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Whiter Is Better

Discrimination in Everyday Life

Eyes [can be] really clouded by lenses that are named racism.
—Pierre-Mecatl, 29-year old male interviewee

We should turn around and show we're not what they think!
—Beatrice, sixty-year-old female interviewee

Ruben and Adele Mendoza are a married second-generation couple who are both light skinned and have a Hispanic surname. They tell me a powerful tale about how their Spanish-sounding name—Mendoza as a "giveaway" last name—restricted their access to housing when they were newlyweds:

ADELE: We were looking for a place to live and we went apartment hunting. There was a small little cottage . . . we went to go look at—[it was] just perfect, what we had wanted. So we told the guy [property manager], "Would you give a chance to go home and get the money and we'll be back in an hour? And then we'll come back and give you the deposit and the rent." He was all, "Oh, yeah, yeah, fine." They had a formal book and so I put our names down on the register—"put you down so I'll know when you come back." When we came back they said, "Sorry, it's already been rented." And they slammed the door.

RUBEN: We asked a couple of our friends to go and check out the apartment for us: "Oh yeah, it's still vacant."

ADELE: I mean, "Ruben Mendoza." That is very obvious, who we are. [I]t's a dead giveaway. . . . What is the problem? Just because he thought we were white—because we were white!!—but once we put the name down we are all of a sudden these evil people.

The United States has a long history of housing segregation (Conley 1999; Massey and Denton 1993; Oliver and Shapiro 1995), and even now U.S. cities remain highly segregated. After being refused at the door by the property manager, the Mendozas confirmed the continued vacancy of the cottage and could not come up with an alternative explanation for having been refused besides the fact that they had written their last name, the "dead giveaway," down on the register.

Discriminatory practices such as this demarcate racial groups by establishing racial boundaries that exclude racial minorities from educational, workplace, or social arenas on the basis of their assumed inferiority. Discrimination erects boundaries to access at the entryway of valuable resources (school, housing, employment, church, commercial zones, social groups), making the sustainability or permeability of racial boundaries a significant question. "Discrimination" is defined here as "attitudes, overgeneralized beliefs, and actions that are mobilized to cement superior group position relative to other groups." Discrimination arises when individuals or groups are denied equality of *treatment*, as opposed to prejudice, which is an "*attitude* of favor or disfavor . . . and . . . related to an overgeneralized (and therefore erroneous) *belief*" (Allport 1979: 13). Discrimination is particularly deleterious in its capacity to instantiate a vision of the world, for "social divisions become principles of division, organizing the image of the social world" (Bourdieu 1984: 471). As people segregate themselves from "others" by way of discriminatory practices, they devise reproducible social categories and ways of life, such as segregated neighborhoods, as we saw in the opening vignette.

This chapter addresses the following questions: What are the sites and forms of the discrimination Mexican Americans face? Which types of discrimination are common across generations and which are distinctive? How do respondents react to discrimination? In what ways is discrimination challenged, resisted, or internalized? What are the generational differences in perception of discrimination and coping mechanisms?

Common Discrimination Experiences across Generations

Members of all three generations were targeted for discrimination on the basis of specific nonpersonal features such as name, skin color, and physical appearance. All three generations were subjected to extra degrees of surveillance in public spaces, whether by shop employees in retail stores or by police officers in municipal zones.

Color-Coded and Labeled: The Impact of Skin Color and Names

Discrimination does not affect all Mexican Americans equally. In a society where "the constitution of racism through . . . economies of color" (Harris 2009: 1) is prevalent, skin color plays a crucial role in the way people are categorized and treated. As one interviewee quipped, "White is right; you were born wrong." Interviewees informed me that they learned at a young age that "lighter is better," and thus they tried to "wash off" their darkness or use facial medications to lighten their skin color. Skin color holds the possibility of "passing," of being perceived and treated as an uncontested part of the white majority. While debate continues as to whether Mexican Americans are a race or an ethnic group—and if an ethnic group, whether they fall under white or nonwhite racial categories—privileges attendant with whiteness makes skin color a critical physical feature. Some Mexican Americans "pass"[1] as white, either intentionally or unintentionally.[2] Light skin color offers an "ethnic option" (Waters 1990) of claiming whiteness. Conversely, some Mexican Americans of light skin color find themselves having to continuously assert their group membership or else it will go unrecognized.

The advantage of being light-skinned lies in being the beneficiary of "white privilege," or at the very least obviating negative stereotypes to which darker-skinned individual are more quickly and more often subjected.[3] Evelyn Morelos draws a tight link among skin color, beauty, and snap judgments:

> I'll tell you about prejudice. It's not who you are and where you come from, it's how fair your skin is. You notice how if you're fair and pretty, if you're attractive, I don't care what you are. It's terrible, but that's the way it is. . . . I really feel that if you're really dark-skinned, people judge you. Right then and there.

Tyler Mendoza explains how his light complexion was an advantage when it came to avoiding police stops and obtaining employment. When I asked him the intentionally broad question, "When you look in the mirror, what do you see?" Tyler immediately honed in on the importance of his skin color to his social identity, as well as his gender and race:

> TYLER: [I'm] a man. A light-skinned man . . . Chicano/Latino man that has not earned the privilege but has received privilege because of my light eyes and my light skin.

JMV: And how does that receiving but not earning privilege work?

TYLER: [Friends of mine] get profiled by police and I don't. . . . For instance, I'll go to a party when I was really, really, really, really young and people would just wave their hand and okay, I can come in but the people behind you have to check to see who they are. Of course, they were darker than me. . . . [I] sometimes know that I've received a job over someone because of what I look like.

Tyler accurately discerned that he "has not earned the privilege but has received privilege," and he sees how unfairly rewards are distributed when he compares his experience with that of his darker-skinned peers. He noted that someone "paid the price" and rather than be riddled with guilt at receiving this unrequested advantage, he said he is committed "to making sure that door always stays open for someone behind [him]." Like Tyler, a number of light-skinned respondents claimed that they had escaped racism because they are assumed to be unquestionably white; a subset of those individuals remarked on being an insider-outsider positioned to hear derogatory comments made against Mexicans because the speaker wrongly correlated skin tone with ethnicity. A study on skin color revealed that light-skinned Mexican Americans "have a significantly warmer affect toward Anglo-Americans than do Mexican Americans of darker skin colors," sentiments that probably reflect experiences with Anglo-Americans that were colored by physical appearance (Murguia and Forman 2003: 75).

Both skin color and last name mark not only who gets perceived as Mexican American and who does not but also who is more likely to self-identify as Mexican American. As Mary Waters (1990) notes with regard to middle-class white ethnics in the United States, people often prioritize their last name in identification choice. Demonstrating the dominance of male lineage, 60 to 77 percent of her respondents expressed preference for their father's as opposed to their mother's ancestry (Waters 1990: 33).[4] Both formal name and phenotype are markers of ethnic background and can be criteria upon which others judge the allocation of scarce resources. Contemporary research has found that names that signal a racial minority status can work against a job applicant in obtaining a job interview (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004). Understanding that names can be a disadvantage prompted one interviewee to change her Hispanic last name to a non-Spanish-sounding surname in order to avoid stereotypes.

Samantha Diaz is well aware of the potential pitfalls of her ethnic-sounding last name and her physical appearance. A third-generation woman, she

has medium-olive skin, has black hair, and is short of average height. She attended a majority-white elementary school where she "thought that she was white," and it was in high school when she learned that others categorized her as Mexican. In answer to whether she felt her physical appearance had helped her or barred her from gaining entrance to any social or occupational arena, Samantha said,

> I don't know if it's reality, but I feel like it's restricted me. I got the feeling that I'm jinxing myself or something, but when I tell people my last name, I wonder what reaction they're going to have. Because "Diaz" is very Mexican. . . . When I'm talking to people or interviewing for things [jobs] . . . it's like I'm back in high school again and I have to pretend I'm white again. . . . The sad thing, in high school too, I wanted to be a lighter color. I actually put Clearasil on my face to get it a lighter skin tone. I thought that was pretty profound. . . . When interviewing, I know I probably could have gotten something higher, but I'm intimidated.

Here, Samantha packs in commentary about ethnic names, skin color, and internalized inferiority. While she never pointed out discrimination she faced directly, Samantha has perceived enough discrimination in the world that she knows the payoff there is to being perceived and treated as white, hence the attempts to lighten her skin tone. Samantha's surname and skin color have amounted to a mild psychological handicap and cause her to feel intimidated in job interviews and at work. She fears that her physical appearance and her ethnic-sounding name will saddle her with negative stereotypes by her potential employers. To overcome this, she is resolved to "prove" her worth through a combination of "walking on eggshells" and "working hard." However, discrimination and negative stereotypes insidiously converted into a sense of inferiority and discouraged her from competing for promotions ("I know I probably could have gotten something higher, but I'm intimidated."). Racism can reduce feelings of self-worth and heighten self-doubt (McDermott 2006; Menchaca 1995). Racism does not have to be actively deployed in order to be effective—its ripple effects run far and wide beyond the point of initial impact.

