage: A Critical Juncture Leading to Thinned Attachment?

All of the Mexican immigrants married other Mexican nationals (or, in one case, a Mexican American). The vast majority of second-generation Mexican American men and women I interviewed intramarried. I define intramarriage or in-marriage as union with another Latino, not necessarily a Mexican-origin person specifically, although most spouses belonged to this ethnic group. Of the second-generation interviewees, twelve men and thirteen women married a person within the same ethnic group and only four married outside their ethnic group. Clearly, the propensity of the second generation is in-marriage with a coethnic.⁵ Nationally, "relatively low rates of intermarriage among first generation foreign-born Hispanics have counterbalanced higher rates of intermarriage among native-born Hispanics, particularly among third- and higher-generation Hispanics" (Lee and Edmonston 2006). This amounts to only 8 percent of foreign-born Hispanics intermarrying, compared to 32 percent of the second generation and 57 percent of the third-plus generations (Edmonston, Lee, and Passel 2003). The families I interviewed follow this trend of increasing intermarriage over the generations.

In the limited circumstances where out-marriage occurred in the second and third generations, it is a decidedly gendered phenomenon. In both the second and third generations three men and one woman (for a total of six men and two women) out-married with non-Hispanic whites. Aside from the Montes-Rosenberg family previously discussed in chapter 2, Timoteo Ponce, Albert Schultz, and Milo Contreras were the second-generation Mexican American men who out-married with non-Hispanic white women. This section discusses how they and their third-generation children, Gabriel Ponce, Rex Schultz, and Renata Contreras, move from cultural maintenance in orientation to increasingly thinned attachment.

While intramarriage with a Latino/a typically leads to high incidence of cultural maintenance and intermarriage with a non-Hispanic white fosters thinned attachment, marriage does not automatically *determine* the cultural allegiances and practices of the married generation and their offspring so

much as *influence* them. Ideology plays a large role in how strongly or weakly parents attempt to instill a sense of Mexican culture in their children and how receptive the younger generation is to this message. Examining the second and third generations of the intermarried Ponce, Schultz, and Contreras families demonstrates that they range from a cultural maintenance inclination (Ponce family) to a thinned attachment and symbolic ethnicity stance (Schultz family) to active distancing from patriarchal elements of the Mexican community (Contreras family).

Timoteo and Gabriel (Gabe) Ponce are part of a large Mexican family with relatives living in close proximity. This closeness feeds Gabe's Mexican identity. Gabe maintains his Mexican culture in his ideology of multiculturalism, diversity, and desire for minority political representation. Yet, in practice, he engages few traditions outside of claiming a "Mexican American" title. Drawing on a commonsense understanding of marriage as a way to branch toward or away from one's ethnic background, Gabe expresses a desire to "return" to his ethnicity through marriage with a coethnic.

Gabe's father, second-generation Timoteo Ponce, always "remembers" who he is and where he comes from. As a high school principal, he has successfully assimilated both economically and occupationally. His family has seen a strong three-generation rise in terms of education, occupation, and social mobility and feels that money has been key to his advancement and acceptance. Timoteo's parents were migrant farm workers in the Imperial Valley, following the sugar beet crops for work. Timoteo's natal family "celebrated all the Latino or Mexican traditions . . . we had *quinceñeras* [ceremonial fifteen-year-old birthday parties], *bautismos* [baptisms] . . . , we did the Dieciséis de Septiembre [Mexican independence day] festivals, we did Cinco de Mayo." Timoteo distinguishes himself from Mexican nationals, making it clear that despite his cultural activities he is an American citizen: "I'm very, very Mexican. But I'm not a Mexican from Mexico. I'm a Chicano from California."

I asked Timoteo how integrated into U.S. culture he feels. He responded by immediately noting the resistance to his inclusion that he feels from the mainstream despite his middle-class status:

If I were a different color and had blue eyes and stuff, I'd be a *gabacho* [white guy]. I understand it [the American racial hierarchy] that well. My wife is French-Canadian, so my kids are mixed, if you will. I listen to Mexican music every morning—*cien punto tres*, 100.3, *radio romántico*. We eat Mexican food. But, we also go to the Four Seasons, we go up to the city to plays. We do all that kind of stuff.

In this complex response, Timoteo asserts that he could be totally assimilated except for being racialized due to his physical characteristics. Aside from being categorized as an “other” by outsiders, he participates in both Mexican and American cultures: he listens to Mexican music (which he code switches to Spanish to tell me) and eats Mexican food, yet he stays in expensive hotels and enjoys high-brow urban American culture.

Timoteo discusses his choice to marry a French-Canadian, saying that there was little calculation, as far as race or ethnicity is concerned, regarding who he married and how he counsels his children on whom to marry:

TIMOTEO: It just happened for me. I wasn't looking for a French-Canadian.

