
Thinned Attachment

Heritage Is Slipping through Our Fingers

First Generation: Maria Montes

Sixty-five-year-old Maria Montes is a devout Catholic, bilingual in English and Spanish, and the matriarch of her family.¹ One of six siblings, Maria emigrated from Mexico when she was four years old with her mother and sister, while her brothers stayed in Mexico. Maria's mother chose to immigrate in part because one of her brothers and her eldest son were already in the United States and encouraged her to move. They crossed the Rio Grande River and took the train into the United States. Upon arrival, she worked in the fields picking potatoes and green beans and then at the packing house. Maria would join her mother in the fields when she was young or would be under the care of her older sister, a "second mother" caretaker for her. Twelve years later Maria's mother brought two of her other sons over to the United States. Maria weaves her immigration tale:

Back then it wasn't as hard as it is [now]—immigration. You just come and go—so they just went across the river and came over here. . . . I remember I had that faraway vision of myself being on top of one of my uncle's shoulders. . . . So they just walked by. It wasn't deep. I was on my uncle's shoulders and we passed and were all excited, because we were coming to the United States! We were all excited. They make it sound so wonderful, you know? You're going to have a wonderful life over here. It turns out it's not that easy as people think that it is. So my mother had a hard life trying to rear us. [She was] being a mom and a dad because she never remarried after my dad died.

As with all first-generation respondents, Maria's family's emigration from Mexico was economically motivated. Once here in the United States, her family's hopes for life being automatically "wonderful"—as some returning

migrants' stories had them believe—were dashed. They worked hard in order to gain a financial foothold in their new country:

My mom really worked hard. And we worked pretty hard, too. Because every summer vacation we'd hit the fields. We'd pick walnuts, we'd pick grapes. . . . We were going to have to help her so that she could be able to maintain the household. Because it's very hard to feed so many people.

When she was a child, Maria's family was poor. Maria reveals a common conflation of race and class:

We didn't have much. We used to use hand-me-down clothes because my mother could barely make it, you know? I used to wear her shoes to school. I used to be ridiculed. I used to stuff them [the shoes] with newspaper and I used to feel really embarrassed. Because I was a Mexican, they thought that we dressed that way [because] that's the Mexican way.

As others mistook class for race, Maria had to battle her lower-class status and her misunderstood Mexican identity. Due to an expanding economy, even with a lack of education Maria was able to secure a well-paying office manager job for a small manufacturing company. Now, in her older age, Maria has achieved a stable middle-class status, even owning more than one property in Santa Barbara.

Even while processes of adaptation to the United States compel some distance from her home country, Maria deliberately attempts to instill pride in her children and grandchildren about their Mexican heritage:

We're Mexican and we have to be proud of the fact that we come from Mexico and never be ashamed that you are from Mexico. I said, "I know there are lots of people that look down on Mexicans, but you have to be proud. That's what we are." . . . I'm not ashamed to say that I'm a Mexican. . . . Like [my granddaughter] Jillian: she has white blood and Mexican blood, so she'll be proud of both of them.

Maria makes a conscious choice to instill racial pride in her offspring. Despite her intentions, however, structural surroundings that promote American ways of life pulled her family toward Americanization. The choices that Maria makes (and the lifestyles of the two generations that succeed her) combine with the local environment, creating hybrid identities and cul-

tures. This interlacing of cultures through both conscious choice and natural accommodation shows that Mexican Americans are “mestizaje,” a racial and cultural intermixture (Macias 2006), who live a “distinctive . . . third way of life . . . rather than simply an amalgamation of Mexican and American cultures” (Keefe and Padilla 1987: 7).

Maria’s experience typifies a survival mode of parenting prevalent among poor first-generation immigrants (and to a lesser extent some second-generation individuals). A survival mode of parenting exists in those families where the parents’ focus was on providing for their family economically rather than self-consciously supplying their children with a strong sense of culture. In this conception, culture can be seen as something of a luxury, although I do not mean to imply by “luxury” that culture is only found in locales of high culture (museums, literature, operas, theaters) as some scholars imply (Bourdieu 1984). Certainly, culture is found in food, traditions, religion, family knowledge, and storytelling, some of which exist to varying degrees in all families. Even given a notion of culture that encapsulates both elite and common (or highbrow and lowbrow) sources (Griswold 1987; Levine 1988), families struggling for economic survival had less free time to endow their children with this cultural backdrop.

A survival mode of parenting often leads to spotty transmission of cultural knowledge. Recalling that she was a single mother for a while after her divorce, Maria offers an image of the survival mode of parenting:

It’s hard to bring family up. . . . You don’t have that much time to spend time with your kids and you’re working, and you come home and you’ve got to do the cleaning and you’ve got to do the cooking. [When] . . . my kids were growing up I didn’t spend much time with my kids. . . . Because to survive you have to have two families working . . . especially when you work at low jobs where you don’t get that [well] paid. [A]t the beginning that’s where we were—at the packing house, any place where we could . . . at least [get] money coming in to be able to support the family. . . . Back then we didn’t get involved much with the kids.

As a working-class mother, Maria adopted a parenting style of “accomplishment of natural growth,” wherein the children’s time was largely self-organized and parents conceived of their duties in terms of providing food, clothing, shelter, safety, and love (Lareau 2002; Lareau 2003). Because of a constant struggle to provide basic necessities, Maria did not have spare time to endow her children with cultural lessons or an overabundance of fam-

ily knowledge. Without conscientious instruction on Mexican culture and Spanish language, the structural environment of American institutions looms large and teaches children American cultural behaviors.

One element of Mexican culture that markedly declines through generations is Spanish language skills (Portes and Rumbaut 1996; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Rumbaut and Portes 2001; Telles and Ortiz 2009). Spanish was overtly discouraged in education during the schooling years of the second generation. Further, immigrant parents tended to want their children to be poised to take advantage of opportunities in the United States, which would require English proficiency. Some families actively encouraged the wholesale adoption of English at school and at home; others attempted bilingualism; and still others maintained Spanish as the primary home language. While most families in my sample lost Spanish fluency by the third generation, the families range along the full spectrum of language preference and usage.² Maria offers a response to the question “how important is the Spanish language to you?” in a way typical of those who would have liked to preserve Spanish in theory but had difficulty doing so in practice:

It is really important that we continue to . . . maintain our language. . . . I wish with all my heart that my kids would know it more and would pass it on to their kids. . . . Little by little they keep forgetting the Spanish . . . and they lose it. It's so sad, because it's so important that they have that language that comes with our heritage.

While Maria upholds the value of Spanish language, she did not enforce Spanish at home and her children therefore are not fluently bilingual.

Just as Spanish usage changes after generations in the United States, so too do traditional gender dynamics (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Smith 2006b). Gender and gender dynamics also help drive thinned attachment. All of the first-generation women I spoke with complained that their husbands were patriarchal and domineering. The second generation also noted the subjugation of their mothers, their sisters, or themselves at the hands of overbearing patriarchal fathers. As Hondagneu-Sotelo notes, Mexican immigrant women benefit from the United States' more egalitarian gender role expectations because it affords them more voice and liberty. Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994: 98) writes, “After immigration, marriage patterns that once seemed set in stone may shift . . . and new living and working arrangements change the rules that organize daily life . . . [such as] more egalitarian gender relations in household divisions of labor, family decision-making processes, and women's spa-

tial mobility.” Most interviewees wished to dispense with *machismo* (a rigidly patriarchal gender ideology and set of behaviors).

