

A PAST AND PRESENT COMPARISION OF  
MEXICAN AMERICAN INTERETHNIC  
MARRIAGE  
THESIS

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

As the saying goes, “love is blind.” However, is love colorblind? Today, most people in the United States would say that another person’s racial or ethnic background does not play a vital role in choosing a spouse or “significant other”. Others would say that for their own personal reasons, they would never choose to be with someone who is of a different race or ethnicity, and still others would never date or marry someone of their own race or ethnicity. This thesis explains why love and marriage has or has not been colorblind with respect to Mexican Americans in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Growing up, interethnic dating and marriage were common in my Mexican American family. Seven out of eight of my maternal grandmother’s children were either married to or involved in long-term relationships with Anglo partners. Many of my older cousins also dated non-Hispanic Anglos and one in particular chose to date Asian Americans and African Americans, because those were the ethnic groups with which he had contact. As a child, it was never a question of how or why, it was merely a fact of life. As I grew older and began to date, I

realized that the young men to whom I was attracted were all Anglo. This is a fact that has also continued into my adult life. It was not until I began graduate school during the fall of 2005 that I began to peer deeper into my own ethnic identity and to question the cultural and social structures of interethnic relationships in general, and then more specifically within the context of Mexican American culture.

This thesis examines past and present patterns of Mexican American interethnic marriage. The main question to be answered is: What factors influence the rate or occurrence of intermarriage and how have these factors changed or remained constant over time? Social and cultural factors that have influenced the rates of intermarriage include language maintenance, higher education, socioeconomic status, prejudice, and discrimination. Various field methods were used to conduct this study including literature reviews, archival research, participant observation, and interviews.

A proper understanding of terms used throughout this study is necessary in order to be able to contextualize Mexican American interethnic relationships. There are many different definitions for the term race. For the purposes of this thesis, race refers to a group of persons who share such genetically transmitted traits as skin color, hair texture, and eye shape or color. Many modern anthropologists believe that there is only one race and that subgroups are culturally constructed. Ethnicity is based on a conception of a shared cultural

heritage and an ethnic group is a group of people who believe they share a common history, culture, or ancestry (Scupin 2003:67).

Anthropologists are straying from using the term race, therefore, the term interethnic will be used in this thesis rather than interracial, except when specifically used by cited scholars and authors. The term Mexican American refers to a person of Mexican ancestry who was born in the United States. Hispanic and Latino are also mentioned throughout this study, however, they are only used in a broad sense to identify people of Spanish descent who are not necessarily of Mexican ancestry such as people from Latin America and South America. The term Anglo refers to any non-Hispanic, “white” person of European descent.

Understanding the interethnic relations of Mexican Americans is essential for the future of the United States. Latinos, the racial/ethnic group under which Mexican Americans are categorized, are having a great demographic impact on the United States. The number of Latinos in this country has grown from 500,000 or .66 percent of the U.S. population in the year 1900, to over 35 million or 12.5 percent of the U.S. population in the year 2000, with the most dramatic impact occurring in the last few decades (Guzman 2001:1; Saenz 2004:1). Latinos were designated as the nation’s largest minority in 2003 by the U.S. Census Bureau, and current projections see an increase in their share of the overall U.S. population from 13 percent in the year 2000 to 33 percent in the year 2100 (Saenz 2004:1). Of the three major Latino

groups--Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans--Mexicans represent the largest group, 59 percent, of all Latinos (Guzman 2001:2). Because the southwest United States once belonged to and still borders Mexico, the majority of Mexicans live in five states: Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas (Saenz 2004:5).

Mexican Americans have made many contributions to American society beyond their demographic impact, and many demand that their contributions be recognized and that they keep their culture even as they seek to be integrated into mainstream American society. The elaborate trade routes of the current Western United States and the pack train transportation systems were developed by Mexican Americans and have now become the highways and railroads of the United States (Dunn 1975:40). During the California gold rush, Anglo miners learned the techniques of the Mexican American miners before driving most of the Mexican American miners out of the goldmines (Dunn 1975:23). Mexican Americans have also made a distinctive contribution to American cuisine with food and drinks such as tortillas, tacos, fajitas, enchiladas, and margaritas, all of which are found in grocery stores and restaurants across the country. It is important to recognize the contributions and influences that Mexican Americans have made on American society, and that this influence will continue as they become even further integrated into the majority society.



In terms of race and ethnicity, it is necessary to address the racial and ethnic ambiguity of Hispanics and Mexican Americans. When describing the early racial differences between Anglos and African Americans, the distinction was legally defined and quite clear. However, when discussing Mexican Americans and Anglos the distinction was not as clear-cut. During the late-nineteenth century, following The Civil War, separate but equal laws were formed that kept African Americans segregated from Anglos, or whites. It remained very clear that African Americans were not considered white and did not have the same rights as white citizens. Mexicans and Mexican Americans, on the other hand, were given the same rights as whites after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. However, many Americans challenged the whiteness of Mexicans. Because of the Latin American caste system, many elite Mexicans emphasized their Spanish, European, or “white” ancestry. Other Mexicans were considered mestizos who had a mix of Indian, Spanish, and African ancestry. Their African or indigenous heritage and darker skin tone made Mexicans racially ambiguous and led to prejudice and discrimination that has continued in modern times.