I just met a girl. Most of my other girlfriends before that had been little Mexican girls. But when you go to school you meet people.

JMV: How do you advise your children on marriage?

TIMOTEO: I didn't. Let 'em bring whoever they decided to bring. I've never been too pushy on that.

While Timoteo engages in Mexican culture on an everyday basis, through music and food, he chose to marry a woman outside of his ethnic group. While I only interviewed one of Timoteo's two sons, he discusses how they have traveled divergent paths with respect to their assimilation into the dominant culture:

Our kids were raised middle class. In that sense, yeah, they became mainstream. I've got a *guerito* [light-skinned one] and a *moreno* [dark-skinned one]. . . . The guy that's fair, Gabe, the oldest . . . he's very much into the Mexican thing. Ramón is . . . different . . . he's a yuppie, lives in Huntington Beach, married to an Italian girl. He became more assimilated. I still keep my foot in the other side and so does Gabe.

Timoteo's narrative demonstrates the important point that not all children of the same parents travel along the same incorporation trajectory. Despite being raised by the same parents under the same circumstances, the extent of the brothers' involvement in “the Mexican thing” diverged. Interestingly, in this case, skin color does not determine cultural commitments: it is the fair-skinned son who holds onto Mexican culture and the dark-skinned one who out-marries and is “more assimilated” and does not “keep [a] foot in the other side.”

Timoteo's son, Gabriel, has a Mexican American father and French-Canadian mother. A rather heavy-set man with dark, wavy hair, dark eyes, and a

goatee, Gabriel says he is often perceived as white instead of Mexican-origin. As a child, he accompanied his father to United Farm Worker rallies and Luis Valdez plays, his Mexican identity formation resulting from a process rather than an epiphany. Aside from facilitating formative experiences in his youth, like attendance at Mexican-oriented rallies and cultural events, his parents “didn’t really push [him] to identify as Mexican. I just did it, I just was.” “Ponce” is not a typical Hispanic surname. Neither Gabe’s last name nor his light skin color signal his background, allowing him to “pass” for non-Hispanic white and obviate discrimination based on race. While these factors could easily lead to thinned attachment, Gabe instead feels that “we need to be able to maintain an identity as a culture.”

As far as family traditions in his youth are concerned, like many other third-generation Mexican Americans, Gabe grew up with a few trademark traditions that were more symbolic than substantive, such as tamales at Christmastime. Like the vast majority of third-generation Mexican Americans in the United States, Gabe is not fluent in Spanish. His mother does not speak Spanish, so he did not acquire the language at home. A decisive factor in Gabe’s racial identity formation is his large Mexican extended family. I asked, “How is it that you identify so strongly with your Mexican side?” He responded,

I think it’s pretty simple: I grew up with my dad’s family. That’s who I had my experiences with. Nobody in my mom’s family was speaking Italian or eating Italian food or anything like that. We spent most of our time with my dad’s side of the family. . . . I just think it was more exposure. Not necessarily that I don’t like being Italian too, it’s just that I was more exposed to [my Mexican side].

Here we see a pretty classic “down the generational ladder” knowledge transmission process. Parents and adult extended family members teach the youth about their heritage and culture as they go about their daily lives.

Gabe is unmarried but would like to marry another Mexican American so that there is a common base of knowledge and there would be little need for cultural translation. Pointing out the linkage between Mexican identity and Catholicism, Gabe expresses the importance of having a foundation of similar experiences:

I would really like to marry a woman who is Mexican. Not Argentinean, not Chilean, but *Mexican*. . . . I would like to do that. I think it’s like me

and women who are Catholic. I grew up Catholic. . . . The fact is that if I meet a woman . . . who went to a Jesuit school, a Catholic school, we have similar experiences immediately.

Gabe clearly prefers to marry a Mexican woman, implicitly assuming that she would also be Catholic.

Gabe's desire to marry a Mexican-origin woman comes from his longing for cultural similarities and common experiences. Whether conscious or not, Gabe pragmatically wishes for a coethnic marital partner in order to reinvigorate, rather than merely maintain, Mexican traditions in his future children. Passing on more traditions than he grew up with is unlikely to occur in any substantive way unless he partners with a Mexican-origin woman because he alone lacks an extensive storehouse of knowledge about Mexican culture. Regardless of whether Gabe's desire for intramarriage results in marriage with a Mexican-origin woman and strengthening of Mexican cultural ties in the succeeding generation, we see in the example of the Ponce family that despite intermarriage in the second generation, the resulting offspring are not predetermined to embark upon a thinned attachment pathway.

