Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Sociological Spectrum

Mid-South Sociological Association

ISSN: 0273-2173 (Print) 1521-0707 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/usls20

# THE BUMPY ROAD OF ASSIMILATION: GENDER, PHENOTYPE, AND HISTORICAL ERA

Jessica M. Vasquez

**To cite this article:** Jessica M. Vasquez (2011) THE BUMPY ROAD OF ASSIMILATION: GENDER, PHENOTYPE, AND HISTORICAL ERA, Sociological Spectrum, 31:6, 718-748, DOI: 10.1080/02732173.2011.606728

**To link to this article:** https://doi.org/10.1080/02732173.2011.606728

*Sociological Spectrum*, 31: 718–748, 2011

ISSN: 0273-2173 print/1521-0707 online
DOI: 10.1080/02732173.2011.606728

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

# THE BUMPY ROAD OF ASSIMILATION: GENDER, PHENOTYPE, AND HISTORICAL ERA

**Jessica M. Vasquez**

Department of Sociology, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, USA

*Gender, phenotype, and historical era powerfully shape the life experiences, identities, and cultures of Mexican-origin families. Using interview data from three-generation Mexican-American families, second-generation Mexican-American women were inclined to revivify their heritage upon marriage or childbearing whereas men underwent the gendered racialization process of U.S. military service. Among the third generation, skin color determines the relevance or irrelevance of "symbolic ethnicity." Women engaged in a "third-generation return" to ethnicity far more than men, revealing gendered expectations of cultural transmission. This article advances assimilation theory by identifying fractures within generations—gender, phenotype and historical context—that steer incorporation processes.*

How do Mexican migrants who arrived in the U.S. prior to 1965, and two generations of their U.S.-born descendants, incorporate into the United States? Popular and scholarly debates question whether Mexican immigrants will follow the pattern of earlier European immigrant waves at the turn of the twentieth century and be assimilated after three generations or whether they will integrate into an underclass (Huntington 2004; Jiménez 2010; Ortiz 1996; Perlmann 2005; Skerry 1993; Telles and Ortiz 2008). This article takes

This project was supported through grants from the University of California at Berkeley, National Science Foundation, UC MEXUS, and the University of Kansas. I am deeply grateful to advisors and peers for their guidance, including Michael Omi, Ann Swidler, Joane Nagel, Christopher Wetzel, Tanya Golash-Boza, Tomás Jiménez, Cynthia Feliciano, Zulema Valdez, and members of the University of Kansas International Programs Faculty Seminar.

Address correspondence to Jessica M. Vasquez, Department of Sociology, Fraser Hall, Room 716, 1415 Jayhawk Blvd., University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66045-7556, USA. E-mail: vasquez@ku.edu

generation-since-immigration seriously (Telles and Ortiz, 2008, p. 3) and distinguishes between immigrants, their children, and later generations, offering a nuanced picture of three generations' experiences with immigration, settlement, and incorporation.

The central questions for this article are: How structurally and culturally integrated into the U.S. are the immigrants, their children, and grandchildren? And, what social factors influence the incorporation of Mexican-origin families? Even while the middle-class Mexican-origin families I studied have successfully structurally integrated into U.S. society, gender, skin color, and historical context facilitate uneven incorporation over time. Gender, phenotype, and historical era powerfully shape the life experiences, identities, and cultural attachments of Mexican immigrants and their two succeeding family generations.

What is the context that greets Mexican migrants? Specific public policy and laws certainly impact life chances and, moreover, a racialized landscape characterized by a white power structure and a colorful periphery meets newcomers. History marks the present in that racialized ideologies with historical roots permeate contemporary discourse. Consider that the expansion of the United States was motivated by an ethos of white supremacy, white nationalism, imperialism, and colonization. Manifest Destiny (1845–1855; revived in the 1890s) was an ideology used to advocate for and justify territorial acquisitions, especially "Westward Expansion" (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1997), and was a rationale for the Mexican American War (1846–1848) which expropriated approximately one-third of Mexico's territory. The U.S. government's concern in drafting the Treaty that ended the Mexican-American war was exclusively about the land to be annexed (De Genova 2005, p. 218); the people that were "annexed" were stripped of their land holdings and granted U.S. citizenship if they were racialized as white but not if they were racialized as Indian or mestizo (De Genova, 2005, p. 220). This brief history makes clear the racial underpinnings of U.S.-Mexico relations, a legacy which negatively affects contemporary Mexican migrants who work and build families in the United States.

While immigrants and their descendants are active agents in the integration process, there are numerous structural barriers and social biases that impair their progress and shape their experiences. Gender, phenotype, and historical era all significantly bear on incorporation possibilities. Assimilation theory does not adequately address the issue of divisions within generations. Nor does assimilation theory recognize that incorporation processes can fork in different directions in one generation and then branch again or reverse course in the

next generation. A multigenerational research design allows for comparison within and across generations. The immigrants in my sample all arrived in the United States prior to 1965, the marker for "new" immigration. Studying an earlier cohort of arrivals has the benefit of access to the third generation, the immigrants' grandchildren, which later waves of immigrants do not yet have. With a focus on multigenerational processes, this article identifies "generational styles" (Mannheim 1936) that typify generations, as well as addresses the important divisions within generations such as gender, phenotype, and historical era that profoundly shape life experience and conception of racial/ethnic identity.

A review of relevant assimilation literature follows, as well as details on the research design and methodology. The findings section proceeds with two sections: first, a section that handles each of the three generations separately, noting commonalities and divisions within each generation, and second, a section devoted to the influence of historical context. A conclusion section presents a final analysis of material, arguing in favor of multigenerational analyses that are sensitive to both patterns within and across generations as well as personal and societal features that facilitate or delimit social integration of Mexican immigrants and their U.S.-born descendants.

## *THE ASSIMILATION DEBATE*

Classic assimilation theorists assert that assimilation—the process of adaptation to a host country—is the inevitable and favorable destiny for both immigrant groups and the host society (Gordon 1964; Park et al. 1925). Assimilation theorists of this earlier era did not consider the impacts of gender, class, culture, historical timing, or structure of opportunity in the host country. Straight-line assimilation theory's description—or prescription—of "one-way adaptation to white hegemony" has been criticized as "symbolically violent and self-oppressive" to immigrant groups and in need of modification (Feagin and Cobas 2008, p. 52).

Segmented assimilation accounts for a variety of assimilation outcomes and addresses what "segment" of society a group is incorporated into (Rumbaut and Portes 2001; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes and Zhou 1993). An influx of in-migration from Asian and Latin American countries after 1965 whose incorporation trajectories were not adequately explained by straight-line assimilation theory prompted this reconsideration of assimilation theory. Race, human capital, and neighborhood subculture facilitate three possible

acculturation outcomes (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes and Zhou 1993): integration into the white middle class, downward assimilation into marginalized or stigmatized subgroups, or ethnic solidarity wherein the immigrant community provides valuable networks and resources that promote social and economic advancement. Empirical evidence supporting or refuting segmented assimilation theory is mixed.

While continuing influxes of Mexican-origin immigrants, or "immigrant replenishment," sharpens both inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic boundaries in terms of identity formation (Jiménez 2008), it does not preclude structural assimilation. Regarding marital assimilation, Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans are assimilating with non-Hispanic whites over time (Rosenfeld 2002), endogamy decreasing over time. Despite demographic trends—Latinos now outnumber African Americans as the nation's largest racial/ethnic minority group, Latinas' fertility rates outpace non-Hispanic whites' reproductive rates, and ongoing immigration—identificational assimilation is occurring over generations. While ethnic identity follows the assimilation pattern of erosion by generation-since-immigration (Ono 2002; Telles and Ortiz 2008, p. 237), identificational assimilation is in part shaped by racialization.

This article demonstrates that despite structural assimilation (educational achievement, mainstream occupations and middle- or upper-class income) respondents are racialized and there is variation in whether they choose to maintain or jettison Mexican cultural elements. Assimilation is incremental and intergenerational, a product of everyday decisions as people attempt to improve their lives in the host society (Alba 1990; Alba and Nee 2003; Bean and Stevens 2003; Kibria 2002; Lee and Bean 2004). Yet, this is not an oversimplified story of gradual assimilation. Being Mexican American is not yet an "ethnic option" (Waters 1990) or "symbolic" (Gans 1979), as it is for white ethnics (Ochoa 2004), due to protracted processes of racialization that affect a segment of the third generation and beyond (Telles and Ortiz 2008; Vasquez 2011).