Maria actively engaged the process of acculturation that leads to thinned attachment. She suffered under a controlling and abusive first husband and consequently discouraged her granddaughter, Jillian, from marrying a Mexican.³ While she issued this advice in the form of a joke, her granddaughter got the message. I asked Maria, “As you advise your children—and now your grandchildren—in choosing someone to marry, how important is it to you that they marry someone who is of Mexican background?” She replied,

Well, I don’t really think that it’s important that they have to be Mexican. In fact, I tease Jillian and I tell her, “Keep away the Mexicans! Macho guys!” . . . My two daughters have married white [men]. I think that they should look for someone that they’re compatible with . . . that they love each other. And whether they’re American, Mexican, Chinese—whatever. . . . Steer clear of the Mexicans! [Laughs]

I asked her, “And that’s because you don’t like the macho guys?” She responded,

I just teased her on that. There are lots of nice Mexican men, too, that make wonderful husbands. Wonderful. But unfortunately, in our culture it tends to be more where the men want to have the power over the women. And they could go to extremes, you know? They’re boss. . . . That’s the way it is with Mexican men. But they’re changing. I think that they’re changing. The new generation is not coming out as bad as . . . when we were young.

The men, they always have the pants and they’re the ones that have to boss. And the woman just has to be submissive and do whatever they want. [T]hat’s why I tell her to keep away from the Mexican macho guys! Macho guys, I tell her! [Laughs.]

In this discussion of marital advice for her female children and grandchildren (she did not comment on advice she gave her sons), Maria oscillates between unprejudiced principles of equality and her visceral reaction against “Mexican macho guys” that is due to her own aggrieved experience. In her scholarship on love, Swidler (2001) argues that multiple framings of a single issue can coexist side by side and be called upon at any time. Swidler uncovers two common tropes of love that are employed by married couples as they explain their love story and ensuing marital life. The “mythic love” narrative

serves to uphold and romanticize the institution of marriage in contemporary America. Alternatively, “prosaic realism” is a framing that people employ to discuss the day-to-day life of a marriage, a love that is often ambiguous, gradual, uncertain, and banal (Swidler 2001). Often the same individual will use multiple framings at different times to explain his or her behavior, feelings, or life in general. Maria exemplifies the way people can employ different narrative framings in quick succession. Maria uses the trope of “mythic love” that forefronts compatibility, love, and equality with no regard for race. She also issues admonitions against Mexican men that are in direct reaction to her own unhappy marriage with a Mexican man. In this way, culture writ large and personal experience (culture writ small) organize Maria’s lines of thought and action as she considers the welfare of her offspring.

Despite her stereotypical image of Mexican masculinity, Maria points out that gender dynamics are changing for the better with the new generation of young men. She cites her son and her grandson as examples of Mexican men who would be good, helpful partners. Maria’s observations are in concert with Arlie Hochschild’s (1989) work on family life and work-life balance after the feminist revolution of the 1970s and women’s entrance into the labor force. Hochschild outlines the family archetypes of “traditional,” “transitional,” and “egalitarian,” family forms that range in gender-equality operating norms (Hochschild 1989; Hochschild 1997). Maria notes change she has seen as generations are each reared in a historical context different from the one prior:

Look at my grandson. Even my son . . . he’s not the macho guy, you know? . . . There’s a lot of young boys now . . . that are really nice. Heaven forbid that a man helps his wife washing the dishes or helping with the kids, way back when. . . . And nowadays you see it a lot, where the husband helps the wife. They clean the house. They cook for them. They help them a lot. I mean, you’re equal. The wife is going to work—why shouldn’t the husband help around the house?

Within Maria’s own three-generation family, she sees gender and marital dynamics change from traditional to egalitarian. Maria is pleased by this revision of gender roles. When I asked what about her culture she would like to see changed, she harkened back to tearing down traditionalism and *machismo* and replacing it with gender equality: “Yeah, you wear pants, but I wear pants, too. So we’re equal. . . . Let’s bring our children [up] to realize that man and woman, it’s nice to help each other out. These are women’s chores? There’s no difference between women’s chores and men’s chores—you know? We’re a family. We’re

here to help each other.” While Maria is unsettled by the slow detachment from Mexican culture her family is undergoing, she is also simultaneously pleased.

While Maria is saddened to see some of that connection to her homeland slipping, she is gladdened to perceive a shift in the macho male ways that had oppressed her. While Maria instills in her progeny knowledge of their Mexican heritage, her references to Mexican culture often switch into “distilled” (Kibria 2002) forms or universal principles. When I asked “what about your culture or your experience do you want to see transmitted to your children and grandchildren?” Maria began by shielding them from prejudice, saying they should “never be embarrassed of what [they] are.” She then moved to platitudes about success and independence: “Never give up. Dreams are so important. I mean—what is life if you don’t have dreams? . . . Never give up. There is always a tomorrow. And as long as there is a tomorrow, there is hope.” Maria has instructed her offspring in life lessons as well as some Mexican culture. Rather than dwell on preserving particular Mexican traits, in part due to her survival mode of parenting, Maria reared her children to combine both Mexican and American cultural features.

While Maria was complicit in her family’s thinned attachment trajectory in that she deemphasized Spanish language and traditions, these linguistic and cultural accommodations were necessary for her family’s upward mobility in the United States. She did not shirk her Mexican culture for lack of emotional commitment but rather loosened those ties for pragmatic reasons. To the limited extent that Maria is trying to re-infuse her family with Mexican culture, this could very well be a response to her observation of her offsprings’ thinning attachment.⁴ As we will see as I profile the next two generations, Maria’s family develops a thinned attachment to Mexican culture. This is due to increased generational distance from Mexico, egalitarian gender ideologies, intermarriage at the second generation, a religious conversion, and heterogeneous peer networks. Thus, the Montes/Rosenberg family’s thinned attachment occurs as a result of conscious choices of accommodation as well as the sway of structural surroundings.

Second Generation: Tamara (Montes) Rosenberg

Tamara Montes, whose married surname is Rosenberg, is the daughter of two Mexican immigrants and was born in California. Despite her American citizenship, Tamara says she describes herself as “‘Mexican’ just because my parents were from Mexico.” But, she adds, “I’m not trying to make a political statement either way.” Claiming a hybridized racial space, Tamara remarks,

“I don’t know that I identify with being an American or Mexican.” While American by birthright, Tamara experiences racialization, which marks her as a particular brand of American: “Mexican” or “Latina.” Undergoing “racialized assimilation” that does not allow her to be simply “American” (Flores-Gonzales 1999; Golash-Boza 2006; Golash-Boza and Darity 2008), Tamara learned her first lesson in racism and segregation when she was in elementary school. Realizing that she was never invited over to her Chinese best friend’s house, she asked her friend about this and her friend reported, “Well, my mom doesn’t want me to hang out with Mexicans because Mexicans are dumb.” Even today, “People will talk to me in the grocery store . . . in Spanish. And I’ll think to myself, ‘God, do I look Mexican?’ Of course I look Mexican!” While it is problematic to reduce “looking Mexican” to some stereotypical image because that image belies the diversity of physical appearance of Mexicans (Macias 2006; Oboler 1995), an issue that will be explored in chapter 7, Tamara knows that being perceived one way or another influences the way people interact with her. Indeed, racial categorization imposed by others (often based on phenotype) pushes people to claim that racial ascription (Waters 1990). There is a “*complex interplay* among the different aspects of an individual’s ethnic identification,” which is in part what leads people to change ethnic self-titles throughout their life cycle (Waters 1990: 23, emphasis added).

Tamara’s childhood years were lean: “I don’t think I ever realized that we were poor. I remember . . . having hot chocolate and bread for dinner. [I didn’t] realize that it was because we didn’t have food.” Tamara saw her parents work really hard and eventually achieve a stable occupation and a middle-class status. She credits belief in the American Dream—a central American ideology (Hochschild 1995)—for her parents’ optimism:

My parents were really hard working. And I think that’s the underlying lesson—that if you work hard—the American Dream—you get ahead. The typical immigrant dream. And my parents lived that. . . . My dad ended up owning a little mom and pop grocery store. . . . My mom [was] able to purchase her own house. Not only one—she owns a few properties. And ran a business. Raised her kids. So just work ethic.