Ideology plays a large role in how committed people are to their racial/ethnic backgrounds. While the Ponce family sought to retain traditional cultural elements in their lives, the Schultz family was more oriented toward assimilation. Second-generation 65-year-old Albert Schultz was raised to be "an American" and, ashamed of his Mexican background until he earned a middle-class lifestyle, he disassociated himself from Mexican culture. As a blonde-haired, very pale-skinned man, he was commonly perceived and treated as non-Hispanic white. Albert raised his son, Rex, without cultural maintenance sympathies. Thus, as parental ideologies are transmitted from one generation to the next, they provide perspectives that the younger generation can either accept or challenge. In the case of the Schultz family, Rex lived out the thinned attachment pathway begun by his father.

The parent-child transmission of ideology began with Albert's mother, who raised him with assimilationist goals: "My mother wanted me to assimilate. . . . My mother always used to tell me, 'Eres Americano. Aquí estamos en los Estados Unidos, eres Americano.' ['You are American. We are here in the United States, you are American.']" Albert's mother instructed him in his American identity while using the Spanish language. Spanish was Albert's first language, but he lost it in his English-speaking school. In fact, Albert's earliest memory of racial difference was when he was learning the Pledge of Allegiance in English. Importantly, Albert was learning about nationalism as

he was acquiring the English language, and it was at this precise moment that he recognized how racial/ethnic distinctions are sometimes bound up with language ability.

Albert describes the traditions in his natal home as well as the tension he felt between Mexican and mainstream American cultures:

At home we spoke Spanish. . . . There were always beans being cooked. I can always smell *los frijoles de la olla* [a pot of beans] and rice and vinegar on the salad. The traditions are closer to me now than they were then. . . . I was growing up in an Anglo society, so I was a little embarrassed to be Mexican. Not until later on in my life did I become proud of the heritage that I developed.

The culture clash he felt between himself and mainstream America in terms of both race and class led him to deny being Mexican throughout high school. He views the United States as predominantly white and middle-class, obscuring both racial and class diversity. Albert explains,

The embarrassment came [when] sometimes my parents wouldn't be able to speak English. . . . My mother would go to PTA [parent teacher association] meetings or parent-teacher conferences and she spoke broken English. Even though she was very light-complected it would be broken English. I would feel a little embarrassed about that. I'd feel embarrassed that I didn't have what other kids had. They were better off than me. All through high school I denied being a Mexican. My mother being light-complected, they thought she was from Spain.

Once Albert was educated and firmly in the ranks of the middle class, he felt he was out of danger of slipping into the grips of deleterious stereotypes. "Making it" educationally and socioeconomically allowed him to claim his background as he had never done before.

Albert thought he would marry a Mexican woman because of "the culture and the togetherness," but he ended up marrying an Italian woman. Albert prizes the "closeness of the Mexican family" and is trying to give his children, who were raised in a middle-class home, an understanding of what it means to be "real poor and hav[e] dirt floors" so that they appreciate what they have. That said, he wanted to "give [his] kids something better than [he] had" and so, following in his parents' ideological footsteps, he promoted assimilation and thinned attachment in his children. While Albert never outright stated

that assimilation and Mexican culture are irreconcilable, that seems to be his working assumption because, while others of his generation held onto cultural attributes and structurally integrated, Albert only exhibited and appreciated his Mexican background *after* he achieved economic success.

Rex Schultz, Albert's 32-year-old half-Mexican and half-Italian son, looks like a European-origin American. When we described ourselves to each other before our initial meeting at a coffee house, Rex said, "I'm five feet eight inches [tall], fair, with blonde, spiky hair." Since he looks like what people expect a white American to look like, Rex is perceived as such in his business and social life. Friends tease him that he is "the whitest Mexican in town." Unlike his father, he does not have to choose whether or not to hide his racial/ethnic background because it is not visible in either his phenotype or surname, two indicators people use to racially categorize others. Rex acknowledges that his appearance allows him to escape negative Mexican-oriented stereotypes and benefit from positive white American ones. So easily accepted into mainstream culture, he feels completely a part of the U.S. mainstream rather than feeling like an "outsider looking in" or existing in a "third-space" liminal position, as many third-generation Mexican Americans with intramarried parents felt.

Rex is culturally, economically, and structurally assimilated into the U.S. mainstream. He does not refer to any traditions that he grew up with that he wants to make sure to maintain in his own life or pass on to his future children: "We didn't really have any customs, we didn't really celebrate any Mexican holidays. I don't know too much about the Mexican side." The one value Rex treasures and wants to preserve is the emphasis on family, something he learned from both the Mexican and the Italian sides of his family. Rex desires to keep the Mexican and Italian values in part because he was not raised with more specific customs from which to choose what to retain or discard: "[My sister and I will] keep a family atmosphere . . . we'll keep a tighter-knit family. . . . I'd want my kids to be close with their grandparents, like my parents were with my grandparents."