Assimilation is not straightforward; instead, assimilation is complicated, dynamic, and follows a "bumpy-line" (Gans 1992). Herbert Gans (1992, p. 44) loosely defined "bumpy-line" assimilation, arguing to "replace what has often been described as straight line theory with *bumpy line* theory, the bumps representing various kinds of adaptations to changing circumstances—and with the line having no predictable end." The incorporation trajectories of three-generation Mexican-American families is best described as "bumpy" in that there are unpredictable departures, swerves, and then resurgences of

commitments to both adopted and native cultures. Importantly, the "[bumpy] line having no predictable end" allows for a vast diversity of both processes and outcomes for any immigrant group. This open-endedness acknowledges that some strata of an immigrant group—be they distinguished by race, class, gender, human capital, skin color, etc.—may have trajectories or end-points quite different from others.[1]

The question of which way third-generation Mexican Americans will veer—toward heightened or attenuated ethnic consciousness—is debated. Marcus Hansen (1938, p. 9) studied European immigrants in the United States and devised his thesis that "what the son wishes to forget the grandson wishes to remember." He contended that the second generation is anxious about "how to inhabit two worlds at the same time" (Hansen, 1938, p. 7), whereas the third generation is secure in its native parentage and is interested in recording and safeguarding its ethnic roots. Conversely, Steinberg (2001, p. 51), referring to the great wave of European migration at the turn of the twentieth century, argued that "ethnic revival was a 'dying grasp' . . . [that] did not signify a genuine revitalization of ethnicity, but rather was symptomatic of the atrophy of ethnic cultures and the decline of ethnic communities." The argument goes that any ethnic culture, upon transplant, undergoes modernization, change, and thinning, a process of "cultural atrophy" (Steinberg, 2001, p. 62). The Mexican-origin case may be different in that "immigrant replenishment" (Jiménez 2008) ensures availability of cultural resources that endow Mexican ethnicity with meaning and secure its perpetuation (Macias 2006). This study enters this unsettled debate with multigenerational Mexican-origin empirical evidence that reveals the importance of gender in terms of who is favorably inclined to "return" to one's natal heritage.

Assimilation literature, even segmented assimilation theory which theorizes three possible outcomes for immigrant groups, underemphasizes *intra-group variation.* Early assimilation literature reported inter-ethnic differences (Warner & Srole 1945) in assimilation, but intra-ethnic group diversity has been understudied. We know little about the reasons why one segment of an ethnic immigrant group is more inclined toward Anglo-conformity whereas another contingent is disposed toward ethnic solidarity. My research makes two important

[1]Consider, for example, the variegation among the four waves of Cuban refugees that began in 1959 following the Cuban Revolution. The first two waves were largely wealthy, white, and educated/skilled whereas the latter two were poorer, darker, and less educated/skilled. Cuban success is largely based on the business entrepreneurship and socioeconomic advancement of the first two major waves of Cuban immigrants (Newby and Dowling 2007, p. 348).

interventions. First, due in part to gender and skin color, multigenerational immigrant families assimilate along a "bumpy-line" (Gans 1992). Many later-generation women who were wives and mothers were inclined toward ethnic retention, as were Mexican Americans with dark skin who were regularly identified by others as Latino/a. Lighter skinned people, especially women, oriented toward assimilation, in part because they faced less strict negative stereotypes than their darker skinned and male counterparts (Vasquez 2010). Second, historical context profoundly shapes life experiences. Accordingly, inter-generational family communication reveals shifts in racial climates. In particular, men who were Vietnam veterans engaged in ethnic politics *and* political/civic assimilation upon returning from wartime military service. My study demonstrates that among Mexican-origin families, there is a diversity of pathways that lead to eventual structural assimilation and middle-class status. Families can be either assimilationist or cultural retentionist in orientation and *both* achieve structural assimilation. In the terminology of segmented assimilation, these pathways are Anglo conformity and ethnic solidarity. This article argues that distinctly different family trajectories *within the same ethnic group* can lead to the same middle-class, structurally assimilated position, and that gender, color, and historical era condition families' trajectories.

## *METHODS*

The state with the largest Hispanic population, California is a prime destination for immigration from Mexico and attendant political and public debates about immigrants' integration. California has the second largest percentage of Hispanics (32.4%) of all fifty states but by far the largest Hispanic population with 12.5 million people (data source: 2000 Census). I sought out three-generation Mexican-American families headed by Mexican immigrants that are now grandparents. The first generation is comprised of Mexican nationals who immigrated to the United States, the second generation consists of the U.S.-born children of the Mexican immigrants, and the third generation includes the U.S.-born grandchildren of the Mexican immigrants.

I conducted 67 in-depth interviews in 29 three-generation families roughly split between Northern and Southern California. The bases for my Northern and Southern California fieldsites were the San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles/Santa Barbara Counties, though the families I interviewed were dispersed around those locations within approximately a 100-mile radius.

I employed a theoretical sampling strategy, followed by snowball sampling. First, I contacted families that fit my racial and generational profile by working through Hispanic Chambers of Commerce, Catholic Churches, and high schools in various cities near my two selected fieldsites. Once I made contacts in the community, I proceeded with a snowball sampling strategy. Note that while my sample is mostly middle class, it is drawn from various sources to minimize other kinds of sampling bias. The vast majority of the interviews were conducted in person and one-on-one.

The age range of the first generation is 65 to 88 years (median 83); the age range of the second generation is 38 to 73 years (median 59); the age range of the third generation is 17 to 45 years (median 28). While the age ranges are wide, this is not a significant limitation since my project focuses on generation in the United States rather than age or birth cohort. Since there is an outlier in each generation that widens the age range, median age for each generation provides a sense of my dataset. Thirty-four interviewees were male, 33 were female, and the vast majority was middle class,[2] with a few older generation individuals falling into a lower income bracket, as well as a couple of wealthy exceptions. I oversampled middle-class families. Since middle-class status is associated with relatively light ethnic boundaries (Telles and Ortiz 2008, p. 277), this sampling bias affects the generalizability of my findings in that Mexican Americans who are economically disadvantaged likely experience redoubled experiences of subordination due to their "multiple oppression" (King 1988; Segura 1986).

## *A LONG-TERM VIEW OF IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION*

### *First-Generation Mexican Immigrants*

The data for the first-generation immigrants correspond with the current immigration and assimilation literature. International migration

[2]I defined middle class through a number of different factors. The first factor was if household income met or exceeded $57,000. (This is the average of all median household incomes for all eleven counties of California in which interviews were conducted. This data comes from the 2004 American Community Survey located at http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en.) My household income question was fixed-choice, one option of which was $45,000–$60,000. I included the respondents who selected this option in the middle-class category. The second factor was if respondent possessed a college degree or above, and the third factor was if respondent held a managerial or professional occupation. If an individual possessed any of these qualities, I considered him/her middle class.

from Mexico to the United States was driven by the classic "push" and "pull" factors: economic need, few job opportunities, and civil unrest pushed workers from Mexico at the same time as the U.S. government actively recruited workers and sponsored contract labor programs. Forces of globalization, such as an internationalized market economy and transnational social networks, constructed a structural need for Mexican immigrant labor, notably during wartime labor shortages (World War I and World War II) and industrial expansion. The U.S. government sponsored the Bracero Program, a temporary contract labor program designed to supply wartime labor from 1942 to 1964, brought in five million Mexican laborers (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1997) and prompted undocumented migration, as U.S. employers skirted minimum wage requirements (De Genova 2005). Whether recruited by the U.S. government under the Bracero Program or arriving as undocumented laborers, the immigrant respondents exclusively worked agricultural and manual labor jobs. The newcomers were grateful for their life in the United States and were especially industrious workers, eager to make a better life for themselves and their families. The immigrant interviewees resided in Mexican neighborhoods, worked in ethnic enclaves, and positioned their children for relative economic success by instilling in them a hearty work ethic born of "immigrant optimism" (Kao 1995) and belief in the American Dream.