Her parents’ work ethic and an expanding structure of opportunity were the keys to their ability to live the American Dream. Just as the ideology of the American Dream runs strong in contemporary American discourse and fuels immigrants’ optimism (Kao and Tienda 1995), so too does the ideol-

ogy of American individualism (Bellah 1986) and the philosophy of “pulling oneself up by one’s bootstraps.” In the Montes family, the American Dream invigorated their work ethic. This work ethic, in turn, became the tool that helped them achieve their aspirations. While the philosophies of the American Dream and American individualism work in tandem in this instance to reinforce one another, the down side of this individualistic logic is the potential to blame those who do not succeed by claiming they lack personal qualities that lead to success.⁵ These same individualistic philosophies, however, if applied to a less upwardly mobile family, could be used to obscure structural barriers that impede individual agency.⁶

As will be explored in chapter 6, education has a tremendous influence on the way students perceive their racial/ethnic background. Many second-generation Mexican Americans, like Tamara, grew up in a Spanish-speaking home and learned English in school. English language acquisition is part of being educated in the United States and is a critical part of the acculturation process, some of which occurs inevitably as families set up long-term residence in the United States. Tamara recalls the difficulty of acquiring a new language, especially when scoring badly on tests made her question her intelligence and deflated her self-esteem: “I can still remember the vision of being in first grade and sitting at this table and putting my head down and thinking, ‘God, I must be so stupid because I have D’s and F’s.’ I think it was because I didn’t know English. So of course what would I get?” Tamara learned English as her mother reinforced its usage at home.

Tamara was the only female of her generation in her extended family to go to college. Higher education was not expected in her family. Her parents had less than junior high school educations, thus lacking the knowledge and resources to prepare her for college. Because her parents were unfamiliar with the fact that a large percentage of college students accept scholarships and loans in order to attend colleges and universities, her father felt that this was a blow to their family pride. Tamara explains,

Going to college . . . wasn’t something that you did. I mean, my dad gave me a really tough time when I went away, because he felt like . . . scholarships [meant] that I was getting welfare. And that was a real blow to his being able to provide for his family. . . . I remember the conversation: “That’s really bad that you’re taking . . . welfare.” . . . It’s like, “Dad, it’s not welfare. It’s a scholarship because of your grades.” . . . I didn’t talk to my dad for a year because he felt like I had really blemished the family name by accepting money from these organizations.

Tamara's high school counselor provided her with some of the cultural capital that her natal family could not: "I was incredibly lucky, because I had never thought of going to college and it wasn't a vocabulary that was in our family. It was the high school counselor who called me [and advised me]."

Tamara's peer networks changed dramatically upon matriculation to college. Her family and educational cultures continued to clash once she began college at the University of California at Davis. Once in college, Tamara comprehended for the first time the racial, economic, and cultural disparities between UC-Davis, with its large contingent of "cowboys and rednecks," and her family and community back home. In Santa Barbara, her family was incredibly "tight-knit." They were incessantly attending "weddings, baptisms, and confirmations." In Tamara's words about her youth in Santa Barbara, "In high school . . . everyone that I hung out with was Mexican. So there wasn't any reason to have any political connections or try to say, 'I am Mexican.' I mean, you just hung out with people. I don't think I ever realized that I was only surrounded by Mexican people."

In contrast, at UC-Davis in the mid-1970s Tamara, as a Mexican American, was a numerical minority. Her changed social context in college exposed her to negative stereotypes. Some college peers had misconceptions about Tamara's personality based on her outward performance of self and femininity (her hairstyle and make-up). Tamara recalls a conversation in college:

"Your hair was ratted. And we thought you had razor blades in your hair or something." The stereotype that they have of me was that I was . . . prone to being aggressive or violent. And, "You are ironing your jeans? My God—no one irons their jeans. . . ." And I'm thinking, "Well, everyone I know does!"

Tamara's appearance that coded her as an "insider" in her home town did not translate well to UC-Davis, where she was interpreted as an "outsider," marginal to the mainstream student culture.

Tamara discovered that she lacked middle-class cultural knowledge in the college classroom as well. While her family provided her many other sources of knowledge, their lack of money and modes of cultural consumption left a gap in her "cultural toolkit" (Swidler 1986) that only became noticeable upon matriculation to college:

I recognized what an incredibly different background that I had, in terms of not having. . . some things that an Anglo family who has money [has

access to]—museums, those kinds of things. . . . There were certain expectations that when you came into UC–Davis you would have certain experience that I didn’t have. So you just had to kind of make up for that.

In response to this race- and class-based discomfiture, Tamara became active in MEChA, a Mexican American student group committed to visibility and social activism. Only in college did Tamara feel the need to assert a Chicana identity because it was threatened by her lack of community:

At UC–Davis [there were] the cowboys and the rednecks. And then there’s not that many Mexicans. They had a particular view of who you were, what you did. . . . It was really lonely because you would stand out. I think that was the first place where I ever saw racism. I think one Cinco de Mayo we had some kind of event in the plaza. And we had names scratched on the booth that were just kind of nasty. Like, “Go home, beaners.”

Tamara’s involvement in MEChA and claim to a Chicana identity in college thickens rather than thins her attachment to Mexican culture. This was a very intentional response to a situation in which she felt community was lacking and racial tensions ran high. She chose to find community through a Chicano student organization rather than a preprofessional organization or sorority chiefly because it was along the racial/ethnic axis of her social identity that she felt marginalized and maligned. Interestingly, she drew attention to her Chicana identity rather than obfuscated it. Within my entire sample of second-generation interviewees, responses to racial slights and exclusions were mixed. Tamara’s response represents the substantial portion of interviewees who met racial animosity head on (for example, some interviewees became active in the Chicano Movement) while others lied to obscure their racial heritage and tried to pass as a white ethnic. Unlike Marcus Lopez, whom we will meet in the next chapter, Tamara only became involved with a race-based group during her college years. Marcus and others, by contrast, held fiercely to their race-based activism, considering it more of a long-term calling as opposed to a shorter-term reaction to a situation of power imbalance. This variability of responses to racial inequality demonstrates that the process of assimilation is not uniform but variable and “bumpy” rather than linear.

Like education, religion is an institution that was powerfully influential in Tamara’s racial/ethnic identity development. Tamara was raised Catholic and went to Catholic school for nine years as a child. As an adult, she grew dis-

tant from the religion of her youth and is now nonpracticing and married to a Jewish man. Nonetheless, upon considering her natal family life she found that her racial heritage and Catholicism were woven together: “I think at the root of all of it [Mexican culture] was the church. A lot of activities revolved around something happening at the church—whether it was the wedding, whether it was the baptism.” The church was a centerpiece of her religious, racial/ethnic, and family life. Tamara’s commitment to the Catholic church began to wane when she was twelve years old, when her parents divorced. The Catholic church prohibited divorce, threatening excommunication, and Tamara’s mother took that command seriously and stopped going to church at the time of her divorce. Maria “paid a huge price in terms of being ostracized. Her brothers and sisters wouldn’t help her because it wasn’t the Catholic thing to do.” Maria’s “excommunication” from the Catholic church and banishment from her family of origin fueled Tamara’s cynicism and eventually toppled her Catholic faith. (The family used the term “excommunication,” yet it is unclear whether or not she was technically banned from the church.) Tamara traces the major moments of her questioning:

The Bible says you can’t get divorced. And [my mom] really believed that. . . . How can you believe in a religion that thinks you’re going to go to hell? There has got to be something wrong with this! . . . When my parents got divorced it totally upset the apple cart. . . . All of a sudden [my mom] couldn’t be Catholic because she was excommunicated. And she was going to hell. . . . I always challenged [Catholicism] anyway. So . . . it was easy to say, “Well, there is obviously something wrong with this.”