Rex is living out an assimilationist, or thinned attachment, lifestyle. Noting only one core value he wants to retain—the value of family closeness that arguably exists in numerous cultures and that he credits both sides of his family with providing him—Rex is not even remotely symbolically ethnic. He does not participate in any Mexican cultural organizations or engage in Mexican-oriented holiday festivities or daily practices. He belongs to an Italian club but does not engage in any Mexican cultural activities and has few Mexican friends.

A natural consequence of having a thinned attachment to his Mexican heritage, Rex is noncommittal about the prospect of marrying someone with a Mexican background. He notes that intramarriage, as well as intermarriage, have positive aspects: “[With intramarriage] you have better understanding about a person. But then again, I wouldn’t mind learning a different side, [from someone with] a different type of upbringing.” Rex is in favor of cultural diversity, even though he lacks a long list of traditions he maintains, noting that making time to do interviews such as the one he consented to do with me is one way he acknowledges and represents his Mexican background. He is part of mainstream U.S. culture yet is also a proponent of multiculturalism: “I know the U.S. is a melting pot, but there’s also a lot of cultural diversity here and I think we should know our backgrounds, rather than just kind of get in mainstream America and work and make money.” While upward socioeconomic mobility is a large component of the American Dream—as lived out by his family—Rex advocates “know[ing] our backgrounds,” although this decree is qualitatively different from practicing an ethnic culture on an everyday basis. Due to his phenotype, his surname, and his father’s assimilationist ideology, Rex is enacting thinned attachment toward his Mexican culture and is not engaged in “symbolic ethnicity” (Gans 1979).

Of the three intermarried families, the Contreras family is the one that in some ways is most complicated because Renata, the third generation, is seamlessly bilingual and bicultural and yet despite this cultural maintenance declares that she will not marry a Latino man. Milo Contreras is a 59-year-old second-generation Mexican American who intermarried with a European-descent American woman. Their 25-year-old daughter, Renata, exemplifies a conflictual relationship to Mexican culture in that she admires some aspects while simultaneously wanting to distance herself from the patriarchal gender norms she has witnessed.

Despite his out-marriage with a non-Hispanic white woman, Milo wishes to see his two daughters marry people who hail from a similar background. When I inquired about his own marital choice, he immediately directed his answer toward the fact that he chose to marry someone outside of his ethnic group. Milo explained,

[I’ve heard] everything from “race traitor” to “Mr. White Wannabe” to “Oreo” to whatever. The fact of the matter is that as an impartial employer would defend his hiring practices, “I just found the best candidate I could find.” [His voice gets deep and entertaining and he chuckles.] It’s not that

I had any aversion to marrying a Chicana, but I never really came across one that I was that attracted to or that I could see in the long run matching. Whereas with my wife I could see a connection at a lot of different levels. And then her own acceptance of me as a Mexican and my family as Mexican—never a sour look or a sour face. In fact the opposite: totally embracing the culture. . . . It's not that I consciously looked for a white person—either ethnicity would have been fine had it matched on all the points that I needed to match.

Milo quickly points to the way other people view his exogamy—labeling him as a race traitor, as a white wannabe, or as someone who is dark on the outside and white on the inside. Milo did not explicitly intend to marry a white woman, but he just happened to find one who “matched” him on the levels he found important.

Milo discusses the cultural intermixing that he observes when he considers himself and his siblings in comparison with their children, at least some of whom are offspring of Mexican American and non-Hispanic white partnerships. Milo remarks,

My brothers and sisters all pretty much feel the way I do: we all speak Spanish and we all have tamales and traditions at Christmas. But our children, because of the mixing with another culture, have to . . . blend it and accommodate it. Because you can't say, “Well, my father's Mexican and, gee, what a rich and beautiful culture that is, that's what I'm going to be.” Because then there is a sense of betrayal or self-denial or self-hate by not saying, “I'm *gringa* [white] too! What's wrong with that?” It's not necessarily diluted. Maybe it's enriched by having one foot in one culture and one in the other.

Milo preemptively defends against the critique that the offspring of mixed marriages are “diluting” or weakening Mexican culture or white culture. Instead, he advances the perspective that the two cultures are “enriched” by their merging.

Milo, like most second-generation parents, desired to pass on Spanish to his children. However, in contrast to most other parents of his generation, he succeeded in this objective in part because he and his wife employed a Spanish-speaking nanny whom they referred to as Tía Carlotta. While she is not a blood relative, all family members referred to the nanny as “Tía,” meaning “Aunt,” a semantic move that suggests her close relationship to the family.