The "Shopowner Tailgate"

Being closely supervised or "tailgated" when shopping in retail stores was a common method of discrimination across all three generations. The obvious suspicion on the part of the store representative is that the Mexican

American intends not to purchase items but to steal them. A form of subtle harassment, the "shopowner tailgate" is not deployed even-handedly toward whites and minorities alike but is geared toward surveilling racial-minority customers. Elena, an attractive, olive-skinned professional woman who is forty-eight years old, explicitly states how shopkeepers link race and class when calculating which customers to watch with extra rigor:

> I have enough money that if I want to buy a three hundred dollar blouse I can buy one. . . . I've seen other people in the store that look not even as dressed as well as I was dressed and *they're* not followed around, but I am. So I think there's still a stereotype-thing that's going on with [people thinking] Latinos or Mexican people are thieves or "they-can't-afford-to-be-here-why-are-they-even-here?" kind of thing.

The "shopowner tailgate" can be a matter of a distrustful store clerk keeping an overly watchful eye on customers or it can mean a retailer calling Immigration and Naturalization Services and having customers deported. The responses to this discrimination can range from the self-censorship of "walking on eggshells" to social action undertaken in response to a real or vicarious experience of discrimination.

Racial Profiling and "Cross Discrimination"

Negative stereotypes play into the way police forces patrol minority and/or low-income communities. While these communities tend to have higher rates of incarceration, this is partly due to increased police presence in these areas as well as to the structural constraints that impoverish them in the first place. The "epidemiological" approach to policing—police forces targeting their surveillance in areas inhabited by black and Latino populations—insures the higher probability of these youths being stopped by officers of the law, perpetuating a vicious cycle (Brown 2003: 150). Harry Torres, the son of Mexican immigrants who was born in the United States, shows how race and immigration status can become intertwined in the eyes of the Immigration and Naturalization Services, commonly referred to as "La Migra":

> JMV: When did you first realize there was something in the world called "race," whether or not the concept was named at the time?
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> HARRY: Very, very, very early. Before grade school we [he and his siblings] used to get stopped by *La Migra* [border patrol] all the time going to

work. They'd make us go back and get our papers. They wouldn't arrest us or nothing, but they'd make us go back and get our papers and we had to go back and show it to them. Right here in Watsonville.

Here, "Mexican" and "immigrant" become one and the same as Harry and his siblings, all young United States citizens, are spotted as possible undocumented workers.

If "Mexican" doesn't equate to "immigrant" in the eyes of police—who are frequently acting on prevalent stereotypes, but with an authority unmatched by laypersons—"Mexican" often equates to the assumption of "poor," as demonstrated in the "shopowner tailgate." Being labeled as poor has a totally different meaning if the accuser is a layperson as opposed to a policeperson who has the power to pull over, detain, interrogate, and arrest the accused.

What if Mexican Americans, deliberately or not, try to prevent being perceived as Mexican American? Will the act of dissembling be effective protection against being racially profiled as Mexican American? While the answer requires more study and probably breaks down according to specific features of the situation, the experience of Pierre-Mecatl Ramirez, a third-generation man, indicates that the answer is "no." Pierre-Mecatl tells me how he feels he was racially profiled even though he was not "performing race" in stereotypical ways:

> I went to a little park in downtown Sacramento, a nice little spot I like. I was looking up at the sky, just being mopey [after a breakup with a girlfriend]. This cop comes up to me, just out of the blue, harassing me, asking me these questions about this piece of graffiti next to me that I haven't even seen. . . . This cop is talking to me about this piece of graffiti. . . . When I was a teenager, I affiliated with the Gothic subculture, so I was dressed in a velvet blazer and a bowler and this guy's talking to me about this graffiti. "Well this is Mexican graffiti." He's looking around for my pen. . . . I caught that he was basically saying, "This is Mexican gang graffiti and your last name is Ramirez." He had my I.D. I was like, "Is anything you're doing legal?" He gave me back my license and told me to get the fuck out of there. . . . If you can't tell I'm not a gang member, based on what I'm wearing, what kind of training do you actually have? I'm wearing velvet. No *cholos* wear velvet. I mean, maybe I have a low-rider car, but. . . . His eyes were really clouded by lenses that are named racism. [Laughs.]

Even when Pierre-Mecatl was not dressed in a typical *cholo* outfit—which serves to further demonstrate the diversity of ways one can "be" Mexican American—he was still pegged as Mexican American (complete with a negative stereotype of criminality) by the policeman. Social psychologist Erving Goffman envisioned social status or group association as something *performed*. Goffman articulated this "culture as practice" idea: "A status, a position, a social place is not a material thing, to be possessed and then displayed; it is a pattern of appropriate conduct, coherent, embellished, and well articulated" (Goffman 1959). Goffman argues that humans interact by way of "impression management" and that everyone, as a social actor, is always attempting to "define" situations, or gain some control over them. While Goffman was theorizing social interactions, it is interesting to contemplate how his theory might translate to social categories such as sex, race, age, or nationality. Dynamics of power are always at play in processes of hailing, interpellation, or applying social categories such as sex and race (Butler 1993; Butler 1995; Butler 1999). It is interesting, then, that even while Pierre-Mecatl performed a version of whiteness (Goth), a police officer reassigned a racial label to him. This refusal of the officer to acquiesce to Pierre-Mecatl's racial performance does not invalidate it, but it does demonstrate the complexity of race as a category that is not wholly projected from within or ascribed from without but is created in a dynamic process and varies according to social context (Okamura 1981).

While many respondents complained of negative stereotyping and racial profiling upon being perceived as Mexican American, others issued grievances after being discriminated against *as a different minority*. Joe Feagin notes the problem of "cross-discrimination" (Feagin 1991: 111)—that is, the way an ethnic or racial minority person may suffer from discrimination aimed at a different minority group by a person who is unable to distinguish one group from the other. This happened to a third-generation Mexican American adolescent male, Tom Acevedo. Tom is a slim young man who is dark skinned and has black hair and dark brown eyes. He is sometimes mistaken for an Arab, the most upsetting instance having been when, some months after the September 11th terrorist attacks, he was stopped by a police officer as he walked home from school. He recounted the incident that occurred when he was thirteen years old:

> TOM: I got stopped because I was carrying a suitcase with my trumpet in it. I kinda looked like I was Arab—the cop said so. He pulled me over . . . and questioned me. . . . And this is after September 11th, too, so they got a little more suspicious about that.

JMV: What did you think was going on there? How did you react in that situation?

TOM: I believe he thought I had a bomb in my hands. [Laughs.] But I told him that, “Nah.” I asked him if he wanted to see what was in the box. He’s like, “Yeah.” So, I opened up the suitcase . . . and I showed him the trumpet. Under it is where I keep all my oil and stuff and [I] let him look under there. . . . He’s like, “Okay, I see.” I told him, “I’m not a terrorist or anything, sir, so don’t take me for that.”

JMV: How did you respond to that internally?

TOM: That kind of freaked me out, because you know, most of my friends they do kind of look Arab but they are actually Mexican. It just freaked me out. He might think I actually have a gun and he might not trust [me]. He might take me to jail. . . . It would frighten me sometimes because *I didn’t want to get arrested for being Mexican.* [Laughs.] [my emphasis]

As this incident illustrates, people of color can fall victim to misdirected racism or racial profiling. Tom attributed being targeted by the police as a consequence of looking Arab in combination with heightened efforts after September 11th to rein in terrorist activity. As with Tom, Middle Easterners also fall prey to the “Muslim/terrorist” misplaced stereotype (Marvasti and McKinney 2004; O’Brien 2008: 156). Tom’s comment that his friends “kind of look Arab but they are actually Mexican” emphasizes the socially constructed quality of race. Since racial distinctions are not a biological reality, they gain their force through the meanings people give them and the way people deploy them. Tom himself sees physical characteristics overlapping between Arabs and Mexicans, and he has been a victim of police mistaking which side of this blurry line he is on. His reaction to this racial profiling is to be fearful of the police force, frightened of possible police overreactions and of being unjustly incarcerated. He realizes that he was (wrongfully) racially profiled as an Arab rather than as a Mexican American, but these technicalities are moot when one is being interrogated by an officer of the law.[5]

Variable Discrimination Experiences across Generations

Most first-generation Mexican immigrants denied that they had experienced discrimination. Only one of eight immigrant interviewees claims to have been discriminated against. All immigrants lived most of their adult lives in ethnic enclaves among fellow Mexican-origin people, this coethnic community insulating them from interracial interactions and limiting their vulnera-

bility to racist encounters. Both generation and historical moment condition perception of discrimination and willingness to label it as such.