Her parents’ divorce marked Tamara’s departure from the Catholic church.

A religious conversion from Catholicism to Judaism moved Tamara, Gregory, and their three children along the thinned attachment pathway. Tamara felt an ideological incompatibility with Catholicism, in particular its mandate against divorce and church members’ withdrawal of support of her mother during her divorce. She therefore supported the family’s embrace of Judaism, her husband’s religion. Even though Catholicism was a big part of the way Tamara understood her Mexican identity when she was younger, the elements that comprise her Mexican identity have changed with time. In contrast to her youth, when being Mexican and Catholic went hand in hand, by age forty-seven, she and her children are Mexican American and Jewish.

Between Tamara’s youthful observations and her mother’s more conscious lesson-giving instruction, Tamara has two different models of the way a

woman can wield power. Along with her own “personally acquired memories” (from first-hand experience), Tamara inherited “appropriated memories” from her mother’s experience (Mannheim 1936), both of which shaped her racialized and gendered identity. Experiencing Mexican *machismo* in her relationships with her father and a college boyfriend, she learned that domineering male authority impeded her freedom and sense of self. She admits that there was a time when she thought “there would be no way I would ever marry someone who wasn’t Mexican,” that in so doing she “would be a sell-out. . . . And yet here I’ve done that.” She struggled with what loyalty to her Mexican heritage meant, especially if that loyalty was contradictory to loyalty to her gender. Tamara felt that marrying a non-Mexican man allowed her to escape narrow expectations of her as a woman and a wife. She was engaged to a Mexican national in college and found his understanding of womanhood, manhood, and their potential marital life together to be discordant with hers. With her husband Gregory she sidestepped those racialized understandings of gender: “I didn’t feel like I was getting squeezed or being told that I couldn’t do this, or expectations of what a Mexican woman was supposed to do. It wasn’t there at all.” Plus, Gregory being an Anglo “reborn hippie from the ‘60s” meant that he had already acquired the liberal thinking that exploded the gender boundaries she found so constricting.

Tamara analyzes the sense of comfort her life with Gregory provides where her gender identity is concerned:

[Gregory] didn’t . . . have the same background or the same traditional values. But I didn’t see that as a negative. In my family those traditional values I think really held women back. And so Gregory was just this avenue, this vehicle to not have to deal with any of that. And Gregory was really accepting and very loving. And always encouraged. . . . Whereas . . . [before] I was engaged to someone who was from Mexico . . . and we were constantly having these discussions about what the roles would be, and how threatened he felt because I was doing certain things. Or what the expectations were. That was a constant dialogue, where it wasn’t with Gregory. . . . I think on some levels the stereotypes [that] the Catholic church and Mexican men had . . . were negative values for me. . . . It gets back to my mom saying, “You have to learn to take care of yourself.” That was such a clear message.

Taking her mother’s counsel to heart, Tamara interpreted the refrain “taking care of yourself” to mean out-marriage for her. While certainly not all Mexican-origin men exhibit the macho version of masculinity Tamara found

so threatening, she felt she could not take that gamble. Similarly, not all U.S.-born non-Hispanic white men are gender egalitarian, as Tamara's reactionary logic suggests, but she nonetheless succeeded in finding a similarly minded mate in Gregory.

Guarding the fate of her gendered self by marrying a non-Mexican cost Tamara some friendships and raised questions about her racial allegiance. For many, exogamy spells a lack of commitment to one's heritage and an inevitable watering down of cultural traits. Tamara suffered some backlash from her friends: "I think I probably lost some friends who would never have considered marrying an Anglo. Because you kind of sold out because you did. And I did the same thing—if I'd see someone with some Anglo it was, 'Uh-oh, they sold out.' Oh, wait a second, I did too!" Tamara ruptured expectations—both familial and community—by marrying a Jew rather than a Mexican. But she was conscientious about her decision, aware that gaining some distance from Mexican culture did not mean a wholesale rejection of Mexican culture. Instead, she opted to actively pick and choose the elements of her background to retain and to discard. She reasoned that distance from her Mexican culture was not deplorable if it facilitated a healthy sense of gender, feminism, and marriage for her.

Tamara learned lessons not just about race and ethnicity from her mother but about gender as well. Self-reliance, perseverance, and a strong work ethic were key lessons that Maria spoke of trying to instill in her children, and by Tamara's account, she heard that instruction loud and clear:

I think my mom's biggest lesson was just an incredibly strong work ethic. And, as a woman, you had to be able to take care of yourself. . . . I couldn't count on anyone else but myself to take care of . . . myself and my family. . . . A woman had to be able to take care of herself and not depend on a man to do that. And . . . if you really worked hard you could achieve whatever goal you wanted to.

The life lessons Maria endowed her children were also lessons about gender. Maria was ever mindful of telling her daughter not to be oppressed by male authority.

Like her mother, in selecting Mexican cultural elements to pass on to her children, Tamara became a participant in the thinned attachment process. She filtered out undesirable elements and preserved valuable ones. In so doing she actively enacted "distilled ethnicity." According to Nazli Kibria (2002: 160), "distilled ethnicity" occurs when "ethnic culture and identity are

pared of nonessential components down to their core essence.” Parents teach children only the “basic values” about the family’s race/ethnicity. This reflects a high degree of acculturation to middle-class America because that is all parents can or want to pass on to their children.

The value of family was passed on intergenerationally as part of this distilled ethnicity. Referring to her natal family, Tamara remarked, “what I learned from being Mexican is just a sense of family. That you’re there for your family no matter what.” She has taught her children this lesson, noting that geographic proximity to her mother (they live twenty minutes away by car) made possible a close relationship among all three generations: “Since they were born the kids have always gone to their Grandma’s house at least once a week. And when they were smaller—three and four times a week. And so they’ve learned that sense of family.” Family events involved getting together for meals: “We used to go to my mom’s twice a week for dinner. And it would be my sisters and my brother, and all of their families, and some of my cousins . . . and so it would be twenty, twenty-five people every Thursday.” After contemplating what she hopes her children will hold on to, she declared family as “always there, no matter what . . . [it is a] safety net.” Allowing for sibling differences but hoping for family unity, Tamara pronounced in an imagined conversation with her children, “You might not appreciate each other’s perspective sometimes. But . . . in the end you are the only ones that will be the copresidents of your siblings’ fan club!” By focusing on family bonding, Tamara is maintaining one symbolic attachment to her Mexican heritage. However nearly universal the tenet of family and family values might be, Tamara endows that value with Mexican meaning.

Each generation confronts different struggles regarding their racial background. Tamara consciously bucked marital and religious expectations, yet she embraced other elements such as “Thursday dinners” with her family and Mexican food. Tamara recognizes that her half-Mexican, half-Jewish children are presented with a different host of identity concerns than she confronted. While she and her husband have afforded them a class-privileged lifestyle that includes the expectation of college education, this trend of upward mobility and assimilation has come with the consequence of a racial “identity crisis,” to use their children’s own words. Tamara considers how a third-generation Mexican American identity can be confounding:

[Racial/ethnic identity struggle] wasn’t something I ever had to deal with. I was just Mexican and that was it. And [my children] really struggle with what it means. And as they go through their journeys they’ll decide how

important it is and where they want to be. I'm hoping that they embrace both and that they realize they have an incredible history.

Tamara spoke of Andrew as “embracing both” the Jewish and Mexican cultures, explaining that Andrew was the one who pushed the family to connect with his father’s Jewish faith. Immediately after that assertion she claimed, “Andrew loves being Mexican. He has all kinds of blankets and little tchatchkes that he keeps because that’s who he is.” Unintentionally illustrating the cultural mix in her home, Tamara uses the Yiddish colloquialism “tchatchke” to refer to her son’s Mexican trinkets.