Milo discusses the importance of Tía Carlotta in the upbringing of his two girls and the maintenance of the Spanish language (a language in which he is fluent and his Anglo wife is not):

[My daughters] had the sitter, Tía Carlotta, who spoke Spanish to them all day long as two-year-olds. They spoke Spanish and saw all the soap operas in Spanish and knew all the characters. I, obviously, favored all of that and I spoke Spanish with them when they were growing up. And even now, on the phone when they call, we'll speak Spanish. They get stuck occasionally and they're not as [fluent] as they once were, but . . . they do make an effort to speak. I think they take a certain pride in being able to do that. Because sometimes they're with their friends and they're with me on the phone and they're speaking Spanish. I think that they derive some kind of pride in being able to have that.

Clearly, having Tía Carlotta in the girls' lives in their youth reinforced Spanish and other Mexican customs and promoted the intake of "mediated resources" (Macias 2006) such as Mexican soap operas. Living in an area with a high concentration of immigrants ensures that later-generation Mexican Americans have "abundant access to the ethnic raw materials—ethnically linked symbols and practices—that make for a more salient experience of ethnicity" (Jiménez 2010: 251).

In addition to employing a Mexican nanny, Milo believes that it was living near an extended Mexican family, as the Ponce family did, that tipped the scales in favor of his children growing up with an abundance of Mexican culture. Milo responds to the question of how he thinks his two daughters have handled being raised in a bicultural home:

I think that because of the extended family on my side—versus my wife was an only child and her father and mother were divorced early on—there were cousins they grew up with and played with and so there was kind of an unfair advantage from the Mexican side. But they move well in the Anglo world also.

As we will see, Milo's daughter, Renata, agrees with this assessment that having a large family was a vital resource in her youth that reinforced Mexican values, practices, and traditions. As Thomas Macias (2006) argues, "unmediated resources," namely, direct relationships and interactions with Mexican Americans, perpetuate Mexican ethnicity among later-generation Mexican

Americans. Conservative and liberal scholars alike argue that ongoing immigration from Mexico creates a particular social context for the perpetuation of Mexican ethnicity, particularly in the American Southwest, which is proximate to Mexico and where there is a concentrated Mexican-origin community (Huntington 2004a and 2004b; Jiménez 2010; Montejano 1987). In addition to “unmediated resources,” which are relationships with people, “mediated resources,” such as Spanish-language television programming or commercial consumption of food and ornaments that do not require direct interaction with Mexican Americans, allow for culture to be uprooted from its origins in local communities and interpersonal relations (Macias 2006: 27). Yet, as in the Contreras family, “it is . . . the unmediated, relational connection to the Mexican American community that endows . . . mediated experiences with ethnic meaning” (Macias 2006: 43). Thus, the “imagining” (Anderson 1991) of a Mexican community is facilitated by interactions with Mexican American people and buttressed by commercially available products.

Contrary to the prediction that intermarriage thins ethnic identification and commitments, Milo states that his affiliation to Mexican culture has “gotten strong over the years” since his marriage with a non-Hispanic white woman. Milo is dedicated to racial representation and visibility even while he is married to a non-Hispanic white woman. For example, when he is a guest speaker at his daughters’ high school “career day,” he asks to speak to two classes, one filled with Spanish speakers and the other comprised of English speakers. He makes this request in order to ensure not only that Mexican-origin students have a positive role model but also that white students see that a Mexican man can be a successful white-collar professional. Milo did not explain the reasons behind his strengthened devotion to his Mexican background after his marriage, yet clearly his intermarriage did not diminish his racial awareness. Because of the unlikelihood of Milo’s *increased* concern with racial minority representation after his intermarriage, one can reasonably suspect that his activism grew out of a tacit fear that his ethnicity would become attenuated due to a bicultural family life. Milo is inconclusive as he advises his daughters on marriage: “I would prefer somebody [for my girls] close in culture. That could be Anglo, that could be Mexican. Obviously the most important thing is that the individual feel comfortable with that person. Life is hard enough without having dirty looks from racists. That’s mainly my concern.” Ostensibly, this is a vote for intramarriage with someone who is Anglo or Mexican (or both) and, while pleased with the biculturalism in his own marital home, Milo seems to be suggesting that marrying someone outside of the white or Latino racial/ethnic groups is less desirable.