Participants in the civil rights movement developed a heightened consciousness about racism, making these second-generation individuals quicker to point out disparities than the elder generation. This period effect conditions the perception of racism among members of the second generation. Beyond historical movements, some types of discrimination are specific to generation, such as discrimination around home ownership and spatial mobility, both of which occur more frequently in the second and third generation. The phenomena of home ownership and residential mobility are evidence of economic upward mobility, a trend occurring in the latter generations that places them in new social contexts and exposes them to new forms of prejudice.

The Civil Rights Movement

Perception of discrimination is influenced by generation in the United States (see also Rivadeneyra 2006; Roth 2008; Waters 1999). Activism during the civil rights movement in general, and the Chicano Movement[6] in particular, is one bond that some members of the second generation share, an experience that continues to influence their sociopolitical perspective. Many second-generation Mexican Americans in my sample were directly involved in the Chicano Movement, the goal of which was to advance the "right of the Mexican American people to justice, equality and self-determination" (Murguia 1975: 93). Those who were not activists were aware of the movement and its social agenda. Indeed, those who were social activists in the sixties reported to me their unwavering ethnic title of "Chicano/a," over and above other options like "Mexican American," "Mexican," or "Latino/a," because of the political implications of self-determination that the term "Chicano/a" implies. One man explained his rationale for maintaining his title "Chicano" decades after the movement: "It's political. It's a thing where there's no difference between you guys and us guys. In those days [1968–1972], Chicano was one that was more politically active . . . we would work with the *huelga* [strike] and we picketed and we went to march to Sacramento a couple times. . . ." Scholars have long noted the importance of self-determination in recouping a marginalized identity (Carmichael and Hamilton 1992; Collins 1991; Fanon 1963; Fanon 1967). In keeping with the spirit of self-determination, activists from the Chicano Movement retained the politically forceful and self-devised ethnic label "Chicano/a" and oftentimes taught their children the importance

of this label as well as the agenda of social justice and representation that it embodies. Chicano activists, who strategically used iconography originating in the Mexican Revolution, promoted a politics of cultural maintenance during the movement. Their goals regarding equal access to opportunities, especially in education, were consistent with those of the civil rights movement, yet were encoded with Mexican-origin imagery that placed paramount importance on cultural maintenance and ethnic dignity.

A goal of the Chicano Movement was to move Chicanos (Mexican Americans born in the United States) from the periphery to the center of the United States collective consciousness. Mexican Americans had long felt treated as second-class citizens, and part of the agenda of the Chicano Movement was to uncover the ways in which Mexican Americans were systematically denied equal access to opportunity and resources. Since the outlawing of Jim Crow segregation that was prevalent throughout the U.S. southern states, discrimination against blacks and browns alike was forced to go underground. In practical terms, this spelled the disappearance of "white" and "colored" signs above bathrooms and water fountains and their replacement with "structured racism" or "color-blind racism." As Barlow (2003: 31) explains, "Unlike the racisms of previous epochs, such as the system of state power called Jim Crow racism, white privileges in the 1950s and 1960s became structured into the patterns of interaction in society so deeply that the overt defense of racial privileges became unnecessary."

While overt interpersonal racism still exists, racism after the 1960s became more covert and structured into society. Activists in the Chicano Movement possessed a heightened awareness of racial inequalities and an understanding of how racism came to be embedded in institutions. The social consciousness cultivated during the Chicano Movement stayed with those second-generation Mexican American participants and groomed them to be quick to discern institutional discrimination. Former activists tended to pass on their knowledge and consciousness to their children, thereby creating a third generation of Mexican Americans who were primed to decry social inequities based on race. Believing in civic participation as a means of representation, some Chicano Movement activists started organizations dedicated to Mexican American causes while others opted to work within already established organizations and be advocates for Mexican Americans from within those preexisting associations.

Rafael Treviño, who established a parent and child wellness health care program in Santa Barbara, credits the Chicano Movement for his career motivation. As other civil rights activists testify, the Chicano Movement helped unveil racism as not just interpersonal but also institutional. As a

Latino outreach worker in the health services in the 1960s, Rafael began to see that Latinos were not utilizing the system because they were "alienated"; there were no Latinos in the system and few recruitment efforts targeting the Latino community. Rafael reflects on his awareness of institutionalized racism that burgeoned during the Chicano Movement:

> It wasn't the kind of racism that says, "Hey, you have a darker skin than I do so you're inferior to me." Which is what I always thought racism was. But then I began to see that there is this institutionalized racism. This very subtle racism where they're not going to come out and tell you that they don't like you because you're not white. But they're going to let you know in a different way and it's up to you to find out what that way is because it's very hidden.

As did others advocating self-determination before him, Rafael concluded that to set up a health care organization devoted to a Latino clientele would be the best way to fulfill the needs of that underserved population (it now serves non-Latinos as well). Rafael explains how uncovering institutionalized racism was the catalyst for creating a Latino health organization:

> RAFAEL: [People ask me,] "Why do your people need to have a different approach to using services? Why do we have to go through all this outreach and all this hoopla to get people to use our services? Why don't they just use it?" Well, that's because this individual assumes that everybody gets the same type of education, had the same type of upbringing and background that they do.
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> JMV: What was your strategy?
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> RAFAEL: . . . [Malcolm X's] idea was to become independent. Start your own farms, start your own restaurants, start your own banks, start your own everything. That's where we came up with the idea of starting our own nonprofit organization. So that's why we formed this organization—on the basis that we would become independent. That we would become our own employer, we would employ our own people, we would employ our own advocates.

The answer to institutional racism, for Rafael, was to construct an independent organization serving Latino needs, in the spirit of self-determination.

Other second-generation Mexican Americans whose consciousness was raised by the Chicano Movement worked within already established institu-

tions in order to achieve visibility. Raymond Talavera, a businessman and community leader in Santa Barbara, is frustrated by society's "judging a book by its cover" mentality, which discounts Mexican Americans in the professional world and society at large. He attempts to make change by working from within white-dominated organizations and institutions. Raymond counters marginalization by becoming active in civic organizations.

> You knock your head against the system long enough you learn . . . that the system ain't really gonna change, you just gotta get in it and deal from within. . . . I noticed when I became a board member at the college, there is a big difference sitting on this end of the table as opposed to sitting in the audience. You are now *influencing* decisions that are made that affect the people out there. . . . More than anything else, you can influence a vote as a voting member at the table. If we are not at the table then forget it. We can yell and scream and march as long as we want, and yeah you get some immediate impact and stuff, but in the long haul we have to be *at the table*, part of the table, part of the council, part of the district board, part of the this board, part of that board. It does make a difference. A lot of times issues do come up where you have a say, you have a vote, but you can also influence your fellow board members by making the argument as to why you should vote this way and not that way. So, yeah, a lot of times you win, you lose, but you are in the game, you aren't in the stands. You are actually playing the game.

Raymond sees "the system" as flawed and wants to work to correct it by becoming politically engaged and enacting changes from inside civic organizations.

Chicano activists Rafael and Raymond represent two primary reactions to having one's consciousness raised during the civil rights movement. One can argue that activists and sympathizers of the Chicano Movement promoted a politics of cultural maintenance. Paradoxically, while this "politics of protest" (Montejano 1999) combats the outdated notion of Anglo conformity, political engagement—including protest—is indicative of some degree of political assimilation into the dominant culture on the part of the participants. In the very attempt to enact cultural maintenance, these Mexican American advocates are politically assimilating. This tension of working within an established American political system to attain cultural maintenance ends underscores the fact that "Mexican American" is by definition an American identity.

Upward Mobility: Home Ownership, College Education, and Occupational Integration

While the immigrant generation generally experiences some economic success through hard work, it is usually the second generation that secures occupations with good compensation packages, gains a financial foothold, and is able to buy a house. This places the second generation in a new occupational arena, income bracket, and neighborhood. Home ownership has long been considered the gateway to the middle class, yet Mexican American prospective buyers have confronted numerous barriers to entry due to discrimination in rental, sales, and financing of housing (Orfield and Lee 2007).

Home ownership is an asset that has historically been boasted disproportionately by whites. Even today, U.S. cities remain highly segregated for blacks and whites, less so for Latinos (Massey and Denton 1993). A number of my homeowner respondents reported that their new neighbors were either disgruntled by their move into the neighborhood or openly questioned the legality of their source of income. Yolanda Segura and her family live in a large Victorian home atop a hill in Hayward, with a view of the San Mateo Bridge and the San Francisco Bay. Yolanda mentions how they were the first non-European descent white family to move into the exclusive neighborhood:

> [W]hen we moved here to this house, I think some of the neighbors kind of looked at us like, "Who are these people?!" And I remember my husband used to say, "Oh, I'm sure they think we're drug lords." Because how could people like us afford a place like this? . . . There is certainly that feeling of "how did you guys get to where you're at?" But, they don't know us and they didn't know what we had to go through at first to get to this point. So I think just in general there is this assumption that Latinos are not usually successful.