Third Generation: Jillian Rosenberg

Jillian, a twenty-year-old student at Yale University, is the eldest daughter of the Rosenberg family. She is Mexican (from her mother’s side) and Jewish (from her father’s side). Jillian has medium-brown hair, light skin, and dark hazel eyes with a bit of an almond shape to them. She is short, petite, and very well spoken. She says people variously think she is “all Mexican, all white, or something else.” Some people approach her speaking Spanish while others are shocked when she reveals she is part Mexican.

By measures of structural and behavioral assimilation, Jillian is integrated into the U.S. mainstream. Several factors contributed to her assimilation: her parents’ upward economic mobility and firmly middle-class standing, her educational achievement and trajectory, her English language fluency (and loss of Spanish fluency), and her adoption of middle-class values (work ethic, career aspirations) as well as the bicultural norms practiced by her family.

Jillian’s expression of thinned attachment is not an inevitable consequence of her structural assimilation, as chapter 3 will make clear. Jillian’s relaxed relationship to her Mexican heritage is due to both familial and institutional forces. Due to her family structure and orientation, class privilege, educational segregation, “appropriated memories” from her mother and grandmother, and college experience, she is living out a race-sensitive but not Mexican-centric life. Jillian expresses a “thinned attachment” to her Mexican background in that it is not central to her life. She does not assert and practice her Mexican-origin identity, nor does she find it instrumental in facilitating or limiting her opportunities. Reasons for her thinned attachment include being raised in a bicultural home with an assimilationist orientation, embeddedness in American institutions, being non-Catholic, and bearing a last name that does not identify her as Latina (Murguia and Forman 2003).

Her mother's exogamy (which bestowed upon her the white ethnic surname "Rosenberg") and her grandmother's admonitions against marrying a Mexican man have conditioned Jillian with a largely assimilationist mindset. A hallmark of "thinned attachment" is the fact that she is aware of her cultural background yet not bound to it (by herself or others).

In grammar school, Jillian rejected her Mexican heritage, even typecasting other Mexicans (often lower-class Mexicans) according to mainstream negative stereotypes. She reasoned that her allegiance to whiteness was due in part to the fact that, as the "norm," she found it "unproblematic." Her Jewish ancestry is the "taken-for-granted" or "background" or "norm" of her identity, as well as the invisible benchmark for society. Jillian's tacit rationale for obscuring her Mexican identity and highlighting her white identity probably involves being able to garner certain benefits of white privilege, such as uncontested enrollment in high school in Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) classes that were racially segregated. She observes, "growing up I was trying to navigate between two worlds but more trying to keep myself out of one of them as much as possible. It's gotten more complicated in college." Her mixed heritage is alternately a source of flexibility as well a wellspring of "identity crises."

In a social and educational context of whiteness, Jillian "naturally" assumed that she was white. Jillian explained the logic by which she deduced she was white in elementary school:

In all of the GATE [Gifted and Talented Education] classes, everyone was white. There is a really clear-cut distinction between the white people and the Mexican people. If you are a Mexican kid, you were in ESL [English as a Second Language] classes or not very intelligent. . . . It was like, "Are you Mexican or are you white?" I look a lot more white than I look Mexican . . . and I was in the GATE classes with all the white kids, so I was white.

Complaining about the "unbelievably distinct boundary between white and Mexican kids," Jillian found no room for her mixed-race heritage. Due to her school achievement, tracking placement, class privilege, and peer group, she identified as white. Circulating in predominantly middle-class white circles, Jillian was exposed to and adopted some stereotypes of Mexicans. Jillian identified as white in elementary school, yet it is unclear whether she did so because she did not perceive stereotypes of Mexicans as applying to her or because she *did* make that connection and opted for whiteness in order to escape being typecast. For instance, Jillian reflected, "I had really awful

stereotypes of what Mexican people were like too, like all Mexican people are gardeners and maids.” She laughed uncomfortably as she admitted, “[there was always] the half of me that I had to hide. I was always so embarrassed of that; I was soiled in some way because I had Mexican blood in me.”

The low social value that society places on Latinos influenced Jillian’s retreat from her Mexican heritage. Food, as a cultural signal of her ethnicity, came to symbolize shame and substandard performance for her. In answer to my question about when she first understood the concept of race or ethnicity, she described a situation that occurred when she was eight or nine years old:

I played piano for my whole life. We used to have performances and competitions. For one of them you had to memorize five to ten pieces and you’d play them in front of a judge and . . . you’d get a scorecard back. . . . I was performing my pieces in front of a judge and I just really freaked out and messed up all of my songs and got really off track. The guy was trying to calm me down and talk to me and he said, “Did you have anything to eat today for lunch?” I was like, “Yeah, I did.” He said, “Well, what did you eat?” I had had a burrito. [Laughs.] And for some reason I was deathly ashamed to say that. But I couldn’t think of anything else to say, so I was like, “I had a burrito” [meek, quiet]. “A burrito?” [curious, surprised] I’m sure he wasn’t even talking about race or anything, but for some reason that really stuck in my head. “Oh my God, what if he thinks I’m a gross little Mexican kid who can’t get her songs right?” . . . I was really embarrassed about being Mexican at that time and I felt there was a big distinction between me and him, this white guy. I was so ashamed of my little burrito.

Food can flag ethnic difference. Just as it can fortify ethnic identity and rejuvenate family bonds (Di Leonardo 1984; Macias 2006), so too can it draw boundaries between mainstream and periphery. Despite being so young, Jillian understood that Mexicans and their customary burritos carried social signals with which she did not want to be associated. Here Jillian plausibly suffered from “stereotype threat” (Spencer, Steele, and Quinn 1999; Steele and Aronson 1995; Steele, Spencer, and Aronson 2002), where one feels one is at risk of confirming a negative stereotype about one’s group, the stress of which leads to underperformance. During this time in elementary school she was in advanced classes with white peers and she felt pressure (and perhaps desire) to be white. She was struggling with social and institutional

messages about the extant racial and ethnic hierarchy. Because classes were segregated by race (she reported she was one of five Mexicans in all of the GATE classes), in order to remain in her GATE class without being suspect, she felt pressure to deny her Mexican heritage in favor of her white ancestry. In these years she was struggling with anxiety about how to reconcile two distinct ethnic backgrounds into one complete identity. By admitting that her lunch was inconsistent with mainstream food culture, she increased her social distance from whiteness, and that only amplified her sense of frustration and inferiority.

In her youth, Jillian distanced herself from her Mexican background due to multiple forces: educational segregation (to be in GATE classes she must be white), society's low estimation of the Mexican population (making her burrito shameful and her whiteness unproblematic), her grandmother's and mother's oppression within patriarchy and Catholicism, and a racially politicized college experience that uncomfortably highlighted her mixed heritage. Jillian experienced her whiteness as unproblematic because it is accepted as the norm in U.S. society. Whiteness is a location of structural advantage (racial privilege) within a hierarchy; it is also a set of cultural practices that are typically unmarked and unnamed (Frankenberg 1993: 1). While whiteness usually constitutes an invisible norm, it is in fact a salient organizing characteristic of white people's lives. Given the benefit of racial privilege, those of mixed heritage may be tempted to side with their whiteness because, as Jillian said, it is "unproblematic." Furthermore, there is external pressure for one's attitudes, behavior, and racial identification to match one's physical appearance and name. As Julie Bettie (2003: 85) found in her work with Mexican American and white high school girls in California, "one's race performance was *expected* to correspond to a perceived racial 'essence,' marked by color and surname." For light-skinned, brown-haired Jillian Rosenberg, this conceptualization of race performance expects her to "pass" for non-Hispanic white (Jewish).

Because of Jillian's "wanting to pass for white" in grade school and being perceived as such because of her physical looks and other signals such as class status, demeanor, and educational attainment, it is no wonder that she feels she is "part of dominant or mainstream U.S. culture." As corroborating testimony, note that she does not feel like she has encountered discrimination. A sign of her assimilation, she "thinks she passes for being white pretty well" and therefore avoided the blunt end of discrimination. Yet, even her "passing" is inconsistent because she feels "hyper sensitive to [race], like [she] expect[s] to be discriminated against."