As we observed in the Montes/Rosenberg family in the chapter devoted to “thinned attachment,” gender roles and expectations can influence major life decisions, including whom to marry. We see that Renata Contreras, like Tamara and Jillian Rosenberg, consciously veers away from marrying a Mexican man for fear of being locked into rigid, traditional female gender roles. Milo portrays his gendered position in the home as patriarchal:

There is a real *macho* element where I am the provider, I am the *chingón* [manly man], I’m the one that’s gonna bring home the bacon, I’m the one that’s gonna protect the house, I’m the one that knows how to fire the guns and train the dogs. . . . And I’m the one that can be out on the streets and still come back, dust myself off, and I’m nice and safe and sound and still the protector. . . . Even though it seems so patriarchal it, in fact, is quite matriarchal. Mothers really run the roost. They run the household and they are less tolerant as would seem on the outside. They have . . . a lot of power and authority in our culture. . . . Being a man means recognizing those [long-standing] dynamics. I suppose that I’ve asserted myself in a *macho* sense to the extent that I could get away with [chuckles], while recognizing that the one that holds the family together is really the mom.

Milo acknowledges male authority yet also defers to the authority of mothers, the glue that unites families. From Renata’s standpoint, however, her father’s patriarchal authority is not something she wishes to emulate in her own marital life.

Renata suspects that she will not marry someone of Mexican heritage. In fact, she was dating and discussing marriage with an Indian man at the time of the interview. Renata considers her dating and marriage desires:

I haven’t ever sought out someone of similar background. I’ve thought it might be interesting to meet someone who is half-Mexican just like me, but the kind of people that I’m attracted to are always dark-haired and have a little color to them. Not just blonde pasty guys. I think it’d be cool to marry someone who has the same background as me, because then we could tell our kids, “This is what you do when you have your first communion, or this is what you do when you have your *quinceñera*, or this is how you make a *piñata*, or little lingo. . . .” Having similar experiences growing up, that’d be kinda neat. But I don’t think it’s that important. I think whomever you are compatible with is the most important part. I never wanted a full Mexican though, because of my dad’s influence. That’s

not as important a factor—similar ethnic background—as having the same values or financial security, emotional security, similar education backgrounds, similar interests and personalities.

Renata is wistful about her ethnic background where marriage is concerned. She likes the idea of cultural similarity but she is not limiting her dating options as a result. She specifies what she is trying to avoid by not dating Mexicans:

The Latin stereotype—even the Italians or French—you just have the image of the noncommitted kind of guy, more domineering or the “well, my dad did that so it’s okay; that’s the way we are.” Mostly that *machismo* attitude that I just hate. I just feel like it’s still there and it’s part of our culture, but I don’t want to go there . . . that’s why I stay away from them. Even if my own dad is saying, “I don’t want you to marry a Mexican. . . .”

Similar to the second- and third-generation women of the Rosenberg family, Renata is actively distancing herself from undesirable cultural attributes by dating outside of her ethnic group. She does not explain how she interpreted her father’s advice not to marry a Mexican (nor did Milo confess to this advice giving during his interview), yet she was emphatic about wanting to out-marry.

Renata wants to avoid the stereotypical domineering or *macho* Mexican man by simply not marrying a Mexican. Interestingly, all third-generation Mexican American men I interviewed complained that *machismo* has had its heyday and must be extinguished. Mexican male authority has been so harshly criticized by women for so long that Mexican-origin women—like Renata—retreat from coethnic relationships in order to ensure they do not get entrapped. However, the distressing irony of this wholesale withdrawal from coethnic romantic relationships is that these women who are resisting patriarchy by refusing to date Mexican-origin men are not allowing for the possibility of cultural change. Notably, because Renata voluntarily isolates herself from relationships with Mexican men, she not only shields herself from the *macho* characteristics she wants to avoid, but she also cheats herself of the opportunity to meet Latino men who defy her negative expectations. In the same way that interethnic contact and friendships destabilize negative group stereotypes (McDermott 2006; Perry 2002), giving Latino men an opportunity to defy negative expectations could reveal or make way for cultural shifts. But, by retreating from Mexican relationships, self-protective

later-generation Mexican American women like Renata and Jillian are complicit in perpetuating a static notion of culture and gender ideologies even as they fight against the “macho Mexican male” stereotype.⁶

Despite Renata’s inclination to marry a non-Mexican, she said that she would like to give her children a background in Mexican culture and that she would like to ensure they learn Spanish. These aspirations are likely reactions to a probable loss of Mexican heritage in her offspring if she were to out-marry. Remembering that she is half-Mexican and half-Caucasian, she does not have reason to fear loss of her European-descent background because it is omnipresent in the mainstream U.S. culture. Acutely conscious of the influence of increasing generational distance from Mexico, growing assimilation over time, and her probable out-marriage, Renata desires to maintain Mexican culture and the Spanish language in the next generation. Renata contemplates how she could structure her children’s lives so they can be immersed in Mexican culture despite having only one half-Mexican parent:

When my mom went back to work [my parents] got Tía Carlotta for us. She was a Mexican immigrant and only spoke in Spanish, so I want to do that for my kids too. I want to speak in Spanish to them when they are little and have my mom and dad around a lot too and impart their experiences and their culture that way. I think I want to have a babysitter, like a Tía Carlotta, so that they can see this person that they love and they respect and who is totally Mexican and who will make sure that they only speak in Spanish and that they watch the *novelas* [soap operas] with her. I want them to get a good understanding of the world through a Tía Carlotta’s eyes. It’s very hard for her to get along. . . . I want them to understand how it feels to be walking around from her perspective. It’s not just, “Oh, anybody can go buy anything they want and have it easy.” You have to appreciate that other people are still struggling. . . .