In that same vein, Guillermo Ramirez, second generation like Yolanda, spoke of his neighbors' incredulity over his purchase of his two-story Mexican colonial house in San Jose. The neighbors wanted to know how he could afford to live in the upper-class neighborhood. He quipped to the neighborhood go-between: "You just tell them, I pay my mortgage payment just like they pay theirs."

Second-generation Mexican Americans confront these questions of class and legitimacy in a way their parents did not because the first generation had different financial resources and objectives. In fact, as the second genera-

tion realizes the importance of home ownership in solidifying middle-class status, they impress upon their children the significance of buying a home for themselves. All three generations view home ownership as a keystone of middle-class success.

Another marker of upward mobility is achieving higher education, which, in turn, often leads to occupational integration. In both mainstream educational and job markets, the environment tends to be racially heterogeneous, thus exposing Mexican Americans to non-coethnic peers and coworkers. More likely to live in non-Mexican majority communities than their predecessors, second- and third-generation Mexican Americans are prone to have educational and work experiences that take them outside of California and into contexts where they are both an ethnic minority and a numerical minority. Irrespective of generation in the United States, social context bears on the formation of racial identity. Immigrant generations often follow social networks or established immigration routes that lead them to settle in ethnic enclaves or communities with a high proportion of residents of the same ethnic group. While immigrant social networks are not always beneficial for newcomers (Menjivar 2000) and may lead to labor exploitation (Lin 1998), a homogeneous community may have a protective effect for its residents. If immigrants are surrounded by people in similar social positions vis-à-vis immigration status and race, they may be less likely to experience discrimination. This could be one factor influencing the immigrant respondents to declare that they had never experienced racial discrimination. The second and third generations who resided in majority white environments were frequently in a numerical minority position, navigating the advantages and disadvantages of that social placement. These later generations had to determine how they fit into and related to their virtually all-white environment, or "white habitus" (Bonilla-Silva 2003).

Homogenous social contexts limit subjection to incidents of public discrimination. If people live in neighborhoods with a majority Mexican American population, they are less likely to experience discrimination because they live in a pocket of coethnics who share many commonalities and literally "look like" them. In particular, when adolescents move from their home context to a college campus, they often encounter racial diversity and the option to take ethnic studies classes. Exposure to people of various racial/ethnic backgrounds, experience of everyday racism in a mixed environment, and the opportunity to learn about one's heritage in a "legitimate" setting like a college classroom can all prompt a shift in one's racial self-understanding (Kibria 2002; Twine 1997; Vasquez 2005). In studies of second-generation

Chinese and Korean Americans (Kibria 2002), second-generation Vietnamese (Thai 1999), and biracial African American women (Twine 1997), scholars found that ethnic studies classes, ethnic politics, heightened racial consciousness, coethnic friendships, and race-based student organizations made race salient in new and critical ways for racial-minority college students. College campuses are fertile sites for "ethnic recovery" or "ethnic discovery" (Thai 1999: 66).

In keeping with the notion that social context—in particular the college experience—matters for racial self-understandings and identity shifts, Reyna Madrigal, a third-generation woman who grew up in a predominantly Mexican area of Whittier remarked,

REYNA: When I took Chicano studies, that is when I realized, "Wow, I'm Mexican."

JMV: Really?

REYNA: Yeah, I think because living here there was . . . probably 80 percent Mexicans that went to my high school so I never thought about other races and I didn't think I was [an] underrepresented group. I didn't know about discrimination because I didn't face any living here. There was Mexican markets, Mexican products. When I went to Cal-State Fullerton, Orange County, then it was like a big culture clash. . . . There's not that many people here that look [like] me.

Reyna did not confront racial/ethnic difference until she moved out of her majority-Mexican hometown and into a more racially diverse environment. Not only had racial homogeneity buffered her from discrimination; enrolling in a Chicano Studies class increased her knowledge of her background and prompted her understanding of herself as Mexican. The downside of living among a large number of Mexican Americans is intragroup tension, as some volley for status as more "authentic" than others, a topic that is covered in chapter 7.

Elena Vargas, a 48-year-old second-generation Mexican American woman, lives in the Napa region and works as a health care professional. Elena, who experienced the 1960s civil rights era as a young teenager, is well versed in the language of identity politics and race relations. She was able to achieve a higher occupational standing than her immigrant mother due to her higher educational level and her bilingual skills. The discrimination she experiences is not overt and confrontational but is nonetheless insidious. The discrimination she encounters takes the form of profes-

sional invisibility, where people do not seem to see, hear, or take her seriously on the job. Elena's white colleagues render invisible her voice, her skills, and even the money she controls. Elena has attained a middle-class occupation and income, and yet equality with her white peers is elusive. She complains of how difficult it is to have her professional voice heard, how she feels it is overridden or neglected on the job. Elena illustrates her point:

> I'm working with a lot of other health agencies and a lot of times . . . I wonder, I really wonder, is it that people don't really listen because I'm Latina, or is it because there's another issue? What would the other issue be? . . . I just had another person in my office go to one of these meetings and I said, "Tell me if you see this going on: I'll say something, even real positive things like 'I have a thousand dollars that I want to spend on an obesity program and I hear you all saying that you have some projects that you want to do. Well, let me help you.' Then somebody else will go, 'Well, I really don't know . . . we need to get some money.'" [Laughs.]

Indeed, Elena's coworker witnessed this dynamic at the meeting: "Yeah! I saw that. You would say something and they wouldn't hear it until somebody else said it." Elena attributes this professional invisibility to her race:

> *I'm* thinking 'cause they're white. . . . It's not like I'm new. I've been in the community for twenty-five years, I've been on Nutrition Council for twenty of those years, so what is it? Is it the Good Ol' Girls System still—just like there's a Good Ol' Guys System? Why are they not listening? Am I being too aggressive? Am I not being aggressive enough? Is it because I do not have a master's degree behind me—it could be education?

Elena goes through a self-questioning process in order to see if the lack of respect she faces in meetings could be a result of something else, a taxing process of "careful evaluation" (Feagin 1991: 103) found among middle-class blacks.

Due to upward mobility, later-generation Mexican Americans are moving into new physical and social spaces. As Mexican Americans earn middle-class status, buy homes, get college educations, and move up the occupational ranks, they move into new social contexts, which leaves them vulnerable to newfangled forms of discrimination such as professional invisibility.

Resistances to Discrimination across Generations

Resistances—referring to attitudes, belief systems, and practices that intentionally undercut racist ideologies—are always potentially transformative. They are aimed at challenging modes of thought and behavior in order to create alternate ideological and behavioral paradigms. Since discrimination is aimed at a victim, it is important to examine the reactions of those victims and see their agency rather than exclusively their oppression. To omit the responses to discrimination is to perpetuate an unequal power dynamic. Documenting resistances converts Mexican Americans who might wrongfully be assumed to be passive victims into "significant agents of social production and change" (Menchaca 1995: viii).

Generation in the United States plays an important role in the way Mexican Americans perceive and respond to discrimination. Each generation patterns unique ways of responding to discrimination that reflect its own distinctive relationship to the United States: first-generation immigrants from Mexico, no matter their tenure in the United States, opt to avoid uneasy situations whereas second- and third-generation Mexican Americans are inclined to struggle for social equity. This generational difference results from a myriad of factors, including the sense of permanence, post–civil rights era awareness, heightened education, and English-language ability that later U.S.-born generations tend to possess.

Two generation-specific influences contribute to my respondents' sociopolitical consciousness: first is their generation in the United States, and second is their historical frame of reference, that is, the historical periods through which they have lived or social movements in which they have been active that helped shape their awareness. Reactions to discrimination in the second and third generations are predicated upon a belief in permanent residence and citizenship (Flores and Benmayor 1997; Sanchez 1993), whereas the immigrant generation relies on a what John Ogbu calls a "dual frame of reference" (Ogbu 1990; Ogbu 1994). This dual frame of reference includes an "immigrant ideology" that perceives America as the "land of opportunity" (Cheng and Espiritu 1989: 528). Because of this immigrant perspective, the first generation is disinclined to criticize their adopted country. The second and third generations possess a post–civil rights language and assertiveness that is due to their historical frame of reference. This finding is especially true for those second-generation Mexican Americans who participated in the Chicano Movement, as well as their children. This is in line with Karl Mannheim's theorization of generations, that is, that their similarity of tem-

poral location makes generations subject to common dominant social, intellectual, and political circumstances (Mannheim 1936). Mannheim defines generations as sharing a "particular kind of identity of location, embracing related 'age groups' embedded in a historical-social process" (292). Mannheim further specifies various kinds of bonds between generations, allowing for an affinity between group members based on social location, political leanings, and geographical proximity that produce a particular consciousness. Third-generation Mexican Americans are confident about their identity as American citizens, leading them to quickly stand up for their rights when they have been infringed upon.