Familiar with her family history, Jillian was aware that patriarchy and strict Catholicism did not serve her grandmother and mother well. The two women above Jillian in the family line experienced gender oppression as a result of their cultural and religious ties. Therefore, they raised Jillian with far looser cultural and religious bonds, resulting in her thinned attachment to Mexican culture and her stern opinion that she would not marry a Mexican man or practice Catholicism.⁷ Recall Maria's divorce from her physically and verbally abusive alcoholic husband and Tamara's need to escape patriarchal expectations of gender by marrying a Jew and attending college. Jillian recalled family stories about her grandmother's life:

She was the first person in her entire family to get a divorce and her entire family did not speak to her . . . some for six years, some for ten years. No one would go near her. She didn't have any help. She was raising three kids on her own. Even in the neighborhood . . . rumors were spread about her. . . . People would be telling [my mom] to her face that they were all going to hell [because my] mom got divorced. It must have taken so much strength to be able to do that—she is a really, really religious person, very Catholic.

Negative associations of Mexican culture and Catholicism as detrimental to an egalitarian gender identity were passed down three generations in the female family line.

Jillian's first-hand experiences only advanced the thinned attachment to Mexican culture with which she was reared. Jillian's insider knowledge regarding the gender restrictions that her forebears claimed Mexican culture imposes on women vis-à-vis power dynamics in marriages, circumscribed educational opportunities, and a gendered division of labor pushed her even further from Mexican traditionalism. Noting that both her grandmother and mother are somewhat "black sheep" in their own natal families because of behavior that defied gender norms (divorce and out-marriage), Jillian described her traditional Mexican kin:

I think, actually, that a lot of the misconceptions I grew up having about Mexicans were from [my family] because they are a very, very traditional family. My mother would kill me if she heard me say this. The women stay around and cook and have no jobs and the men go out and come back and kick their feet up and demand beer and food. No one goes to college and you should be married and having kids at my age [authoritative tone]. It's really, really, really traditional.

She described her family's reaction to her mother refusing to abide by gender expectations of marrying a Mexican and remaining in the domestic sphere:

No one would ever say outright, "I can't believe you married a white guy" [and yet] I always felt like we were the black sheep of the family and it was some sort of disgrace that my mom married a white guy. My mom has always been the black sheep because she went to college, too. She actually had goals and did something. They always felt like, "What is this woman doing, running wild and going off to college and trying to do something with her life?"

Seeing both strict gender expectations and her mother's defiance of them, Jillian continued along the pathway paved by her second wave feminist mother. Acutely aware of her family history and not open to the possibility of variance within the totalizing term "Mexican culture," Jillian feared being "pigeon-holed" into a gendered role that she didn't want:

The subservient wife. You pop out the kids and you make dinner and keep the house clean and keep him happy. [One side of my family] . . . is very, very, very traditional and I always felt like I didn't get any respect. Even when I was a senior in high school and I was going off to an Ivy League school and I had done really well for myself and I had a lot of accomplishments . . . I felt like I was never going to get any respect from them. Like I was betraying my culture by trying to go off to college and do something with that.

A much-disputed research finding suggests that for some minorities educational success equates to "acting white" (Matute-Bianchi 1986; Ogbu and Fordham 1986) and betraying one's cultural background. The "acting white" critique is not only about race and ethnicity but about class as well, for it suggests that those who become educated will no longer be able to relate to—or will perhaps act as if they are superior to—their more humble roots (Kadi 1996; Lewin 2005). Feeling this pressure, Jillian struggles with commitment to her goals that are supported by her immediate family and the traditional race and gender roles that her wider kinship circle expects of her. In order to liberate herself from gender constraints, Jillian distanced herself further from the rigid gender roles of her extended Mexican family.

Jillian's pathway of thinned attachment continued upon her matriculating to Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, and moving out of her family's sphere of influence. First, her college attendance was in part a function of her middle-class status and her family's acculturation, or changed cultural

patterns and values that match those of the host country. A mark of structural assimilation, or “entrance into cliques, clubs, and institutions of [the] host society” (Gordon 1964: 71), Jillian’s Ivy League college education signals her membership in mainstream U.S. society. Indeed, her Yale University education is in many ways a perfection of an ideal, considering the premium most middle-class whites place on an Ivy League education. This isn’t simply going to college; this is attending an *elite* institution.

Jillian’s college experience included racialized encounters. These situations belie her smooth and wholesale acceptance into an elite, historically white university. While Jillian was made aware of her racial background in college in a new way and took on a “Mexican American” label more willingly because of her new “politically correct” college atmosphere, she did not actually renew any substantive connection to it. While her Mexican heritage was “symbolic” to the extent that it did not overly determine her life outcomes, it was not symbolic in the pleasurable and voluntary way that Gans (1979) predicted. For Jillian, being of Mexican descent was an integral feature of her life because she struggled on a regular basis with the question of what being half-Mexican and half-white meant.

Recall that Jillian comfortably saw herself as white through most of her growing-up years, although this perception was periodically troubled. In college, social context further complicated her story of racialization, because Jillian’s Mexicanness was exoticized at a predominantly white, Ivy League campus. Due to a confluence of factors (having checked “Mexican American” on her college application, residing on a politically aware college campus that values “diversity,” and experiencing renewed connection to Mexico due to recent family travels), Jillian began to accept “Mexican” as a descriptor. Her move toward “Mexican” was only partly voluntary, however:

I think I started saying “Mexican” since I’d gone to Yale, because now it’s “cool” to be Mexican [wry tone]. It definitely is weird. I feel weird that I don’t have nearly as many issues with being white and Jewish as I do with being Mexican. I think I probably use Mexican and Mexican American. . . . As much as I say that being white is an identity, it does feel like more of a vacancy. There is really not anything to explain there. With Mexican it’s like, “It’s this and this and this.” There is not really anything to confront with being a white person.

Whiteness, for Jillian, is easier to identify with because it is “unproblematic.” Because the white race is the majority race in the United States, whiteness does not need to be explained or defended.

If Jillian is assimilated, how does she live out her Mexican culture? She experiences a “thinned attachment” to Mexican culture. She is both symbolically and practically attached to Mexican traditions and knowledge, but tenuously and loosely so. With regard to Spanish, which is often used as a marker of cultural maintenance, Jillian remarked, “I have a good vocabulary but bad grammar; I don’t know how to put a sentence together. It was my first language and I lost it. It’s really important, but I haven’t been able to make time to actually do it because I have two majors and I’m pre-med.” Jillian lost Spanish at a young age and has never recaptured it because her home life did not reinforce it and her school life is overwhelmed with other academic concerns.

Never pointing to any Mexican traditions as strongholds in her life, she experiences her Mexican identity primarily due to her commitment to her family. When I asked what she likes about being of Mexican descent she responded,

I think the most important thing to me is the importance of family. That is just so, so, so important to me. I’m really glad to be a part of a culture that appreciates that. I think it’s the culture that is most focused on the family. It’s just really important to me. My mom chose to live here [in Santa Barbara] because she wanted to be near her mom and I want to live here as well and let my kids have the same kind of relationship that I got to have with my grandma. . . . And I’ve never met anyone else who has felt that same way; everyone else is like, “oh, God, I want to get as far away from my parents as I can.” . . . I’ve just been raised and learned that your family is there for you no matter what, you can’t escape them, you are related by blood, and they are there for you and that’s that. . . . I really love everyone being together and getting to share moments together.