Eighty-four-year-old Juan Ramos had a labor-intensive life: he "worked all the time, he worked hard." His ring finger, half amputated during a workplace accident, served as a corporeal testament to his lifetime of hard work. Despite this arduousness and danger, he appreciated the life he led in the United States, saying it was surely better than he would have had back in Mexico. Eighty-four-year-old Juan Lopez similarly described the long hours he worked everyday, even when sick or injured, feeling that "he owed the white man." Both men refused to critique the United States because, despite living in segregated communities and working low-end jobs, they were comfortable among co-ethnics and were satisfied with safeguarding their earnings to provide for their children. This gratitude for life in the "land of opportunity" colored all social interactions: while immigrants were economically, politically, and socially marginalized, they were loathe to complain.

First-generation Mexican immigrants varied in their desire to impart family history or cultural knowledge to their children. Some immigrants were reluctant to pass on any information that pre-dated their arrival in the United States to their children, acting as if life "began" once in the U.S. Given their poverty-stricken origins,

perhaps this was a defense mechanism to shield their offspring from knowing the hardships they endured. This is how Rosa Avila justifies the lack of information that she supplied her descendants: "I never told them much about my life. Because my life has been very tough." By contrast, Yolanda Segura notes how her immigrant parents maintained certain beliefs and traditions: "Even though they came to the United States they never lost their sense of being *Mexicanos* and they tried to instill the traditions, the culture of being *Mexicano* here in the United States." There is a divergence in the immigrant generation in terms of whether they tried to pass on cultural values and practices to their children. Some immigrants were assimilation-oriented, keen on positioning their children to take advantage of opportunities, and reluctant to share memories of poverty and hardship. Another contingent of immigrants pursued a cultural preservation integration trajectory where they transmitted to children the importance of Catholicism, Spanish, family, food, and a strong work ethic.

### *Second-Generation Mexican Americans*

Fractures within the second generation reveal that ethnic groups cannot be adequately theorized as holistic units. The native-born children of Mexican immigrants followed diverse routes to the same structurally assimilated, middle-class outcome. Given that my sample is middle class by the third generation, my data do not illustrate the "rainbow underclass" (Portes and Rumbaut 2001, p. 45) but instead demonstrate the Anglo conformity and ethnic solidarity modes of incorporation. Illustrating the dynamism of integration trajectories across multiple family generations within a single ethnic group honors the diverse pathways that families can travel in order to reach the same destination.

The U.S.-born children of the Mexican immigrants see themselves as "between two worlds," that is, occupying a social and political space that is part Mexican and part non-Hispanic white. As Tina Acevedo remarked, "I prefer my [Mexican] culture. But yet, I was raised with a predominantly white culture. . . . I'm able to blend in with both. I think I'm a 'transition culture.' I consider myself kind of in the middle." Some second-generation Mexican Americans responded to this cultural liminality by actively attempting to assimilate into mainstream culture while others fought for group visibility and "cultural citizenship" (Flores and Benmayor 1997), social practices that establish a distinct social space wherein they can be both Mexican *and* American.

Gender influences integration patterns. Tamara Montes-Rosenberg made conscious choices, based on her gender identity, about how to

disengage from her Mexican culture in favor of embracing American culture. She married a non-Hispanic white man because she believed her out-marriage would liberate her from uncomfortably strict gender roles. Having experienced Mexican *machismo* (patriarchy) with her father and her college boyfriend, she felt that marrying a non-Mexican man would allow her to escape narrow expectations of her as a woman and a wife. With her husband, Gregory, she evaded those racialized understandings of gender:

> **[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. . . . Whereas . . . [before] I was engaged to someone who was from Mexico . . . and we were constantly having these discussions about what the roles [and expectations] would be, and how threatened he felt because I was doing certain things. . . . It wasn't [that way] with Gregory. . . . The stereotypes [that] the Catholic Church and Mexican men had . . . were were negative values for me[.]**

Tamara distanced her attachment to Mexican culture through her out-marriage with a non-Hispanic white.

Historical era plays an important role in providing or delimiting courses of action. The Civil Rights Movement allowed for a race-based politics of protest. In contradistinction to those who sought to assimilate, some members of the second generation were social activists, taking on the mission of anti-racist politics and social equity. Marcus Lopez is the son of Juan Lopez, the immigrant who felt he "owed the white man" for the better life he was achieving in the United States. Marcus became politically active because of experiences with prejudice. Marcus explains how racist interactions with a high school counselor aimed at "keeping him down" inspired his social activism:

> **I was doing well in school and I wanted to get into honors classes. But when I went to see my counselor to ask him why I couldn't get harder classes, or more classes besides three periods of study hall and a shop class, I was told *by my counselor*: "Take shop classes because your kind of people are good cooks and good mechanics." That was my counselor, Mr. XX, and that's what I was told.**

Maldonado's (2009, p. 1033) finding regarding racialized labor queues is true for the educational system: "practices serve as the mechanism through which racist ideologies become institutionalized

and invisible.'' Administrators' racist assumptions of Marcus's worth—notably, contrary to his earnestness and academic performance—stymied his achievement. Detoured from high school to the U.S. Marine Corps, Marcus was on the receiving end of racial slurs: ''To them I was a bean-burner, a wetback, 'come take my boots off, boy.' '' He summarized the effects of those experiences: ''It made me very angry. Angry enough that when I got out of the service, I joined the Brown Berets. I wanted to make change. The Brown Berets were equivalent to the Black Panthers.'' Marcus joined the Brown Berets[3]—a paramilitary group active during the Chicano Movement—and even served as Cesar Chavez's[4] bodyguard when he was touring and making public speeches in central California. Clearly, Marcus became politicized in reaction to racial discrimination.

Others mobilized for minority visibility and representation by working from inside white-controlled organizations and institutions to change their ideologies and operations. Raymond Talavera, a businessman and community leader in Santa Barbara, fights marginalization through civic participation:

> **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. . . . You can influence a vote as a voting member at the table. If we are not at the table then forget it.**

Raymond attempts to affect social change by working from within civic organizations, many of which have substantial long-term consequences, such as education and health care.

Members of the second generation all agreed that they exist in a liminal space that is ''of'' as well as ''between'' racially dominant and subordinate social strata. Other commonalities include educational and socioeconomic gains, extending the upward mobility that

[3]The Brown Berets were the militant vanguard of the Chicano Movement. The Brown Berets claimed a brown (nonwhite) identity, their pledge reading: ''I wear the Brown Beret because it signified my dignity and pride in the color of my skin and race.'' They protested injustices (especially police brutality) through mass mobilization and militant street action, declaring they would fight for Mexicans ''by all means necessary.'' By 1970, the Brown Berets had over 60 chapters throughout the Southwest. (Haney-Lopez 2003, pp. 18–19, 178).

[4]Cesar Chavez, along with Philip Vera Cruz, Dolores Huerta, and Larry Itliong founded the United Farm Workers of America (UFW) labor union in 1962. Chavez and the UFW organized numerous nonviolent social protests (including the Delano Grape Strike in 1965) in California.

their parents' migration initiated. Beyond this shared experience, this generation displays intra-ethnic group variation in its split desires: some are oriented toward assimilation while others are inclined toward ethnic solidarity. Those who are assimilationist are influenced by their parents' accommodationist ideology (either with the goal of securing opportunities in the United States or protection against racism) or personal concerns such as gender ideologies. On the other hand, reactions against racism (both interpersonal and structural) and the Civil Rights Movement contribute to ethnic solidarity. There is considerable diversity among the second generation: some are assimilationist in orientation, aiming to take on an American lifestyle and garner the benefits of U.S. opportunity structures, while others are cultural pluralists who see their American citizenship as entailing the right to agitate for minority visibility and representation.

### *Third-Generation Mexican Americans*

It is almost paradoxical to discuss assimilation with reference to members of the third generation because both they and at least one of their parents are U.S.-born. Researchers have limited insight into later generations because it is difficult to distinguish the third generation from later generations. Complicating the study of later-generation Mexican Americans is that some people cease to identify as Mexican-origin. Alba (2006, p. 293) notes that "some people [are] migrating into pan-Hispanic categories, while others embrace more mainstream identities . . . [they become] Anglos with Mexican ancestry." This "loss" due to identity changes makes it impossible to measure the gains of this group; it is "unmeasured progress." Despite this disaffiliation trend, those who are perceived as Latino—most often those with dark skin—are subject to interpretation as foreign and outside of the national imagination (Chavez 2008; Jiménez 2008; Oboler 1997).