Conflict Avoidance

Conflict avoidance is the way first-generation immigrants sought to distance themselves from discriminatory situations instead of fighting back. While this stratagem does not technically qualify as resistance, in that it is not aimed at changing perceptions, behaviors, or institutions, it was a common reaction among the first generation.

Ramona Vargas, a first-generation, 77-year-old widow who has spent the last fifty-two years in the United States, is the mother of Elena. She and her late husband worked hard in low-paying jobs (she in a cannery, a packing house, and housekeeping) in order to achieve, and then cling to, their middle-class status. Ramona, who struck me as a mild and gentle woman, told me how she felt discriminated against in church because no one would sit near her and her husband:

> Where we used to go to church we noticed that some American [white] people, if the bench was empty—it was just us—they see us there and they just look for another place to sit down. You notice all those things. . . . It was just my husband and me. We sit there and the whole bench was empty: just the two of us in one end and they just see us there and just keep going and look for other places [to sit]. Even if it was *crowded*, still they wouldn't sit there.

Ramona was clearly still agitated by these social slights, which whittled away at her self-confidence. She explained that she and her husband decided to stop going to church because they felt unwanted there. The church ended up hiring a "Spanish priest": "They have an American one [priest] and a Mexican one [priest]. Now I just go to the Mexican service, that's much bet-

ter." She solved the dilemma of how to continue her churchgoing without enduring social slights by self-segregating and attending the Spanish/Mexican mass. Ramona conceded to the informal system of "social apartness," wherein "Anglo Americans determine the proper times and places" for interethnic contact (Menchaca 1995: 172), by retreating to the "Mexican [church] service." As evidenced by her increasingly reclusive tendencies, Ramona's transgression of the rules of "social apartness" in her community makes her feel debased and socially inferior.

Ramona is firm in her philosophy of equality, as she utilized religious language to adamantly inform me, "God made me and made them so there shouldn't be any difference!" Still, her own convictions of equality do not match up with the social reality she experiences. So, when push comes to shove in racial matches, she declines being a contestant and leaves the situation. On a few occasions she attended a senior center where a similar situation of racial avoidance and discomfort ensued, prompting her to duck out of senior center activities: "They weren't friendly at all. You expect me to come over here? So I just stopped going. No, I'd feel worse if I come over here and see those faces [she turns up her face and looks away]. I'd rather stay home." Ramona makes the rational choice to remove herself from potentially damaging situations, a tendency that over time has grown into a more generalized distaste for public outings.

Ideological Resistances: "It's Your Problem," Logic, and Ignorance

Ideological resistances are rooted in a fundamental belief in human equality. One way to undercut discrimination is to attribute the problem or pathology of discrimination to the perpetrator rather than the victim. Logic plays a key role in disarming acts of prejudice. Beatrice Madrigal, a sixty-year-old, second-generation Mexican American woman, works as a campus monitor at an elementary school in Los Angeles. She displays a very "it's your problem" attitude when it comes to discrimination and "doesn't let it bother her." As a schoolyard monitor, she tries to be a mentor to the young kids who are often battling on the playground with race talk. She adheres to the principle that "we're all the same" and says to children, to illustrate her point, "you peel off your skin—but, don't do it!—and I'll peel off mine and you'll see that we're both the same underneath." Beatrice argues against racism by dismantling biological claims to racial difference.

Beatrice continues to use logic to crumble racist thought as she touches on racial epithets and name calling:

> Even though they say "dirty Mexicans" or "you bean eater," it doesn't bother me. I say, "Think what you like! I eat beans, yes!" . . . I'm a Mexican and there's nothing I can do about it and I accept it and if they don't like it, well then that's their problem. But it doesn't hurt me. I think at one time, growing up, that word "bean eater" did bother me, but to me it was *just a word.*
>
> They do that at school too [where she works]. They say "bean eater." I say, "Why? That's just a word." I tell the little girl, "Don't you eat beans?" She goes, "Yeah." "Well then we are bean-eaters, right?" She goes, "Yes." I kind of joke with them because I don't want them to take offense at "bean eater."

Logic is Beatrice's armor against racism. She uses logic to defuse racial insults, trying to show the elementary schoolchildren she supervises that racism is the problem of the aggressor. She tries to take the sting out of politicized words such as "bean eater" by showing that on a basic level, words are "just words" and if a "bean eater" really just refers to someone who eats beans then such statements of fact should not be injurious.

Beatrice, like a sizeable number of other respondents, doesn't take interpersonal discrimination seriously. She credits her mother and father with instilling her with an "oh, who cares?" attitude. This attitude stems from contentment with her own life, a stance she has concertedly tried to inculcate in her children. Beatrice informs me,

> When I hear that, "Oh, you Mexican!" I think, "Who cares? I don't care what you think. I like being a Mexican." . . . I am who I am and their name calling isn't going to change it. "You got the problem, you deal with it because I don't have no problem with who I am." I always tell the kids, "Look what I'm saying. Do I have a problem with it? No. Is it going to bother me? No. I am not going to go over there and cry. . . ." You have to do the same thing. I pass that on to them.

Beatrice vacillates between unraveling the discriminatory act with logic, as she does for schoolchildren at her work, and writing the aggressor of discrimination off as "ignorant" and therefore "not caring" and not letting the

action bother her.[7] Beatrice's notion of "who cares?" is echoed by Moises Ramos, a third-generation male: "I just worry about myself and make the best and be the best that I can be. Kind of like 'I don't give a fuck' kind of attitude. . . . But just the attitude of 'who cares what others think of me' and that's not going to stop me from doing what I need to do to achieve my goals that I need to achieve." In these excerpts, a calculated insouciance and fortitude are levied as disarming devices for racism.

Similarly, Milo, a 59-year-old second-generation male, recalls dating a Swedish woman in high school whose father was a racist. Milo felt "that little sting" when he was told by his girlfriend's mother that it would be best if he weren't there when the father got home. Milo remarks how the racist father of his girlfriend was "ignorant," yet he quickly follows up that "it's your problem"–type response with a justification for why he should be treated with respect. A lawyer in Ventura, Milo explains,

> I was okay with it because I just felt the guy was ignorant. He was a blue-collar welder who didn't know better. I had no need for his approval. I'm sure I'm not what he's used to. I'm sure he never went to what is now my office and met with a brown face that is his lawyer who is going to save his ass, who happened to be a Mexican. I'm sure he'd never experienced that. Had he ever experienced that then maybe he wouldn't have felt that way.

Milo sees racist beliefs as ignorant and uninformed, thus preventing him from feeling belittled in any significant way. Viewing racist ideology as ignorant is defensive armor against discrimination, yet even so, Milo follows up these assertions with the idea that he deserves to be respected due to having proven himself in his occupation as a lawyer. Even after writing racist beliefs off as "ignorance" and rejecting a need for "approval," he moves to show himself as an exception ("I'm sure I'm not what he's used to.") because of his success in a vocation that could potentially put the former girlfriend's father's legal fate in his hands. By highlighting his vocational capabilities, Milo rationalizes his positive self-image even beyond refuting racism as a folly of ignorance.

The third generation followed the second generation's lead of deflecting racism by repositioning the pathology of discrimination with its producer rather than its receiver. While the immigrant generation was overwhelmingly reluctant to recount instances of discrimination, their descendents were firmly rooted in the United States and succeeded the civil rights movement, giving them the confidence and voice needed to call out discrimination as illogical, unfair, and a deficiency on the part of the aggressor.

Racial Pride as Protection

Many Mexican Americans expressed racial pride, most often in the second and third generations. Pride acts as a preventative defense mechanism against nefarious consequences of discrimination. In particular, interviewees mentioned this need for pride as a tenet taught to them by their parents. Feagin and Sikes (1994) notes the role parents play in socializing their children regarding racism. When racial pride is relayed from parents to children, pride is intended to augment self-esteem and ward off the potentially damaging consequences of discrimination.

While two older immigrants claim to be very "patriotic" toward Mexico, on the whole, the immigrant generation is less inclined to be proud of their Mexican heritage than later generations. Remembering the reasons they left Mexico, immigrants are grateful for their new position in the United States, poised to take advantage of relative opportunity. Given their "dual frame of reference," immigrants, were appreciative of being in the so-called land of opportunity and looked forward to a relative upward adjustment of their lifestyle (Hochschild 1995). Indeed, a couple of first-generation immigrants denied ever being discriminated against—even when their children claimed that they had indeed suffered racist treatment. Again, this points to generational awareness of racism as well as a readiness to critique one's country of residence.