Aside from Jillian’s commitment to her family—which she and her mother both attribute to Mexican culture but which is, in fact, valorized across many ethnic cultures (Di Leonardo 1984)—she is only loosely connected to her maternal grandmother’s homeland. Jillian’s thinned attachment is demonstrated by the many ways in which she is distant from Mexican traditions and belief systems and even actively moving away from them. Specifically, she is opposed to patriarchal family forms and *machismo*, is not Catholic, and does not think she will marry a Mexican American. She reflected on the aspects of Mexican culture that she does not like:

The traditional family structure. Odd that the thing that I like the most is also the thing that I dislike the most. I don’t like the traditional “man goes

out and works and the wife stays home and cooks and doesn't really do anything." I really don't like that. I [also] really don't like a lot of the really strict Catholicism.

Jillian has distaste for Catholicism, which she considers synonymous with Mexican culture. Upon discovering that her Caucasian boyfriend was Catholic, she exclaimed, "I didn't know that whites were Catholic! I thought it was just Mexicans." From this vantage point, Jillian's move away from Catholicism is yet another way in which she is moving away from traditional Mexican culture.

Just as her mother avoided what she saw as pitfalls of a traditional culture that violated her gender equality ideals by marrying a non-Mexican, Jillian is also headed in that direction. When I inquired as to her ideas on marriage, she replied with certainty, taking her grandmother's woman-to-woman advice to heart:

I am like 99 percent sure that I won't marry another Mexican. Which makes me really sad because my kids will be only one-fourth. But my grandma—she's like, "*Mija* [darling], never date a Mexican man. They are nothing but trouble. Stay away from the Mexican men."

I asked her, "Why do you think she says that?" She replied,

I think that she has a very traditional view of them as well and doesn't want me to be in that role, a subservient role, and doesn't want me to fall into the traditional structure like that.

Jillian holds strong convictions about gender equality that she sees as largely incompatible with Mexican manhood. Furthermore, she notes that most Mexican men she encounters are not "marriageable" in her sense of the term. That is, they have not been on the same assimilationist and upward-mobility trajectory as she. In a prospective marriage partner, matching education, family structures, and belief systems are of utmost importance to her. In this equation, while she bemoans the potential loss of Mexican culture through intermarriage, it will probably not be retained:

What are the chances of me meeting a Mexican man who doesn't want a traditional family structure and who is well educated and has my similar beliefs and values and someone that I'm attracted to on top of that? What

are my chances of that? It's probably a really cynical view to have, but if I'm honest with myself, that's really how I feel. . . . Because all of my serious relationships have been with white guys, I just feel like that's where it's going to end up. And it does make me a little bit sad because I want my kids to be able to share that kind of culture and history that I do. It does make me sad that they would only be one-quarter, but maybe that just means that I have to make a better job of filling that culture in them.

Jillian romanticizes some aspects of Mexican culture (such as family togetherness) while disparaging others (patriarchy and traditional gender roles). She makes life choices that avoid what she sees as the downsides of her Mexican heritage. By resisting patriarchal family forms, rejecting Catholicism, and dating non-Mexican men, she is on a trajectory that will further assimilate herself and her potential offspring, the fourth generation. Recognizing that her "thinned attachment" will probably result in exogamy and that a consequence will be her future children's even further distance (generationally and culturally) from Mexico, Jillian is disheartened and vows to rejuvenate Mexican culture for her children. However, the likelihood of this occurring in any meaningful way is dubious. Inter marriage is more likely to occur among Mexican American children with one non-Hispanic parent than among those who have two Mexican-origin parents (Telles and Ortiz 2009: 281). Without the support of a partner who can contribute knowledge and emotional support to Jillian's aims, her children are in all probability going to continue the assimilationist and thinned attachment course that her grandmother, mother, and she and her siblings have charted.

Jillian's Mexican heritage has been problematic for her, producing "identity crises" at various times in her life. While she did not discuss this directly, it is plausible that her struggle with how to cohere her "fragmented" identity also motivated her thinned attachment. The two extremes (and accompanying crises) Jillian experienced in terms of her Mexican identity were dependent on context: it was "dirty" and something to actively estrange herself from when she was younger, and in college it is exoticized by her east coast college peers as "not just white." Because whiteness is often the "unmarked and unnamed" standard (Frankenberg 1993) and is a trait shared by the majority of the U.S. populace, Jillian's Mexican side provides her a noticeable racial identity:

I've had identity because of my Mexicanness. White is the norm. Anything you add on top of that is going to cause problems or issues. My dad [Jew-

ish] has a lot of history with his family, with the Holocaust, and so there is definitely that history, but I almost don't associate that with white history. It feels like there is no "white history." There is the history of our country and all that, but it doesn't feel like there is as much history there as with other cultures. Odd. . . . I guess it is because it's such an odd conglomeration of everything. Mexicans are from Mexico. Whites are from *everywhere*. Maybe it's because growing up, it was okay that I was white. I never had any issues with that. I never felt like I had to hide it or be really proud of it. I don't feel like it has as much attached to it, which is sad because I don't want to feel like half of me is really significant and has all these issues to work out and the other half of me . . .

For Jillian, her whiteness is an easily acceptable identity feature because it is the national norm. Mexican identity, however, provides distinction (positively and negatively, depending on social context) and therefore "causes issues" for her. She struggles with how to combine two seemingly disparate racial heritages. Jillian hopes that her future children will have an easier time coalescing their identity features than she has had, which they probably will if she marries a white man as this will strengthen their connection to whiteness. She refers to an acculturated "distilled ethnicity" (Kibria 2002) as she ponders what she would share with her children about her background: "I'd want them to have a sense of their Mexican heritage . . . and the big emphasis on family." As much as Jillian, and other third-generation Mexican Americans, may want to preserve their cultural heritage, this may not be possible without sustained and conscientious striving. After declaring that she wants to "preserve all of it," Jillian conceded, "I feel like it's slipping through our fingers." The pull of her assimilationist, upwardly mobile, and thinned attachment reality seems inconsistent with her preservationist sentiments.

Social Forces Driving Thinned Attachment

The thinned attachment trajectory, as evidenced by this family but also practiced by a third of families in the sample, is characterized by loosening commitments to their Mexican heritage and increasing attachment to American cultural behaviors. Several features are key in routing families toward thinned attachment, including religion, gender and gender ideologies, peer networks (including social context and educational experiences), family memory and teaching, marital partner, cultural toolkit (namely, language), and phenotype. A survival mode of parenting in which parents focus on pro-

viding the basics for children and lack time to supplement their children's knowledge of family history is one way attachment to Mexican culture weakens. Parents not teaching children Spanish or maintaining it in the home has a direct effect on with whom Mexican American children can communicate and what kinds of cultural knowledge they can obtain. Many families expressed a *desire* to continue the use of Spanish in the family but they either lacked the vigilance to implement that commitment or could not counteract the centrifugal force of English that surrounded them in public spaces and institutions.

Changing gender dynamics and gender roles also contribute to thinning. In the move from a more traditional and patriarchal system in Mexico into a more transitional/egalitarian system in the United States, a thinning of Mexican ways of life can be a byproduct of conforming to new structural surroundings (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Smith 2006b). While U.S. residents do not unilaterally exhibit more equal gender relations than residents of Mexico, national context can condition cultural behaviors, such as gender norms. Some Mexican Americans (namely, women in all three generations and many men in the third generation) made purposeful decisions to adopt the ideology and practices of gender equality, advancing thinned attachment.⁸

Diminishing devotion to Catholicism also contributed to cultural dilution. The vast majority (69 percent) of Mexicans in the United States identify themselves as Catholic (Pew Hispanic Center 2007a: 13). In many families' narratives, Mexican culture was very much intertwined with Catholic religious traditions. Despite this general devotion to Catholicism, the Rosenberg family, in its attachment to Judaism, represents a twist to the trend of "Latinos, over time . . . changing religious preferences toward those of the larger non-Latino community [Protestant/Christian]" (Chavez 2008: 63). The families that remained practicing Catholics usually retained a strong sense of Mexican identity whereas those families who converted to other faiths (Jehovah's Witness, Seventh-Day Adventist, Judaism) did not. Mexican culture and Catholicism have a mutually reinforcing relationship; it appears that when one weakens, so does the other.