It is complicated to discuss assimilation and the third generation because, to great degrees, the third generation is assimilated. During the 1990s intermarriage rates between Latinos and whites exceeded 50% in the third generation (Lee and Bean 2004, p. 222) and most are monolingual English speakers (Alba 2006; Lopez 1996; Portes and Hau 1998), using Spanish only as "an interactional symbol of ethnic solidarity" (Rumbaut and Portes 2001, p. 66). While immigrants work in ethnic enclaves, second and later generations integrate into the mainstream economy (Alba, 2006). While there remains a wage gap (or "brown tax") between Latinos and whites, when generation and birth cohort are controlled for simultaneously, one sees *intergenerational* progress in terms of both education and wages (Smith 2003). Table 1

**Table 1. Educational attainment**

| | Jr. high or less | High school | GED | Some college | College | Master's | Doctorate | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gen1 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 |
| Gen2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 12 | 6 | 5 | 3 | 30 |
| Gen3 | 0 | 5 | 1 | 6 | 12 | 4 | 1 | 29 |
| Total | 9 | 7 | 2 | 18 | 18 | 9 | 4 | 67 |

displays my respondents' educational attainment, demonstrating the structural assimilation of my middle-class third-generation respondents, as well as the advancement achieved across the three family generations.[5]

Note from the table that all of the first-generation immigrants had an education of junior high or less. Compare this with their grandchildren, the third generation, all of whom were either attending high school with plans to pursue higher education or were already attending college or university.

Members of the third generation are cognizant of their families' upward mobility since their grandparent's (or grandparents') immigration, yet they reflect on their own academic and occupational achievements as being relatively on par with other non-Hispanic white natives.[6] In a sense, while aware of race in their own lives, they proceeded in their assimilated lives without contemplating the strategic moves they would make in order to gain advancement, as did their forbearers. Dillon Castillo describes his family's incremental experience of assimilation: "I guess when you get in this country, you get more American. You forget some stuff and mix in with everybody else. We're more American than my grandparents are and my parents are and I guess it's going to [continue]." Notably, both class and phenotype are important distinguishing factors. Lower middle class and darker-skinned individuals were more sensitive to race issues because they found their socioeconomic status or physical characteristics to be more central to their experience than their upper middle class or lighter-skinned counterparts.

[5]While I cannot tease out causality, this table shows that the positive association between families' socioeconomic status and educational attainment.

[6]The primary distinction that third-generation respondents draw between themselves and the non-Hispanic white U.S.-born population is the experience of racism, prejudice, and discrimination. They complained of cases of racial slurs or violence, educational tracking by race, and the widespread conflation of race, class, and nativity (that is, people assuming that because they are of Mexican descent that they are therefore poor and/or an immigrant).

Despite this intergenerational educational progress and U.S.-nativity, the third generation, strikingly similar to the parent generation, considered its identity to be between two social worlds. While racial liminality is not experienced the same across the third generation—descendants of two Latino parents typically experience greater racialization than those with one non-Hispanic white parent (Vasquez 2010)—many reported feeling in flux:

> **Ricardo Torres: Third generation Mexicans were always my best friends. Those were the guys I closely identified with. . . . really value those friends. . . . They were Mexican and they felt comfortable speaking English and at the same time we'd be eating *frijoles* [beans] and tortillas. . . . There's . . . camaraderie between more assimilated Chicanos, just because there is not many. It's like a minority within a minority.**
>
> **Samantha Diaz: I see myself as Mexican, but a little more white-washed. I'm part of the generation that is a little lost. Some people consider me not Mexican enough but I'm not American enough [either]. So I'm really stuck in the middle. I don't categorize myself as "Mexican Mexican" or "American." I'm in the middle.**

Resounding in these narratives is the theme of being "in the middle," or more poignantly, "a minority within a minority." Ricardo finds comfort in a third-generation community that understands his particular racial, class, and generational social position. Samantha similarly declares that she is "in the middle." Despite her (and her parents') birthright, she is hesitant to claim the title "American" because of racialization which conveys the message that she is a racial minority in the United States. This is supported by scholarship which has found that Latinos are experiencing "racialized assimilation" and their identity choices reflect this, as they choose to identify not as "Americans" but as specifically "Latino/a Americans" (Flores-Gonzales 1999; Golash-Boza 2006). Samantha interprets racializing messages to mean that due to her Mexican heritage she is only provisionally American: "Americanness" is conflated with whiteness and reserves for whites only (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1997; Oboler 1997). My work agrees that Latinos—especially dark-skinned individuals[7]—are undergoing

[7]**While I did not interview lower-class individuals, I suspect the lower class is also significantly racialized.**

"racialized assimilation" wherein they are incorporating into the mainstream but are receiving reluctant acceptance and continuing messages of racial otherness.

Skin color determines the relevance or irrelevance of "symbolic ethnicity" among the third generation. "Symbolic ethnicity" is an enactment of ethnicity that revolves around the use of ethnic symbols among an acculturated class of ethnics (Gans 1979). This "ethnicity of last resort" is more "expressive" than "instrumental" in its function in people's lives, a leisure activity or "nostalgic allegiance" (Gans, 1979, p. 9). For later-generation Mexican Americans ethnicity is more than merely symbolic (Telles and Ortiz 2008, p. 264). Skin color is a primary factor in determining how voluntary Mexican heritage can be. Symbolic ethnicity exists among the lighter-skinned segment of the third generation because, in the absence of being recognized as Mexican-origin, enshrouding one's self with ethnic symbols is the remaining way that assimilated individuals can invoke and display their heritage. However, darker-skinned third-generation Mexican Americans are persistently perceived and treated as distinctly nonwhite, this imposed racial identity disbarring Mexican heritage from being innocuous and symbolic. Black-haired, tan-skinned Moises Ramos remarks: "People shouldn't be so ignorant in judging people by . . . stereotypes. People think that I'm not capable of being successful because I'm Mexican American." Prejudice and racial discrimination remains prevalent among this middle class, structurally incorporated Mexican-American cohort: 17 of 29 third-generation respondents (59%) claimed that they had experienced racialization as Latino/a. Using monoracial status (a child of two Latino/a parents) as a proxy for skin color, it is revealing that 14 of the 17 (82%) Mexican Americans who were subjected to racialization were monoracial.

Third generation Mexican Americans who wish to connect with their heritage largely rely on "mediated resources," such as commercial consumption, in order to display and revivify an ethnic identity (Macias 2006). Dillon Castillo, introduced earlier, wishes he had a darker complexion so that his heritage would not be questioned. Dillon's strategy in authenticity contests is to display cultural symbols and accessories that signal what his pale skin does not. Dillon answers my question on how he describes himself racially or ethnically:

> **I feel stronger than I look. I'm not very dark. So, most people wouldn't assume that I'm Latino. So it's difficult—when I say I am people [say], "Oh yeah?" they look at me funny. But I have a lot of stuff. My car is kinda low-rider; I had a *zarape* [Mexican blanket] over**

> **my seat; I have *la Virgen de Guadalupe* on my window. I used to have a little Mexican flag in my room. I'm proud of it. But I don't really look like it, I guess. But I'm very proud.**

Since skin color is often (mis)understood to equate with cultural allegiance, Dillon elects to do "authenticity work" (Vasquez and Wetzel 2009) by displaying cultural symbols that he hopes will make up for his light skin color. If he lacks dark skin, he can at least have *la Virgen de Guadalupe*, the patron saint of Mexico, in his window.

Most third-generation respondents engaged in "symbolic ethnicity" by embracing a few trademark traditions. Gabriel Ponce, who reports often passing for a white ethnic, considers how he would like to raise his future children:

> **They've got to speak Spanish. It wasn't spoken in my house. . . . And give them cool names like "Andres." . . . Some of the cultural stuff like *quinceñeras* [birthday party for 15-year-old girls that functions as an introduction to society]. . . . Stuff that you think is stupid when you're a kid but I think it gives you an identity to hold onto. We're all American but it's nice if you can have a little something that kind of separates you out or makes you more insightful.**

Interestingly, Gabriel hopes to revive language and customs in the fourth generation that the third generation did not enjoy. He notes that "we're all American" and so he therefore must *signal* symbolic attachment to a Mexican American identity, such as by giving his child an ethnic-sounding name like "Andres." Naming practices "signify the [ethnic] identities that parents expect for their children. . . . Given names have obvious long-term consequences; as labels they influence the socialization of children and contribute to the development of personal identities" (Sue and Telles 2007, p. 1383).