The second generation possessed a kind of "double consciousness" (Du Bois 1903) with regard to their racial background. They were cognizant of their families' feeling about their race (be it pride, indifference, or embarrassment), as well as society's feeling toward their race (largely disparaging). Navigating those various modes of sentiment can be tricky. The majority of second-generation Mexican Americans expressed pride in their background, saying it was either instilled by their parents or acquired in compensation for a personal experience of devaluation. Fractures within generations require explanation. Mannheim makes a distinction between an "actual generation," that is, youth experiencing the same concrete historical problems, and the more substantial bond of a "generation unit," groups within the same actual generation that have "an identity of responses, a certain affinity in the way in which all move with and are formed by their common experiences" (Mannheim 1936: 306). An actual generation can therefore boast a number of differentiated, polar forms of generation units that display antagonistic intellectual and social responses to identical environmental stimuli.

Mannheim's theory clarifies how second- and third-generation Mexican Americans can be alternately proud and embarrassed. Racial pride is often

attributed to parental teachings, some of which are laced with a staunchness about the underbelly of racism and an encouragement for preparedness and fortitude. A common motivation for pride is expressed here:

> My mother . . . said to me, "Look, you're Latino—or, you're Mexican—and you should be proud of it. No one is any better than you, just like you are not any better than anyone else. You are equal to everyone. And you just have to stand by your ground." And that made me understand that if I was going to be confronted with racism there was nothing I had to be ashamed about, just to be strong, that's all.

The philosophy of equality is always advanced in statements of pride. The emphasis on equality is utilized to elevate people who occupy a mid-to-low position on the racial hierarchy. People are intensely aware of the reality of the racial hierarchy and sometimes use humor in order to raise their group position both in their own mind and in the mind of their interlocutor. Lance Morelos takes his mother's teaching one step further by using humor to call into question the extant racial hierarchy:

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

By problematizing the placement of Mexican Americans as somewhere other than the "upper echelon" of the racial hierarchy, Lance points out the cunning presence and divisive power of the racial hierarchy.

Not all members of the second and third generations are stalwart in their racial pride. Some, like third-generation Amalia Ruiz, were embarrassed. Unflattering self-perceptions are also passed down from one generation to the next:

> [I think that my grandparents and my dad] thought of themselves as second-class citizens because we were Mexican. . . . I think they internalized some of the discrimination that they experienced, as older generation Mexicans. So they never taught me to be proud to be a Mexican. . . . On a more conscious level I got from them that it's kind of shameful to be Mexican. I hate to say that.

Abashed and lacking racial strongholds, Amalia doesn't have the familial or societal resources to develop racial pride.

The possession of racial pride sometimes converts into active representation in civic organizations. On the other hand, racial insecurity leads to blending in with mainstream culture to the greatest degree possible. While pride was more prevalent than embarrassment, fractures exist within the second and third generations, demonstrating that orientation to racial heritage is not overdetermined by generation.

Behavioral Resistances: Proving Oneself through Overachievement

Behavioral resistances are practices and conduct that people employ as strategies to combat discrimination. In contrast to ideological resistances, which are based in thought, attitudes, and perspectives—specifically, fortifying one's own belief system or challenging other people's sets of beliefs—behavioral resistances are grounded in action. These two primary modes of resistance are not mutually exclusive but can be enacted simultaneously or in succession.

Racial and ethnic minorities encounter and then respond to both interpersonal and institutional discrimination, much of which is perpetuated by stereotypes. Negative stereotypes are an overlooked form of discrimination; they set up negative expectations that function as both a roadmap and a roadblock for individuals against whom they are directed. Negative stereotypes saddle their targets with the burden of puzzling through the situation and sometimes internalizing this maltreatment, lowering their sense of self-worth or heightening their sense of social insecurity. Sometimes negative stereotypes lead to lowered expectations for the performance of Mexican Americans, while at other times they lead to avoidance of Mexican Americans in social, community, or professional arenas. This social avoidance or professional invisibility is discrimination, a move toward exclusion, self-segregation, and marginalization of the "othered" group.

People often approach Mexican Americans with preconceived ideas about who they are, where they come from, and where they are headed that are based on negative stereotypes. These negative stereotypes are leveraged after a cursory assessment of a person's physical characteristics. For men, a typical assumption is that they are violent criminals or gang members. Ricardo Torres remarked on how his facial scars and moustache get him typecast as a gang-banger: "I think when people look at me they see my scars and the moustache or whatnot. A lot of times people get the impression that I'm a

gangster or a *cholo* or something like that. That really bothers me because that is just totally what I'm not about."

Moises Ramos, a 28-year-old, third-generation male whose "dad was a drug addict and . . . mom was his number one customer" grew up in an environment where his "family, everybody, thought [he] was going to be a loser, a screw up." Moises overcame enormous family obstacles to lead a clean life and become a high school career counselor. He experiences the common reaction of needing to "prove himself": "I've got to still prove myself because people are still always going to have this doubt about me. So the more I prove myself the better that I feel about myself." Succeeding against others' doubts boosts his self-confidence, but certainly he suffers an uphill-battle burden of having to prove his self-worth rather than having it already assumed. He needs to "prove himself" not just because of his family background but also because of his racial background, the element visible to outsiders:

> People automatically judge you as being something you're not just because of the way you look. . . . For instance, I was in a bar celebrating one of my friend's birthdays. This lady saw me and she said out loud, "Oh, he's mean looking." I was thrown by it. For some reason I just smiled. She was like, "Oh my God, he has a dimple," or something like that. So we started talking and she asked what I did and I told her. "Oh my God, I never would have guessed." I was like, "Obviously you shouldn't judge a book by its cover." She had this image of us—Mexicans—in Santa Maria, that's where she's from, bald and mean and involved in gangs and stuff like that.

When confronted interpersonally with stereotypes, Moises engages in behavioral resistance by opening a dialogue in order to disprove and disarm the stereotype cast on him.

The idea of having to "prove oneself" was an undercurrent of many interviews. Tyler Mendoza and Milo Contreras felt the need to "prove themselves" against negative stereotypes and low expectations. Both men felt pressure to overturn the negative expectation of academic underachievement. Tyler, a third-generation man from Vacaville, refers to his parents' stress on education and his own need to disprove the expectation of educational failure:

> My parents always pushed school, school, school, school. So I had to do better in school. . . . You know, C's were not that good, you get A's and B's. C's meant that you could do better. So, they always pushed from day one

> that I had to do better in school. I knew I had to try harder. I had to try harder and prove that I wasn't one of those dumb lazy Mexicans or the ones that are going to drop out and get somebody pregnant. . . .

Tyler's parents encourage him to behave in ways that will positively distinguish him from aggregate, pessimistic images of Mexican Americans that shadow him. Tyler comments further on the image of "dirty Mexican" that his parents were determined to guarantee he avoided by devoting extra attention to his cleanliness:

> [T]hese are things we have to go up against: we're not as smart . . . we're not clean . . . we don't know how to act. . . . [I]n the sixth grade, I loved playing tether ball. I was pretty good at it and I wanted to wear a shirt that I wore yesterday. It was clean. And she said, "No, you can't wear that shirt twice because people will think that you're a dirty Mexican so you can't wear that twice. You never wear a shirt two days in a row. You always wash your shirt. You never do that." And that is when it struck me. Okay, I got to be cleaner. I got to be cleaner.

The strain of Mexican-inferiority ideology that spurred "germ theories" proliferated after the Mexican-American War. During this period in the mid-1800s, widespread low wages confined Mexican laborers to poverty; the housing they could afford or that employers provided was very substandard (often "renovated" animal living quarters), heightening the risk of disease. "Germ theories" held that "dirty Mexicans" were unhealthy and unhygienic, therefore deserving to be quarantined. The derogatory term "dirty Mexican" was a quadruple entendre: (1) a synonym for dark skin color and inferiority, (2) a reference to agricultural laborers who work the earth, (3) a descriptor for someone who is unhygienic, and (4) a metaphor for low status in the class structure (Montejano 1987: 227).

Milo Contreras, the second-generation Mexican American lawyer introduced earlier, proved himself against negative expectations by attaining a law degree and becoming a successful lawyer. His long narrative delves into a number of themes already touched upon, such as intra-Mexican stereotypes, proclaiming another's "ignorance" as a protective device, and overachievement as a primary way of capsizing stereotypes. Milo reflects on two formative experiences, starting with a coworker from his youth who was also Mexican American:

MILO: I remember an experience with this guy named Sidney who was a track star at the high school. . . . He worked at the store [I worked at] and so when I came in at thirteen he was about nineteen. . . . He was a meat cutter at the store. I eventually became a meat cutter and ran the register and pretty much did everything. And so he asked me, “Hey, what do you want to do when you grow up, man?” I said, “I wanna be a lawyer.” “Baaaaah!” He almost rolled on the ground laughing. “You guy!” He was just cracking up. Well, he was one of my first invites to the University of California–Los Angeles Law School graduation. And I still have the tie that he gave me as a graduation present. Yeah, so that sort of changed his mind about stereotypes, even among our own people.

JMV: I imagine that was a proud moment to send off that invitation.

MILO: Sure, sure. And he was very proud, too. He could see how wrong one can be in our perceptions. . . .