Renata is sensitive to the intersection of race, class, gender, and nationality that shaped the life of her beloved babysitter. She seeks to impart this same understanding and empathy to her children by following in her parents’ footsteps and employing a Latino/a immigrant babysitter. At this unmarried stage in her life, Renata is pondering hypothetical situations and is not taking a partner’s preferences into account. So, the degree to which this branching toward cultural maintenance will occur is debatable. Keeping in mind that Renata is structurally assimilated like her third-generation Mexican American peers I interviewed, unlike those her same generation,

she is substantively involved in her ethnicity. This engagement with her ethnicity is not wholesale preservationist, however, as she deliberately distances herself from patriarchal aspects she finds troubling and oppressive. As she chooses to claim some cultural features and shed others, Renata is substantially rather than merely symbolically attached to her ethnicity.

Primary relationships with Mexican-origin people and intramarriage are expected to maintain or increase a Mexican ethnic identity, whereas being in a racially mixed environment and intermarrying are predicted to loosen ethnic ties. However, recent research on Latino intermarriage challenges the assumption that out-marriage to whites equals cultural or political whitening (O'Brien 2008). Cross-racial intimacy, achieved either by being mixed-race or partnering with a non-Hispanic white, can lead to a racially progressive stance. A racial progressive is someone who approves of racial intermarriage, supports affirmative action, and acknowledges the reality of discrimination rather than espousing a "color-blind" ideology (Bonilla-Silva 2003; O'Brien 2008: 164). Latino intermarriage with non-Hispanic whites resulting in racial progressivism is *counter* to assimilation theory's whitening thesis, which predicts intermarriage will be an indicator of assimilation. Inverting this prediction, rather than minimizing attention to race, intermarried Latino respondents are acutely aware of race and racism because they compare their own racialized experiences with those of more privileged experiences of whites in their families (O'Brien 2008).

Since cross-racial intimacy can function either to diminish or to elevate the importance of ethnicity, the racial *ideology* of influential family members is consequential for racial identity formation. The Ponce family was committed, in philosophy and practice, to maintaining Mexican ways of life whereas the Schultz family was far more noncommittal (and, in fact, in the second generation purposely passed as non-Hispanic white). The Contreras family offers an insight into how gender influences the flow of cultural attachments. Bear in mind, however, that the influence of gender is complicated and does not determine whether one prefers to in- or out-marry. We have thus far seen cases of women specifically wanting to marry both within and outside of their ethnic group for cultural reasons. Renata Contreras wishes to out-marry in order to avoid the male dominance displayed by her father, yet she also wishes to retain Spanish and cultural practices. Structurally assimilated and mixed race, Renata lives an ethnically conscious life as she selectively retains and discards Mexican cultural elements. Reyna Madrigal, in contrast, desires to in-marry in order to facilitate her ethnic renewal. She desires to

acquire through her husband and his family the Mexican culture and traditions she grew up without and pass them on to her children.

Men were disproportionately represented in the intermarriage category. In addition to exogamy, ideology can lead people in different directions. There was also a distinct difference in the ways men and women who intermarried talked about the process. Women wanted to flee patriarchy whereas men spoke about attraction and finding the best fit. “Best fit” is an enigmatic and malleable concept, and it is noteworthy that the three men intermarried with non-Hispanic white ethnics, such that one can argue they are “marrying up” racially and gaining a status advantage. As predicted by classic assimilation theorists, these second-generation Mexican American men are structurally assimilated, middle-class, and in predominantly white or racially heterogeneous social environments, all of which increases the probability of out-marriage (Gordon 1964). Women based their decisions to out-marry on not wanting to risk entrapment with a patriarchal marital partner. The ideologies one uses to consolidate a stance toward one’s Mexican heritage also guides marital choice. Marriage decisions, in turn, affect the assimilation pathway one travels and become significant contributors to the racial/ethnic claims, beliefs, and cultural practices of the next generation.