Dark-skinned respondents were subjected to multiple negative stereotypes and strongly racialized, qualifying this discussion of "symbolic ethnicity" and "passing." When generation in the United States is cast aside as irrelevant, dark-skinned third-generation Mexican Americans are closely linked to their ethnicity—that is, race/ethnicity is instrumental in structuring their lives and is anything but "symbolic." Phenotype has a strong impact on how Mexican Americans are perceived and treated. Differential treatment based on skin color illustrates the vast variety of life experiences and integration possibilities available to members of the third generation.

Gender, like skin color, is a "bump" in the road of assimilation influencing incorporation into U.S. society. A schism along gender lines divides who was most likely to undergo a "third generation return." Women, far more than men, described a reengagement with Mexican culture in adulthood, often in connection with marrying a Mexican national or Mexican American. While the "third generation return" thesis in theory applies to both men and women, young adult women (engaged or newly married) far more often described a willful reconnection with Mexican culture. Women are traditionally viewed as carriers of culture. Women, imagined as wives, mothers, and keepers of traditions, carry a particular "burden of representation" (Yuval-Davis 1997, p. 45). Women are viewed as symbolic bearers of collective identity, making the timing in the life-course of these young adults' "return" particularly meaningful in terms of how they view their gender roles and responsibilities.

Reyna Madrigal, a 35-year-old mother of two children, was raised by her assimilationist-oriented mother. She describes her mother: "Because of the discrimination that occurred . . . in the 1950s my mom dropped of her cultural values. . . . She didn't want me to experience [discrimination] so I think that's why she said, 'I'm going to try and acculturate my daughters as much as I can.'" Reyna's mother raised her without the trappings of Mexican culture as a protective move against racism. Yet, lacking cultural moorings only intensified Reyna's sense of living between two worlds: "I have no identity. I'm in-between. I don't fit here and I don't fit in either culture. So I'm looking for something." She filled this void by seeking out Mexican cultural knowledge and relationships: "I'm just trying to recapture everything. Go back to where my grandparents came [from]."

Reyna did "recapture" and "go back" by marrying a Mexican national, this move reinvigorating her sense of Mexican identity and providing roots. Reyna attempts to "recapture" Mexican identity for herself as well as for her children. She credits her husband with fostering her journey of "return": "When I met [my husband] in college . . . I would visit him and his mom would cook . . . and share what my culture was really about." Through her marriage to a Mexican national, Reyna not only refurbished her knowledge of Mexican culture but passed this on to her mother, as well, who readily admits learning Mexican cooking fundamentals from her daughter's mother-in-law.

The members of the third generation I interviewed hail from middle-class families, achieve college educations, and occupy white-collar occupations. While most respondents feel "in-between two social worlds," skin color and gender are points of divergence.

Lighter-skinned individuals can pass as non-Hispanic white and, from that juncture, choose whether or not to engage in cultural work to claim a Mexican-oriented identity. In contrast, those with darker skin color are more strictly racialized and are not awarded this ethnic option (Waters 1990). Third-generation Mexican Americans express a variety of orientations toward their country of birth: some embraced Anglo-conformity style assimilation, others agitated for cultural maintenance and ethnic solidarity, and still others reversed a trend of cultural assimilation by striving to "return" to their ethnic heritage.

## *THE INFLUENCE OF DIFFERING HISTORICAL CONTEXTS*

Historically-contingent racial discourses play into how immigrants and their descendants understand their racial/ethnic identity, choose to highlight or downplay their heritage, and perceive discrimination. In the Lopez family, described above, first-generation Juan Lopez was determined to go to work everyday, despite physical ailments and work-related injuries. While Juan said he never faced discrimination, his son, heavily influenced by the Chicano Movement in which he was a bodyguard for Cesar Chavez, had an opposing opinion. As Roth (2008, p. 205) argues, "cultural narratives in the sending societies create obstacles to recognizing discrimination." Marcus conjectured that his father either did not identify the discrimination or dismissed it because he was so grateful to be living a better life in the United States than in Mexico.

Marcus explains the generational difference between himself and his father. Born in the United States and coming of age during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, Marcus was acutely aware of racial politics. As a result of immigrant/citizenship status as well as changing racial rhetorics, Marcus and his father were differently oriented toward their Mexican-American background. He refers to the fact that his father would go to his manual labor job with broken bones:

> **Marcus: [My father] had a big work ethic, but this is where he and I have had philosophical and political differences. He thought that he owed everything to the white man for what he had. He felt compelled that he had to go to work. . . . I used to tell him, "What are you doing this for? They don't care about you!" So he and I just had big differences. Knock-down drag-out fights about . . . me being a Brown Beret . . . I was "ungrateful" and all of that, "they're just radicals, they don't**

love this country!" We had big differences: He felt that he owed the white man his loyalty. He felt that they gave him a life that was much, much better than it would be in Mexico and he felt that he owed them for that. He didn't realize that things could be better, he could have more.

JMV: In your view, did he experience discrimination?

Marcus: I remember . . . the owner of a market . . . referred to my dad as "wetback." "Hey, you ol' wetback! What are you buying today?" My dad would laugh because he thought it was funny. It was later that I realized they were making fun of him.

Political orientations tend to be generational; they are reactions to contemporary political climates and reflect transitions in political and racial consciousness (Takahashi 1997). In Marcus's description of the clash between he and his father, we see that political views are tied to the racial circumstances of an era. Juan, living and working in a segregated community, was satisfied with his circumstances since they were improved from his country of origin. His son, however, was inspired by the discourse of racial equality predominant in the 1960s and believed that full equality had yet to be achieved. Marcus's account of "the white man" to whom his father was loyal is incisive, revealing the class elements of the racial hierarchy with white employers at the top and poorer minority workers beneath. As Omi and Winant (1994, p. 34) clarify: "Racial dynamics [are] determinants of class relationships and . . . class identities, not . . . mere mere consequences of these relationships."

Tony, Marcus's son and Juan's grandson, traced the increasing acceptance of the Spanish language and Mexican-origin people during his lifetime. In the early 1970s he was denigrated for speaking Spanish, whereas by 2005, he noted that he was paid extra for being bilingual. Tony recounts this shift in tolerance for Spanish:

Probably kindergarten or first grade, I remember a teacher telling me not to talk Spanish. "We don't speak Spanish here, we speak American." "American" as opposed to "English." When I was in grade school—and it wasn't that long ago—it was not proper to speak Spanish. So, I didn't speak Spanish in school. Whereas now it is so widely accepted and promoted. . . . Race came in when I came to [work at] the deputy sheriff's office. . . . That was a big selling point for me: "You're Hispanic. We need your background. We need your language skills, we want you to reach out to the Latino community." . . . They pay me extra because I speak Spanish. . . . If you speak Spanish you are very sought after right now.

Tony's prime working years began when affirmative action policies were enacted in order to ensure a diverse work environment. Unlike his father's experience of discrimination that compelled his activism in the Chicano Movement, Tony believes his "race has kicked open doors, huge doors, for me to move up and become a very prosperous individual. As far as getting into new jobs, new promotions, new positions. I think because I'm Hispanic and because I'm willing to work hard, I think it has kicked open a lot of doors for me." Rather than barring access, as in his father's life when he was told in high school that "his kind" was suited to be only "good cooks and good mechanics," Tony credits his ethnic heritage as an advantage in the work world. Acknowledging the likely influence of social policies like affirmative action, and perhaps responding to the neoconservative critique that race-conscious policies are unjust and non-meritocratic, Tony is quick to note that he works hard and deserves the career opportunities he receives.

The Civil Rights Movement ushered in an era of appreciation for multiculturalism and enactment of affirmative action, although those ideologies and policies have suffered a xenophobic backlash. The issue of whether the Civil Rights era *caused* Mexican-origin families to assert racial pride is not as important as recognizing that changes in the sociopolitical climate allowed for ethnic pride and "returns" to an ethnic heritage. Marcus Lopez was incited to agitate for social change and the Civil Rights Movement provided him an avenue for social action. The era of multiculturalism following the 1960s gave racial/ethnic minorities the right to declare their "cultural citizenship" (Flores and Benmayor 1997) more freely than in previous generations.