Sidney, himself a Mexican American, outright laughed at Milo’s dream of becoming a lawyer. Sidney had not only internalized a low expectation for his ethnic group but had also become an enforcer of such under-par achievement, as evidenced by his boisterous laughter at Milo’s future hopes. Fortunately for both of them, Milo used the negative expectation as a benchmark to surpass. Notably, Milo shared news of his law degree with Sidney so that they could be proud both of his individual achievement and of how that success enfeebles the stereotype that had encroached upon them both years earlier.

Milo and I continued our conversation where we had left off:

JMV: Did you ever get the sense that you had to overcome those stereotypes?

MILO: I always felt that I was going to “get back at them.” When I graduated [from] law school, I had recruitment letters from the navy, the air force, the army, the Marine Corps to go into the J.A.G. Corps, which is . . . the legal branch of the services. It’s the Judge Advocate General Corps, which is military lawyers, and you go in as a captain. I thought to myself, “Gee that’s tempting, only because all of these racist rednecks that I came across will now have to salute this short Mexican.” [Laughs.] I had that sense, I don’t know, revenge or whatever. . . . You say, “This stereotype you had is now a captain you salute!” when you see them. That’s a lot more effective and more satisfying then just getting angry.

As noted briefly earlier, negative expectations can be converted into motivation for achievement. While Milo did not go into the J.A.G. Corps, he did become an established lawyer, still "proving" himself through his occupation and "getting back at them." Conducting his life according to the old adage that "living well is the best revenge," Milo verifies his self-worth and the worth of his ethnic group. Milo's law degree and legal profession symbolize his triumph over negative expectations and stereotypes and, even if he never has a chance to encounter the "racist rednecks" from his army days, these credentials empower his sense of equality.

Samantha Diaz, the 25-year-old legal secretary in Santa Barbara introduced earlier, explained how she feels as though her Mexican American background is a hindrance, a penalty she must "make up for" or "prove herself" against through her actions. As Third World feminist scholars, in particular, have noted, being a racial or ethnic minority *plus* being a woman makes one a "double minority" (Acevedo 2001; Collins 1986; Collins 1991; Segura 1995) or "multiply oppressed" (King 1988; Segura 1986). Minority women have two minority positions to account for (make sense of, make up for, battle from, etc.) as they navigate the social world and try to achieve equal treatment in gender and race relations, plus equal opportunity and remuneration in the work force. As is true for Chicanas in white-collar jobs more generally (Segura 1992), Samantha finds herself in a double bind because of being a Mexican American woman and feels she must "prove herself":

> I feel like I always have to prove something because I'm Mexican. I feel like people look down on me. . . . I don't know if that's racial, I don't know if that's self-esteem, but maybe sometimes they go hand in hand. . . . I tend to think people look down on me because I'm Mexican. I've convinced myself that I will never be as successful as someone who is white, who possibly has the same qualifications as me, but they will go more places than I can. And maybe too because I am a woman, too. I'm Mexican and a woman.

She is unable to attribute this feeling of people looking down on her to being Mexican or being a woman, probably because both of those social positions are currently undervalued in United States society. She points out that the inferiority that springs from being looked down upon might be due either to race or to low self-esteem, but she acknowledges that those concepts might "go hand in hand," race informing how high or low one's self-esteem can be.

Samantha's heritage plays a significant role on the job: "I think I put a lot of stress on myself with my job. Because I know that I'm Mexican and I know that I have to prove twice as much as a white coworker because I'm Mexican." For her, this translates to dressing well and being "on her toes" at work and being extra professional. She distinctly feels that she must be more professional than her white coworkers in order to make up for a racial penalty.

Asserting Demands for Equality

A second chief way that second- and third-generation Mexican Americans behaviorally resist discrimination is to make verbal demands for equality. Demanding equality attacks discrimination at its core principle of enforcing dominant and subordinate group relations. Discrimination is a matter of group position, not a set of feelings: "the locus of race prejudice is not in the area of individual feeling but in the definition of the respective positions of the racial groups" (Blumer 1958: 5). A group-status perspective finds that prejudice and discrimination are leveraged in order to secure a group-status position (Bobo and Tuan 2006). Since discrimination is centrally about preservation of group (superior) status through enforcement of exclusion and marginalization, asserting equality aims at the main objective in order to rectify the inequity.

For example, rather than "walk on eggshells" in response to the "shopowner tailgate," some people engaged in practices that directly confronted and resisted discrimination in retail spaces. Cordelia Fuentes, a 55-year-old, second-generation Mexican American from San Diego, experienced "rebound racism" (Frankenberg 1993) as she felt herself vicariously betrayed by a retailer who mistreated Mexican-looking customers. She informs me,

> There was some discrimination here [San Diego] that got me very upset. A JCPenney's suspected that a Mexican family was stealing and so instead of calling the police they called Immigration [INS]. And they got deported. So that made me really angry. So I don't dare go into that store.

This incident fits with the alarmist "Latino threat narrative," which posits that Latinos are disproportionately "illegal aliens," have negative influences on society, and will ultimately not become part of the nation (Chavez 2008). Law and law enforcement—here depicted as the Immigration and

Naturalization Service[8]—are instrumental in the definition of legality and illegality, inclusion and exclusion. While we have no information on whether or not the Mexican family in JCPenney's was authorized or not, the "Latino threat narrative" remains operative here in that the Mexican family was deemed undesirable and drastic action to maintain "social apartness" (Menchaca 1995) was taken. People from Latin America are many times more likely to be deported to their home countries than Asians (Golash-Boza 2009), often for nonviolent, minor infractions such as petty theft, showing the importance of race, skin tone, and stereotypes (of criminality and model minority status, for example) in the way America conceives of itself. Further, citizenship status has not always provided equal legal protection for all, as the federal government has forcibly deported Mexican American citizens along with immigrants during economic downturns (Gutiérrez 1995; Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002). Even while Cordelia did not personally witness the discrimination she recounted, she felt the act was wrong and protested it through boycotting JCPenney's.

Cordelia's daughter, Marisol, reacted similarly to retail-related discrimination by verbally demanding equal treatment. Marisol recounted a time when she was fourteen years old and shopping at a "knick-knack" store with her mother. She was trying on barrettes when she overheard the store clerk telling her mother that she was not allowed to put on the hair accessories. Marisol interpreted this incident as overtly about race:

> [The store clerk told my mother that] you're not allowed to put those [barrettes] in your hair when a couple of minutes before there was a white lady and her white daughter there trying on the same things and nobody told them anything. [M]y mom was like, "Well, why? Why aren't we allowed to? If you guys didn't want [customers to touch items], then there should be a sign out here."
>
> . . . I guess in a way she [the store clerk] was calling [us] dirty or something. My mom told her that we washed our hair . . . and I just got really, really upset. . . . I got really mad and I was like, "Where's your manager?" . . . The manager was the same way . . . saying, "Well, you're really not allowed to do that." Like these people over here? [Marisol points to other patrons, a white mother and daughter.] I pointed them out. . . . You let them put things in their hair. She said, "Well, they weren't allowed to." And I was like, "But you didn't tell them anything." That's the difference. "Well, if you really didn't want people to do that, then you need to put a sign out because that's not right."

Marisol and her mother confronted the shopkeepers, asking for equal treatment on a par with the treatment granted other customers. The repeated emphasis on proper signage is central because a sign is universal and does not discriminate. A sign that indicates what is "off limits" would broadcast this line to all shop patrons, rather than allowing these lines to be drawn at the whim and will of store clerks. Here, the actions of white customers are condoned while those same actions undertaken by Marisol are rebuked. This excerpt rings with echoes of discrimination from earlier eras that decried Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and other minorities as "dirty" or "unclean" (Montejano 1987; Montejano 1999; Sanchez 1993). Clearly, vestiges of earlier forms of discrimination persist. Interestingly, Marisol related this story not in answer to a question about discrimination but in answer to a question about the first time she realized there was a concept in the world called "race." As was true for the majority of my respondents, it is extremely telling that she selected a tale of discrimination to demonstrate her knowledge of the reality of "race" in the world. Even if "race" has been debunked as a biological truth, it undoubtedly carries much social weight.

While it is impossible to determine what motivated the shopkeeper to prohibit Marisol from trying on the barrettes, Marisol is convinced that the reason was her Mexican heritage. This argument is supported by her interpretation of the natural experiment that presented itself—the store clerk did not rebuke a white customer for the same behavior. One point to note is that this racial discrimination seems to be class inflected in that Marisol and her mother are offended by the implication that they are unclean, hygiene being harder to adhere to if one is, as the saying goes, "dirt poor." Speaking to the intersection of race, class, and gender, Omi and Winant (1994: 68) write, "race, class, and gender . . . constitute 'regions' of hegemony. . . . It is crucial to emphasize that race, class, and gender . . . overlap, intersect, and fuse with each other in countless ways." Marisol and her mother are standing in the middle of an intersection of multiple categories. Teasing out class-based from race-based discrimination is an impossible task as I rely on only the recounting of the victim and I do not have access to the thoughts behind the storekeeper's action. While an action may (correctly) be decried as racial discrimination, we must keep in mind that racial discrimination is informed by historical and contemporary class and gender power differentials.