Improved economic status occurred for the vast majority of my sample—both thinned attachment and cultural maintenance families—and so upward mobility does not determine level of cultural identification and commitment. Upwardly mobile families oftentimes moved into higher-socioeconomic-status neighborhoods or geographic regions that were predominantly non-Hispanic white. These families became enmeshed with middle-class, mainstream American culture, losing daily contact with coethnics and thus

forfeiting a source of cultural reinforcement. Yet, not all upwardly mobile families experienced thinned attachment; some remained very culturally attuned and committed.

Educational attainment is heavily influenced by generation (and class). All first-generation immigrants had “junior high or less” levels of education whereas their children’s modal educational attainment was college degree.⁹ The third generation is well on its way to a college degree being the minimum educational attainment, with a sizeable portion of individuals seeking postgraduate degrees. While educational attainment is not crucial to one’s racial self-concept or incorporation pattern, the social context of school is important. Both the racial demographics of the school campus and its racial atmosphere play an important role in racial identity development. The way people calibrate their responses to racialized educational settings steers their racial identity development. For instance, Mexican American respondents who attended a school with a sizeable portion of other Mexican Americans felt supported by their surroundings and social networks. As a consequence, this social environment allowed them to hold onto and practice their cultural heritage. On the other hand, if students attended a school where they were a minority population, encountered unwelcoming peers and institutional indifference, they were more likely to either resist schooling and/or use thinned attachment as self-defense.

Exogamy is another pivotal factor in thinned attachment. Intermarriage is commonly viewed as an indicator of assimilation (Gordon 1964; Kalmijn 1998; Lee and Bean 2004; Murguía 1982). But intermarriage also has decisive consequences for the racial, social, and cultural position of the offspring of such pairings. Exogamy is both an indicator of and factor leading toward assimilation. Those who intermarry with European-descent Americans in the second generation¹⁰ have a far greater propensity to adopt American traditions and outlooks and loosen the grip on Mexican ones. Telles and Ortiz (2008b: 281) found that children with Mexican-origin and non-Hispanic white parents “were less likely to know Spanish, were more likely to intermarry themselves, identified less with their Mexican origin, and were more likely to call themselves Americans.” Exogamous marital choices can either be interpreted as a consequence of structural assimilation (as traditional assimilation theory predicts) or a deliberate choice (as in cases where a Mexican American woman wants to escape rigid gender expectations). A Mexican American’s out-marriage with a European-descent American further reinforces American culture within the family unit. As demographers remind us, “intermarriage increases the size of the Hispanic population

through the addition of people who have one Hispanic parent and who were identified as Hispanic. . . . While not yet large, a nontrivial and growing proportion of Hispanics are ‘part-Hispanics’” (Lee and Edmonston 2006). Alternatively, Mexican American intramarriage supports a family atmosphere that includes some Mexican orientations such as Spanish, food, tradition, and values. Marriage is thus a heavily influential ingredient in the cultural recipes for either thinned attachment or cultural maintenance.

How likely someone is to loosen his or her sense of Mexican identity is also influenced by personal features that make that identity more evident to others, such as skin tone and surname. Physically, thinned attachment families, especially by the third generation, are lighter in skin tone than cultural maintenance families. Phenotype changes in the third generation are partly due to intermarriage in the second generation. Skin tone and surname affect the way people are perceived and treated by others as well as how they self-identify. While the preponderance of my sample had Hispanic last names, those who did not were invariably in the thinned attachment category. As a result of phenotype and surname, this population is more accepted by the dominant society and therefore has an easier time acculturating (and, conversely, has a harder time preserving ethnic culture).

It is due to structural and cultural influences as well as the choices of everyday life that one develops a thinned attachment to a natal culture. Deliberate choices can enact thinned attachment, even if the decision itself is not based on a desire for cultural distance. The structural and cultural conditions of American life can sway immigrant families toward cultural assimilation as well. “Assimilation occurs while people are making other plans, as it were” (Alba 2006: 292), as people attempt to improve their lives. Recall that a sizeable portion of my sample represents the other possible incorporation outcome of cultural maintenance, so American culture does not inevitably overwhelm immigrants and overtake their native cultural traits. Indeed, while assimilation models often assume that upward mobility is achieved at the expense of shedding non-U.S. traditions and cultures, upward mobility can also occur by *adhering* to the values of that culture and preserving a high degree of ethnic involvement (Zhou and Bankston 1998). This illustrates an exception to the assumption that assimilation requires immigrants to jettison their homeland’s culture and value system in order to achieve academic success and socioeconomic upward mobility.

The portrait sketched here is in the spirit of a Weberian “ideal type” (Weber 1978). I have described how thinned attachment families appear in the aggregate, using the Montes/Rosenberg family as a rich illustration.

For each family characteristic described above that contributes to thinned attachment, there is a range of possibilities that can combine to yield a similar result but due to different “configurations of causes” (Ragin 1987; Ragin 1994). Thinned attachment and cultural maintenance represent two poles on a spectrum of incorporation possibilities. Families do not need to fit neatly into these two categories, but may instead lie along the continuum that exists between thinned attachment and cultural maintenance.

The Montes/Rosenberg family demonstrates how each generation in a family makes both conscious and unconscious choices to move away from Mexican culture. In this “thinned attachment” pattern, the cultural linkage to Mexican traditions weakens with each succeeding generation. Families such as the Montes/Rosenberg family who experience thinned attachment do so as a result of focusing their attention on the United States and steering their attention away from Mexico. Thinned attachment refers to individuals who do not consider “being Mexican” a significant portion of their social identities. Instead, they demonstrate a relaxed expression of Mexican cultural traits and inconsistently attempt to preserve a meaningful Mexican identity for themselves or their offspring.

This chapter focused on a mixed-race family because of the high degree of marital assimilation among Latinos by the third generation; Latino intermarriages with whites exceeded 50 percent in the third generation during the 1990s (Lee and Bean 2004: 222). Furthermore, among my interviewees, the three out of four second-generation interviewees who intermarried with whites were on the thinned attachment pathway, buttressing the argument that marital partner plays a significant role in the incorporation trajectory of a family.

Thinned attachment refines assimilation theory. Straight-line assimilation theory is overly deterministic, assuming that incorporation requires total shedding of native culture. Thinned attachment allows for “distilled” cultural elements to be passed on, even while assimilation occurs at other levels. Thinned attachment elaborates assimilation theory by examining the mechanisms that propel the incorporation process, adding nuance to our understanding of integration patterns and racial identity formation over generations. Racial/ethnic self-concept and degree of attachment to a cultural origin are highly contingent on generation, family orientation, social context, historical era, and personal features such as phenotype.

Structural assimilation does not inevitably lead to thinned attachment, as we will see in chapter 3. Thinned attachment, accompanied by a high degree of structural assimilation, is one of the two modal patterns of incorporation

of Mexican immigrant families into the United States. Some of the same factors highlighted in this chapter, with different content and in different combinations, can produce a qualitatively different outcome. The next chapter explores the second of the two main paradigms of incorporation and racial identity development found among my upwardly mobile middle-class¹¹ sample. Chapter 3 showcases two families who demonstrate the cultural maintenance trajectory. These complementary chapters refine assimilation theory by uncovering key points at which assimilation advances, reverses, stalls, or changes direction. The concepts of thinned attachment and cultural maintenance emphasize the intergenerational transmission of culture and racial meanings that occurs within familial, institutional, and historical frameworks. Taking this chapter and the next as two sides of the same coin, we can see how a diversity of identities and outcomes can be exhibited by three-generation Mexican-origin families that one might at first glance consider a single homogeneous group.