Monica Hernandez's life history narrative illustrates that assimilationist parental ideologies can be disrupted by personal volition if coupled with a historical era that allows for ethnic difference. Monica's parents, both from Mexico, were assimilationist in orientation. As an adult, Monica craved her native ethnic culture. To revivify her ethnic identity, Monica married a man who came to the United States from Guatemala when he was ten years old, works in the Hispanic community, and raises her children with more ethnic culture than she had in her childhood. Monica reflects on her parents' approach to living the United States and rearing her as an American:

> **I [see] now why [my parents] did certain things the way they did them. They [were] thinking it's the American way. . . . They may have wanted to . . . move on to . . . America . . . and what you do here. Like . . . Christmas, it doesn't have the *posadas*—it just has Santa Claus and**

> **the gifts. . . . As far as my memories go back, I do not remember doing any of the traditional [Mexican] cultural activities or events.**

Despite this American cultural orientation encouraged by her parents, Monica learns about Mexican traditions and recipes from Latino community members, filling a cultural void. While Hansen (1938) posited a "third generation return," we see here a "return" in the second generation, made possible because the immigrant generation successfully assimilated their offspring:

> **Working now in the community I have learned about so many different traditions that I had no idea about. I've [said to] my mom, "Mom, why didn't we do that? I didn't know about this." . . . She'll say things like, "When I came here, I knew that I had to leave that behind. I came here to learn English and to get a job and to raise you guys and so I didn't have time to tell you about the *posadas* or how you celebrate *Dia de las Madres*."**

Monica reports a sense of cultural comfort with her Guatemalan husband. It was when she became a mother that she grew especially thoughtful about identity and culture. In contrast to her parents' assimilationist ideals which were consonant with—and reflect—the goals of "Americanization programs" in the first half of the twentieth century (Ochoa 2004; Sanchez 1994), Monica is "returning" to her ethnic culture. Monica is intent on transmitting her regained cultural knowledge to her children:

> **I think part of it [the inclination for rediscovery] must [have] hit when having children. Knowing it's not just me and how I identify myself. . . . That was a shift to really, really think it through and know [how] you are going to present yourself to your kids. What are you going to share with your kids? And that is an ongoing thing, everyday to share and to get them to be part of it or to learn from it.**

Monica is promoting her children's cultural learning by enrolling them in Spanish classes and taking family trips to both Mexico and Guatemala.

Historical timeframes roughly correspond with my first- and second-generation interviewees: the immigrants arrived at a time that stressed Anglo-conformity assimilation (Gordon 1964) whereas their children witnessed (or were activists in) the Civil Rights Movement which argued for equality for all. While not universal or uncontested, there is more widespread acceptance of multiculturalism post Civil

Rights Movement than in ages past. This period of increased appreciation for diversity is a structural element that allows for second-generation Mexican Americans, like Marcus and Monica, to participate in activities encouraging ethnic solidarity.

In spite of common historical influences, there are intragenerational splits. Gender divides the orientations of the second generation. Women were inclined to "return" to their heritage upon marriage or childbearing whereas numerous men served in the U.S. military during Vietnam. Seven out of sixteen second-generation Mexican-American men (44%) were either conscripted into the U.S. military or enlisted.[8] No female interviewees reported military service. Military service was a consequence of racialized recruitment strategies that filled the ranks with minority youth during Vietnam (Ybarra 2004). As part of minorities' masculine rite of passage, the military was formative in producing a particular brand of racialized masculinity.

Marisol Fuentes, a third-generation Mexican American, discusses the difference between her parents, who are both second-generation Mexican Americans. Raul Fuentes, like Marcus Lopez, served in the U.S. military overseas in Vietnam during the war. Both men, upon completion of their military service, pursued ethnic solidarity and demanded equality on their own—non-whitewashed—terms. Marisol describes her mother as Americanized and her father as involved in ethnic politics. Much of Raul's character is rooted in his status as a Vietnam War veteran. He served the United States at great personal risk and this is how he and Marisol ground their sense of being American. Marisol remarks:

> **I'm Mexican culturally and ethnic-wise and . . . a lot of credit goes towards being American [because] my dad [was] in Vietnam . . . serving serving this country. . . . He was drafted . . . and he went to fight an American war. I think that has to do with why I started calling myself 'Mexican American' and where the 'American' came from because the Mexican [part] I totally knew . . . because I'm not brown skinned but my family is.**

Only men were drafted during the Vietnam War. Historical era shaped the assertive racial politics of second-generation Mexican-American men who served in the U.S. military during the Vietnam War. The Civil Rights era political style was diametrically opposed

[8]I did not directly question respondents about military service so the data I have are from voluntary remarks. Therefore, military participation may be higher than reported here. I also have incomplete data on whether interviewees were conscripted or enlisted.

to the submergence of racial identity seen in earlier generations. For those minorities who fought in international conflicts on behalf of the United States, it was a reasonable next step to agitate for equality once back on U.S. soil.

Gendered expectations, institutional practices, and performances of violence shape the identities of minority male youth and reproduce racial inequalities. Fighting is seen as a "necessary accoutrement of masculinity" (Ferguson 2000, p. 112). Harry Torres, who served the United States in Vietnam, leverages this military service as a qualification justifying his American status. Despite his U.S. citizenship, he feels a "double consciousness" (DuBois 1903) common to his generation in that he also feels subordinated as racial minority. Harry remarks:

> **I'm a dual personality. I'm Mexican. And I'm American. I'm both, I'm not hyphenated. . . . The first time I was told I was an American and I should be proud of it was when I was in high school and the army recruiter came . . . to look at you and recruit you: "You're Americans and you're supposed to protect your country and here's your opportunity to do that." As far as being American, well, I was born here, I was raised here, I went to school here, I served in the military. I voted in 8 major elections . . . always behaved myself, never been in jail or nothing, try to be a good neighbor. . . . I guess I'm 200%: 100%, 100%.**

Notably, it was when an Army recruiter who employed rhetoric of American citizenship and patriotism that Harry's native-born rights and responsibilities were proclaimed. His note that he is "unhyphenated" and "200%" total reveals his simultaneous insider-outsider perspective. He neither claims nor is recognized as simply an "American" but, undergoing racialized assimilation, is specifically both Mexican and American (Flores-Gonzales 1999; Golash-Boza 2006). Upon returning home to the United States after military service overseas in Vietnam, Latinos and blacks adopted a culture of resistance because, after serving their country in foreign conflicts, they saw injustice in still being denied full rights as citizens based on their race (Bender 2008; Johnson et al. 1997; Krouse 2009; Mariscal 1999; Ramirez 1999; Segal 1989; Takahashi 1997; Ybarra 2004).

Marisol Fuentes's mother, Sandra, expressed a different relationship to the United States than did her husband Raul. Marisol considers her parents' differing orientations:

> **My mom, she's very Americanized. I picture my mom back in her day listening to Buddy Holly and Elvis. . . . I can see my dad listening**

> **low-rider oldies with [his] gang—it wasn't about guns and all that stuff—it was just a group of friends who stuck together. . . . He's not as Americanized as my mom. He still holds on a lot more to . . . the importance of being Mexican American, like holding on to traditions and listening to certain to music. I see my mom as a baby boomer. . . . My mom had really cute '60 s, '70 s clothing like bell-bottom pants, long hair, and the big hoop earrings. . . . I picture my mom trying to fit in more with that American culture. . . . My mom has more white friends than my dad does. My dad . . . being a male and having a gang of friends . . . they had to defend themselves against the *gringos* . . . [because] they were always like being picked on because they were Mexican and being called dirt, greasers or spicks. . . . They would get into a lot of fights with the Anglo Americans. . . . My mom was always trying to be more . . . accepted into the culture whereas my dad was being more resistant and fighting back against it: "No, I'm not going to become Americanized. I'm going to hold onto like my culture and my traditions."**

This detailed narrative illustrates how gender and historical moment split generational styles. While Raul declined an interview with me, it makes sense that after having served in the U.S. military during the war that he would resist Anglo-conformity, resent race-based epithets, and be dissatisfied with anything less than equality.