Behavioral resistances to discrimination are action-based challenges to inequality. Striving to out-perform expectations and demanding equality are two ways that Mexican Americans oppose discrimination.

Discrimination as a Means of Racialization

The kinds of discrimination that middle-class Mexican Americans encounter elucidate the interpersonal and structural injustices with which they contend. As with antiblack discrimination, "color stigma" (Feagin 1991: 114) is crucial to the way Mexican Americans are treated in public realms. As in the case of blacks, Mexican Americans regularly contend with two aspects of "additive discrimination": "(1) the cumulative character of an individual's experiences with discrimination; and (2) the group's accumulated historical experiences as perceived by the individual" (Feagin 1991: 114). Contrary to the reasonable expectation that racial minorities are more accepted (that is, acceptable) once they have climbed up the ranks of the socioeconomic ladder, the narratives of middle-class Mexican Americans suggest that discrimination relays the message that the welcome mat is not always rolled out. If discrimination is a means of racialization and if middle-class status cannot neutralize discrimination, a situation of "racialization despite assimilation" exists. Class advantage does not entirely shield Mexican Americans from discrimination or racialization. Piercing through the optimism of the American Dream, these experiences show that achieving upward mobility does not always "make up for" racial/ethnic disadvantage among middle-class Mexican Americans.

Sites of discrimination that are consistent through generation include retail spaces and other public venues. Who gets targeted for discrimination is based on specific factors such as name (Hispanic or non-Hispanic) and physical features. The phenomena of the shopowner tailgate, racial profiling, and cross-discrimination by police are ubiquitous in all three generations. Some sites of discrimination are specific to generation, such as the second and third generation experiencing more challenges in the areas of home ownership, residential mobility, and occupational advancement.

Responses to discrimination are generationally patterned. Victims' reactions to acts of discrimination are also worthy of scrutiny, for reactions reveal how individuals consolidate their group identity. The dominant group attempts to secure its group position by acts of discrimination (Blumer 1958), yet the targeted group's reactions are vital to their ability to recoup a dignified sense of identity. Each generation develops a stylized manner of responding to discrimination that both creates and reflects its own distinct relationship to the United States.

While all three generations experienced discrimination, they perceived and reacted to it differently. The first-generation Mexican immigrants, liv-

ing among coethnics, were less likely to be exposed to discrimination on a regular basis than their descendents. When they did experience discrimination, this injustice was overshadowed by the immense sense of gratitude to the United States for a chance at a better life than they had had in Mexico, and they were thus loathe to criticize. As O'Brien (2008) argues, Latinos, as part of the "racial middle," may minimize the impact of discrimination in their lives in order to continue to believe in and espouse the American Dream. O'Brien (2008: 159) found that Latinos, already seen as un-American or foreign, chose a survival strategy concerning their everyday racism:

> [O]ne can control the extent to which he or she is further deemed un-American by adapting one's worldview to champion the American dream rather than appear to be criticizing it by "dwelling" on racial discrimination. Thus, while respondents may appear to be engaging in passive denial, they may indeed be actively practicing a resistance strategy by which they refuse to be further deemed un-American.

For foreign-born immigrants, this compunction over critiquing the United States, the land to which they electively migrated, is compounded.

In contrast, the second and third generations engage in social activism on the basis of the set of rights and privileges accorded to them as U.S.-born citizens and a well-honed ideology of permanence and belonging. Women spent mental energy and emotional resources pondering whether their unequal treatment was due to their gender or their race, illuminating how the intersectionality of identity makes for complex questions.

The immigrant generation's caution in critiquing the United States was in part due to its "dual frame of reference" (Ogbu 1990; Ogbu 1994) and gratitude for having a chance at a better life in the United States. In contrast, the two succeeding generations felt a sense of permanence (Sanchez 1993) and were therefore emboldened to argue for their "cultural citizenship" (Flores and Benmayor 1997). These later generations are inclined to struggle for social equity due to their generation in the United States and their historical frame of reference: they are confident as American citizens and they possess a post–civil rights movement assertiveness and race rhetoric. While all three generations were subjected to discrimination, the first generation either was disinclined to acknowledge it or adopted the coping strategy of avoidance, whereas the second and third generations had the propensity to resist using both ideological and behavioral strategies.

People in thinned attachment and cultural maintenance categories handle discriminatory experiences slightly differently. Recall that these are not simple binaries but two ends of a range of orientations. Cultural maintenance individuals, by definition more attuned to their ethnic heritage and history of racial oppression, were inclined to contest and protest discrimination. Culturally attached second-generation Mexican Americans, many of whom were involved in the Chicano Movement, were especially primed to engage in politics of protest where they discerned inequality. Those on a cultural maintenance trajectory were sensitive to issues of subjugation and inequity, making them prone to detect and defend against discrimination.

Alternatively, while some people on a thinned attachment course spoke up in the face of discrimination, showing variation within these ideal type categories, most were less vigorous in their protests against racial/ethnic discrimination. Many thinned attachment people explained how they would carefully calculate whether or not to directly verbally confront racist behavior. This quandary was usually decided according to whether the perpetrator was someone who mattered to the individual; if the perpetrator was a friend or a peer, the respondent deemed it "worth it" to challenge and correct him or her. On the whole, thinned attachment people had milder reactions to discrimination than did cultural maintenance people. This difference is due in part to the fact that thinned attachment people were comparatively less concerned with safeguarding their ethnic heritage in their everyday lives, wearing their culture more lightly, making them less obvious targets. Additionally, by virtue of being less emotionally tied to their heritage, thinned attachment individuals' reactions were less emotionally charged and defensive in nature.

Regardless of their citizenship status, time of arrival, assimilationist or preservationist tendencies, "Latinos are simultaneously subjected to processes of whitening and racialization" (Davila 2008: 12) as a nonwhite racial category. Racialization is enforced through consistent prejudice and discrimination. Alternatively, when Latinos are "whitened," they are allowed to "pass" as non-Hispanic white and awarded a "flexible ethnicity," which will be discussed in chapter 7.

Racialization of Latinos—as non-Hispanic white, Hispanic/Latino, or non-Hispanic black (Golash-Boza and Darity Jr. 2008: 901)—is yet another "bump" in the road of assimilation that can orient individuals to different assimilation trajectories. Given that discrimination (and therefore racialization) occurs despite marked assimilation, Mexican Americans as a group

remain unequal to non-Hispanic whites. As with middle-class blacks, racial discrimination in public places is an ongoing and major problem (Feagin 1991; Feagin and Sikes 1994). While public opinion holds that racial discrimination has decreased dramatically in the post–civil rights era, it continues to be a sizeable hurdle for blacks. In fact, the public policy shift in focus toward the "underclass" (Wilson 1987) has eclipsed attention from the issue of racial discrimination (Feagin 1991; Pattillo-McCoy 1999). As we have seen, the experiences of Mexican Americans, as a population beyond the black-white dichotomy, testifies that racial discrimination is an ongoing and sizeable social problem. Yet, relative to blacks, Latinos experience a more porous boundary to whiteness. Hispanic newcomers in the rural South "perceive the social distance separating themselves from whites as more permeable than that separating themselves from blacks and are engaging in distancing strategies that may reinforce this distinction" (Marrow 2009: 1053).

Racial/ethnic identity choices Latinos make on the U.S. Census reflect the processes of racialization and discrimination analyzed in this chapter. Nearly half the population of Latinos in the United States see themselves as a separate racial category that is captured by neither the "white," "black," "Native American," or "Asian" options. In the 2000 Census, 42 percent of Hispanics preferred "some other race," while 48 percent selected "white," 4 percent selected "black," and 1 percent selected "American Indian" (Gómez 2007: 153). Of those who checked "some other race," 97 percent were Latinos (Lee and Bean 2004: 224). Referring to Mexican-origin people specifically, 50 percent of Mexican Americans picked the "white" racial category in Census 2000 whereas 47 percent selected "some other race" (Gómez 2007: 157). This breakdown of identity choices supports the experiences of my interviewees. Those who undergo racialization as nonwhite are probably inclined to mark "some other race" because they feel excluded from mainstream society. In contrast, those who are socially "whitened" and feel relatively included in dominant society—particularly those with a non-Hispanic white parent, light skin color, and/or anglicized names—are probably predisposed to select "white" as their racial category.

As in this chapter, we see in the following chapter that historical period bears on the type of treatment Mexican Americans receive in social spaces, namely, schools. As with public interactions, educational systems and families transmit messages about racial meanings. The next chapter takes the specific social space of schools to show how racial significance is taught, learned, and reshaped through a diametrical process that toggles between schools and home life.