Marriage as a “Bump” in Assimilation Processes

Marriage both shapes and is shaped by assimilation processes. Marriage marks a major potential turning point for cultural revitalization or diminution. In my sample, it is most common that women marry a coethnic, which consolidates their racial identity as Mexican American. Mirroring broader demographic trends of increasing intermarriage with each generation, the intermarriage rate among Mexican Americans “is so slow so that even by the fourth generation, nearly two-thirds are still married to other Hispanics” (Telles and Ortiz 2009: 265). For women interviewees, intramarriage with a Mexican-origin man becomes a driving force in women connecting with their Mexican cultural lineage, even if it was a previously absent or minimal part of their lives. In-marriage relationships clearly affect cultural transmission “down” the generational ladder as parents (in particular, mothers) raise children. Cultural learning and revitalization can move “up” generations as well as “down”: in-marriage can cause members of an older generation to learn more about their ethnic identity as well.

If intramarriage is a means to (re)learn cultural knowledge, intermarriage presents an opportunity to diminish one’s connection to Mexican people

and culture. Exogamy offers an opportunity to speed the process of assimilation. Through marriage with an out-group member—in particular, a non-Hispanic white, which was the tendency among my respondents—Mexican Americans adopt more American cultural habits and associate more with racially mixed or predominantly Anglo crowds. Specifically, women viewed intermarriage as an escape route out of a patriarchal system of gender relations that they felt typified the Mexican-origin community. Men, alternatively, out-married with white ethnics and did so with the logic that they could still practice their Mexican culture if they cared to do so. Thus, ideology becomes an important piece of the gender and marriage puzzle in terms of who chooses to retain versus discard their native cultural trappings.

Marriage is highly influential in terms of how a family routes itself either toward or away from Mexican or American culture. The dynamics that marriage set in motion have potentially major consequences for multiple generations: the marital partners, the successive generation (children), and the prior generation (parents). In this way, marriage can be viewed as a “bump” in the loosely defined term “bumpy-line” assimilation.

Recall that Herbert Gans (1992a: 44) argued to “replace what has often been described as straight line theory with *bumpy* line theory, the bumps representing various kinds of adaptations to changing circumstances—and with the line having no predictable end.” The incorporation trajectories of three-generation Mexican American families is accurately described as “bumpy” in that there are unpredictable departures, swerves, and then resurgences of commitments to both adopted and native cultures. Importantly, the “[bumpy] line having no predictable end” allows for a vast diversity of both processes and outcomes for any immigrant ethnic group, ranging from “thinned attachment” to “cultural maintenance.” This open-endedness acknowledges that some strata of an immigrant group—be they distinguished by race, class, gender, human capital, skin color, etc.—may have trajectories or end points quite different from others.⁷

Children of intermarried couples tend to intermarry, identify less with Mexican origin, and are more likely to call themselves “American” (Telles and Ortiz 2009). My data on the third generation add to these findings that physical appearance, particularly skin tone, Hispanic-sounding names, and gender play important roles in whether Mexican Americans are perceived and treated as non-Hispanic white or are racialized as non-white (Vasquez 2010). Later-generation Mexican Americans who bear light complexions similar to those of non-Hispanic whites are awarded the (white) privilege of voluntarily claiming their ethnicity or quietly “passing” as non-Hispanic white. Due to

volitional identity changes that range from adopting pan-Latino categories or embracing mainstream identities, Mexican-origin people may cease to call themselves Mexican, Hispanic, or Latino, instead becoming “Anglos with Mexican ancestry.” This “loss” of members of the Mexican community due to identity changes “makes it impossible to measure the gains of this group; [uncounted gains becoming] ‘unmeasured progress’” (Alba 2006: 293). If the most successful echelon of Mexican Americans are likely to intermarry or otherwise cease to identify themselves or their offspring as Hispanic, human-capital gains across generations may be understated (Grogger and Trejo 2002: 7–8). Thus, as we consider the consequences of intermarriage, it is important to note the potential “disappearance” of those who achieve upward mobility, intermarry, or, as children of intermarriages are multiracial, become “part Hispanics” (Lee and Edmonston 2006) and potentially blend into the fabric of American society.

Integration over three generations is a “bumpy” process in that while there is intergenerational progress in terms of structural assimilation, there is also a spectrum of ways in which Mexican Americans can choose to engage Mexican culture. Marriage choices—specifically, whether one marries endogamously or exogamously—have distinct consequences for the possibilities of either continued assimilation with the American mainstream or a turn toward cultural resurgence. As Telles and Ortiz (2009 284) note, both modern assimilation theory and segmented assimilation theory “exaggerate the consistency and uniformity in direction to which assimilation occurs across a wide range of social dimensions.” Pursuing the critique that “assimilation, or the lack of it, can occur at quite distinct paces and even in an opposite direction” (Telles and Ortiz 2009: 284), this chapter demonstrates that marriage (including marital partner, families-in-law, ideologies, and gender) represents a “bump” that exists along the road of assimilation that can speed, stall, or redirect the flow of integration.

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