Gender separates Raul and Sandra's experience. While women have served in the U.S. military since before World War II and opportunities for women are progressively expanding, only men reported participation in the military (in addition to the seven men in the second generation who served, three Mexican male immigrants served in the U.S. armed forces, as did one third-generation man). The second generation served during Vietnam, the Vietnam draft notably inequitable in that minorities were overrepresented in the military relative to their numbers in the general population.[9] Upon returning stateside, these veterans are acutely aware of a racial hierarchy and their place in it, despite their service to the country. War sharpens contradictions in that minority soldiers were asked to fight, and potentially die, for freedoms they did not enjoy at home. This juxtaposition between ideals one fights for in uniform and the absence of such liberties in one's own country accelerated minorities' demands for civil rights (Krouse 2009; Lipsitz 2006, p. 95; Mariscal 1999).

[9]Further minimizing the participation of racial and ethnic minorities in wartime, Hollywood films depict the Vietnam War from perspective of white males, whereas African Americans and Latinos were disproportionately on front lines (Lipsitz 2006, p. 89).

If military participation has historically been a masculine rite of passage that proves devotion to the nation, it is no wonder that dissatisfaction with inequity in one's home territory provokes adherence to one's natal ethnic culture. In prior work, I found that "U.S. society racializes Mexican American men more stringently than Mexican American women" (Vasquez 2010, p. 47). Drawing on Carter (2007, p. 192), women are viewed as "soft" whereas men are deemed "hard," and this stark female/male dichotomy drives differential gendered outcomes in reception, treatment, and incorporation possibilities. Marisol describes her father as getting into "lot of fights with the Anglo Americans" who badgered him with racial epithets. In contrast, her mother actively accommodated to American popular culture and was met with no such resistance. This example of two second-generation Mexican Americans who are received by American society quite differently reveals the gendered nature of policing and acceptance. Raul undergoes gendered scrutiny: he was drafted into the U.S. military where his loyalty was tested and he faced racialized heckling from Anglo Americans who were marking him as an "other." Oppositely, Sandra, partially by virtue of being a woman is leniently viewed as "soft," more malleable and acceptable to the mainstream. Consequently, Sandra experiences an easier transition into American culture and identity. Sensing acceptance, she actively attempts to fit in with the popular musical and clothing styles of the time. Having met in San Diego when they were 16 years old, Raul and Sandra experienced their youth in the same social context in distinctly racialized and gendered ways. The boundary between whiteness and non-whiteness was more rigorously policed for Raul than for Sandra, which spurred him to claim the identity that is imposed upon him—*Mexican* American—whereas Sandra melded into the U.S. mainstream as a Mexican *American.*

## *DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION*

As neither globalization nor international migration show signs of abating, addressing public and scholastic concerns over the longer-term incorporation possibilities for Mexican migrants and their families is of paramount importance. This article deepens our understanding of Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans in the United States. Since Mexico is the leading country of origin for both legal and undocumented immigration into California (and the United States at large; Rytina 2006), this work contributes to a topic of national interest. This research demonstrates that, over generations,

Mexican immigrant families do very much become part of the national tapestry of the United States. While, indeed, some Mexican immigrant families experience downward assimilation and are trapped in poor neighborhoods and low-paying jobs (Dohan 2003; Vigil 1988), at least a segment of the population eventually integrates into the middle-class mainstream. Among those families, they take at minimum two routes to that middle-class destination: Anglo-conformity assimilation and ethnic solidarity. These findings correct an oversight in assimilation theory by demonstrating that variation within immigrant ethnic groups' modes of incorporation are shaped by gender, skin color, and historical moment.

Integration over three generations is a "bumpy" process in that while there is intergenerational progress in terms of structural assimilation there is also a spectrum of ways Mexican Americans can choose to engage Mexican culture. As Telles and Ortiz (2008, p. 284) note, both modern assimilation theory and segmented assimilation theory "exaggerate the consistency and uniformity in direction to which assimilation occurs across a wide range of social dimensions." Pursuing the critique that "assimilation, or the lack of it, can occur at quite distinct paces and even in an opposite direction" (Telles and Ortiz, 2008, p. 284), this article uses qualitative data to demonstrate the types of "bumps" and directional splits within generations that exist along the road of assimilation. Significant "bumps" in the road of integration include: gender, phenotype, and sociohistorical context.

My middle-class sample demonstrates both educational and socioeconomic intergenerational progress that accompanies structural assimilation. In terms of acculturation and relationship to the United States, most first-generation immigrants felt grateful to the United States for expanded opportunity and a better life than they had in Mexico. The immigrants varied in their wishes to teach their children about family history or Mexican culture: some actively enacted assimilation whereas others retained cultural traditions that rooted them in a new land. The second generation, feeling between two social worlds, was split in their loyalties: some followed an assimilationist pathway while others were committed to cultural maintenance. These trajectories are influenced by interviewees' physical characteristics that either permit or disbar them from unproblematically claiming an American identity.

Like their parents, the third generation encompasses a variety of integration trajectories and possesses varying degrees of cultural commitments, from satisfaction with "honorary whiteness" to highly ethnically identified. Honorary whites are those racial/ethnic minorities who "are extended the status of whiteness despite the public

recognition that, from a bio-racial perspective, they are not fully white'' (Haney-Lopez 2006, p. 151). Skin color is critical to how people are perceived and treated. Lighter-skinned individuals who wished to display their heritage performed ''symbolic ethnicity'' by exhibiting trademark Mexican cultural symbols whereas dark-skinned individuals were presupposed to be Mexican-origin and were not given this ''ethnic option'' (Waters 1990). Some lighter-skinned individuals were content with ''passing'' for non-Hispanic white, others did cultural work to claim their Mexican heritage, and still others endeavored for positive representation in society.

Racial identities are as marked by gender as by phenotype. Historical era is an ever-present influence because it informs notions of appropriate or normative gender roles and racial identities (or gendered racial identities and racialized gender roles). Gendered and racialized discourses dominant during the young adulthood of the second generation in the 1960s and 1970s constructed Mexican-American men as soldiers and women as wives and mothers acceptable to the mainstream, provided they adopt prevailing cultural repertoires. Conceiving of themselves as heads of the hearth, some women desired to ''return'' to their ancestral roots and recuperate forgotten cultural elements, particularly with the goal of instructing children in these ways. Third-generation English-monolinguals or bilinguals engaged in symbolic ethnicity offer the perspective that multiculturalism is a professional advantage. Challengers to the view of a peaceable multiculturalism are males and those with darker complexions; they are not distanced from persistent racialization and do not have an ethnicity that is merely symbolic.

This study shows the necessity of exploring empirically the diversity of integration trajectories both within ethnic groups and over family generations. Given existing bifurcations within multi-generational families—such as an Anglo-conformity versus ethnic solidarity orientation—that reach the status position of structural integration three generations after immigration, it is clear that assimilation theory needs to account for intra-ethnic group dynamics and diversity. This work advances assimilation theory by identifying generational patterns, and fractures within generations, such as phenotype and gender, that steer inherently ''bumpy'' incorporation processes.

## *REFERENCES*

**Alba, R. D. 2006. ''Mexican Americans and the American Dream.'' *Perspectives on Politics* 4:289–296.**

Alba, R. D. and V. Nee. 2003. *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bean, F. D. and G. Stevens. 2003. *America's Newcomers and the Dynamics of Diversity*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Bender, S. 2008. *One Night in America: Robert Kennedy, César Chávez, and the Dream of Dignity*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm.

Carter, P. L. 2007. "Between a 'Soft' and a 'Hard' Place." Pp. 189–200 in *The Kaleidoscope of Gender: Prisms, Patterns, and Possibilities*, 2nd edition, edited by J. Spade and C. Valentine. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Chavez, L. R. 2008. *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

DeGenova, N. 2005. *Working the Boundaries: Race, Space, and "Illegality" in Mexican Chicago*. Raleigh, NC: Duke University Press.

Dohan, D. 2003. *The Price of Poverty: Money, Work, and Culture in the Mexican-American Barrio*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

DuBois, W. E. B. 1903. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Feagin, J. R. and J. Cobas. 2008. "Latinos/as and the White Racial Frame: The Procrustean Bed of Assimilation." *Sociological Inquiry* 78(1):39–53.

Ferguson, A. A. 2000. *Bad Boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Flores-Gonzales, N. 1999. "The Racialization of Latinos: The Meaning of Latino Identity for the Second Generation." *Latino Studies Journal* 10(3):3–31.

Flores, W. V. and R. Benmayor. 1997. *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space, and Rights*. Boston: Beacon.

Gans, H. J. 1979. "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups in America." *Ethnic and Racial Studie*, 2(2):1–20.

———. 1992. "Comment: Ethnic Invention and Acculturation, A Bumby-Line Approach." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 12(1):42–52.

Golash-Boza, T. 2006. "Dropping the Hyphen? Becoming Latino(a)-American through Racialized Assimilation." *Social Forces* 85(1):27–56.

Gordon, M. M. 1964. *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Haney-Lopez, I. 2003. *Racism on Trial: the Chicano Fight for Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

———. 2006. *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race*, revised and updated, 10th anniversary edition. New York: New York University Press.

Hansen, M. 1938. *The Problem of the Third Generation Immigrant*. Rock Island, IL: Augustana Historical Society.

Hondagneu-Sotelo, P. 1997. "The History of Mexican Undocumented Settlement in the United States." Pp. 115–134 in *Challenging Fronteras: Structuring Latina and Latino Lives in the U.S.*, edited by M. Romero, V. Ortiz, and P. Hondagneu-Sotelo. New York: Taylor & Francis.

Huntington, S. P. 2004. "The Hispanic Challenge." *Foreign Policy*, March/April. Retrieved from http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2004/03/01/the_hispanic_challenge.

Jiménez, T. R. 2008. "Mexican Immigrant Replenishment and the Continuing Significance of Ethnicity and Race." *American Journal of Sociology* 113(6): 1527–1567.

———. 2010. *Replenished Ethnicity: Mexican Americans, Immigration, and Identity.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Johnson, T. R., J. Nagel, and D. Champagne. 1997. "American Indian Activism and Transformation: Lessons from Alcatraz." Pp. 9–44 in *American Indian Activism: Alcatraz to the Longest Walk*, edited by T. R. Johnson, J. Nagel, and D. Champagne. Chicago: University of Illinois.

Kao, G. A. M. T. 1995. "Optimism and Achievement: The Educational Performance of Immigrant Youth." *Social Science Quarterly* 76:1–19.

Kibria, N. 2002. *Becoming Asian American: Second-Generation Chinese and Korean American Identities*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

King, D. 1988. "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14(1):42–72.

Krouse, S. A. 2009. *North American Indians in the Great War.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Lee, J. and F. D. Bean 2004. "America's Changing Color Lines: Immigration, Race/Ethnicity, and Multiracial Identification." *Annual Review of Sociology* 30:221–242.

Lipsitz, G. 2006. *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Lopez, D. 1996. "Language: Diversity and Assimilation." Pp. 139–164 in *Ethnic Los Angeles*, edited by R. Waldinger and M. Bozorgmehr. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Macias, T. 2006. *Mestizo in America: Generations of Mexican Ethnicity in the Suburban Southwest.* Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

Maldonado, M. M. 2009. "It Is Their Nature To Do Menial Labour': The Racialization of 'Latino/a Workers' by Agricultural Employers." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 32(6):1017–1036.

Mannheim, K. 1936. *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (L. Wirth and E. Shils, Trans.). New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Mariscal, G. (Ed). 1999. *Aztlán and Viet Nam: Chicano and Chicana Experiences of the War.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Newby, C. A. and J. Dowling. 2007. "Black and Hispanic: The Racial Identification of Afro-Cuban Immigrants in the Southwest." *Sociological Perspectives* 50(3): 343–366.

Oboler, S. 1997. '"So Far From God, So Close to the United States': The Roots of Hispanic Homogenization." Pp. 31–54 in *Challenging Fronteras: Structuring Latina and Latino Lives in the U.S.*, edited by M. Romero, V. Ortiz, and P. Hondagneu-Sotelo.). New York: Routledge.

Ochoa, G. 2004. *Becoming Neighbors in a Mexican American Community: Power, Conflict and Solidarity.* Austin: University of Texas Press.

Omi, M. and H. Winant. 1994. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2nd edition. New York: Routledge.

Ono, H. 2002. "Assimilation, Ethnic Competition, and Ethnic Identities of U.S.-Born Persons of Mexican Origin." *International Migration Review* 36(3):726–745.

Ortiz, V. 1996. "The Mexican-Origin Population: Permanent Working Class or Emerging Middle Class?" Pp. 247–277 in *Ethnic Los Angeles*, edited by R. D. Waldinger and M. Bozorgmehr. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Park, R. E., E. Burgess, and R. McKenzie. 1925. *The City.* Chicago, IL.: The University of Chicago Press.

Perlmann, J. 2005. *Italians Then, Mexicans Now: Immigrant Origins and Second-Generation Progress, 1890 to 2000.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Portes, A. and L. Hau. 1998. "E Pluribus Unum: Bilingualism and Loss of Language in the Second Generation." *Sociology of Education* 71(October):269–294.

Portes, A. and R. G. Rumbaut. 2001. *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Portes, A. and M. Zhou. 1993. "The New Second Generation: Segmented Assimilation and Its Variants." *The Annals of the American Academy* 530:74–96.

Ramirez, J. 1999. *A Patriot After All: The Story of a Chicano Vietnam Vet.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Rosenfeld, M. 2002. "Measures of Assimilation in the Marriage Market: Mexican Americans 1970–1990." *Journal of Marriage and the Famil* 64(1):152–162.

Roth, W. D. 2008. "'There Is No Racism Here': Understanding Latinos' Perceptions of Color Discrimination Through Sending-Receiving Society Comparison." Pp. 205–234 in *Racism in the 21st Century: An Empirical Analysis of Skin Color*, edited by R. E. Hall. New York: Springer.

Rumbaut, R. G. and A. Portes. 2001. *Ethnicities: Children of Immigrants in America.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Rytina, N. F. 2006. *Estimates of the Legal Permanent Resident Population and Population Eligible to Naturalize in 2004.* Washington, DC: Department of Homeland Security Office of Immigration Statistics.

Sanchez, G. J. 1994. "'Go After the Women': Americanization and the Mexican Immigrant Woman, 1915–1929." Pp. 284–297 in *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History*, edited by V. Ruiz and E. DuBois. New York: Routledge.

Segal, D. R. 1989. *Recruiting for Uncle Sam: Citizenship and Military Manpower Policy.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.

Segura, D. 1986. "Chicanas and Triple Oppression in the Labor Market." Pp. 47–65 in *Chicana Voices: Intersections of Class, Race, and Gender.* Austin: Center for Mexican American Studies, University of Texas.

Skerry, P. 1993. *Mexican Americans: The Ambivalent Minority.* New York: Free Press.

Smith, J. P. 2003. "Assimilation Across the Latino Generations." *American Economic Review* 93:315–319.

Steinberg, S. 2001. *The Ethnic Myth: Race, Ethnicity, and Class in America*, 3rd edition. Boston: Beacon.

Sue, C. and E. Telles 2007. "Assimilation and Gender in Naming." *American Journal of Sociology* 112(5):1383–1415.

Takahashi, J. 1997. *Nisei/Sansei: Shifting Japanese American Identities and Politics.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Telles, E. and V. Ortiz. 2008. *Generations of Exclusion: Mexican Americans, Assimilation, and Race.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Vasquez, J. M. 2010. "Blurred Borders for Some but Not 'Others': Racialization, 'Flexible Ethnicity,' Gender, and Third Generation Mexican American Identity." *Sociological Perspectives* 53(1):45–71.

———. 2011. *Mexican Americans across Generations: Immigrant Families, Racial Realities*. New York: New York University Press.

Vasquez, J. M. and C. Wetzel. 2009. "Tradition and the Invention of Racial Selves: Symbolic Boundaries, Collective Authenticity, and Contemporary Struggles for Racial Equality." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 32(9):1557–1575.

Vigil, J. D. 1988. *Barrio Gangs: Street Life and Identity in Southern California*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Warner, W. L. and L. Srole. 1945. *The Social Systems of American Ethnic Groups*, volume 3. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Waters, M. C. 1990. *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ybarra, L. 2004. *Vietnam Veteranos: Chicanos Recall the War*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Yuval-Davis, N. 1997. *Gender & Nation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.