The following section provides an overview of interethnic relationships in order to gain a better understanding of interethnic relationships in general and the factors which have influenced rates of intermarriage, and also to specifically contextualize Mexican American interethnic relationships.

### Overview of Interethnic Relationships

Although interethnic relationships have occurred wherever and whenever different people have been in contact, in the past, it was not considered the norm in the United States to practice interethnic dating or marriage. It is only in more recent times that people are increasingly stepping outside of the boundaries of their culture and ethnicity to find suitable partners of every race and color. What factors come into play when a person chooses to have a long-term, committed interethnic relationship? Research shows the importance of cultural and social factors such as physical attributes, political change, and socioeconomic status (Feinman and Gill 1978; Heaton and Jacobson 2000). Opportunity variables that foster intergroup contact, such as age, military service, metropolitan residency, and education can also affect the rates of interethnic relationships (Feinman and Gill 1978; Heaton and Jacobson 2000).

Many people admit that when looking at another person, the first thing they decide is whether or not that individual is physically attractive, a judgment usually influenced by society. Not all relationships, interethnic or not, begin this way, however, maintaining a long-term relationship with someone whom we do not find physically attractive is rare. The most obvious physical attribute is phenotype, or the observable appearance of a human. An interesting study on physical attractiveness preferences discovered that Anglo males have a tendency

to prefer lighter female skin coloration and Anglo females prefer darker male coloration (Feinman and Gill 1978:43). This could partly explain why there is a tendency for Anglo women to have relationships with African American men. Nearly seventy-five percent of interracial marriages involving African Americans consist of African American men married to Anglo women (Stone 1992:167).

Phenotype also plays a role in early Mexican American interethnic relationships. The more Spanish-looking Mexican women with light skin, hair, and eyes, were considered as being almost the equal of Anglo women, and “these *rubias*, or light-complected Mexican women, were acclaimed as ‘superb specimens of womanhood’” in editorials found in California and Texas (Griswold del Castillo 1984:67). The idea that these women could “pass” as almost Anglo may have had an affect on intermarriage rates, however, very few scholars explore this possibility.

Secondly, socioeconomic status can play a very vital role in interethnic relationships. According to the exchange hypothesis, Anglo women of low economic status will exchange their high racial status in order to have economic security with someone of a lower racial status but high economic status. Minority men with high socioeconomic status will exchange that for “interracial acceptance and evidence that they can marry ‘white’” (Heaton and Jacobson 2000:30). This could also explain the tendency for Anglo women to marry African American men.

Another factor that can affect the rate of intermarriage is political change. This is especially true when one takes into consideration that now the children of more liberal and tolerant parents who believe in racial and cultural equality, as opposed to earlier racist and ethnocentric families, are becoming old enough to marry and start families of their own. Commentator David Updike asserts that

more likely, my sister and I both married Africans because, as children, we were not conditioned not to, were not told that this was not one of life's options, and so, when the opportunity arose, there were no barriers- neither our own nor our parents' (1992:64).

When interviewees for this thesis were asked whether or not their parents preferred for them to date someone of their own culture, the majority of respondents replied in the same way as Updike and asserted that it was never an issue and if it was, it changed over time. One of my respondents, Lisa, states, "They joked when we were young that we had to marry Mexican, but as we got older, they told us they just wanted us to be happy, they wanted us to marry someone we love".

Opportunity variables refer to factors that allow for more social contact with other ethnic groups (Heaton and Jacobson 2000:31). Thus, age, military service, metropolitan residency, and education must also be taken into account when discussing the rates of interethnic relationships. For example, older people often have less peer contact with members of other races and ethnicities, and the norms against intermarriage were more prevalent when they were younger and in the dating and marriage market (Heaton and Jacobson 2000:32). On the

other hand, “younger individuals began their marriages in more recent years when interracial dating was more common” (Joyner and Kao 2005:364).

Studies have shown that both men and women with military experience are more likely to marry someone of a different race or ethnicity than people who have not served in the military. More specifically, Anglo men and women are more likely to marry African American men and women. The reasoning behind this is that the military is desegregated, emphasizes fair treatment, and creates a relatively homogenous socioeconomic group. Also, overseas assignments increase contact with different races and ethnicities (Heaton and Jacobson 2000:31).

Metropolitan residency and group size are other opportunity variables that can affect the rates of interethnic marriages. Generally, those who live in metropolitan areas are likely to have more contact with members of multiple racial and ethnic groups than those who live in rural areas. Also, the tendency for greater tolerance of other races and cultures in these areas allows people to spend time and fraternize with whomever they choose without fear of repercussions. Interestingly, “the mathematics of increasing minority group size make it possible for increasing exogamy for the majority while simultaneously increasing endogamy for the minority” (Heaton and Jacobson 2000:32). Thomas Macias agrees and asserts that metropolitan areas with a large minority

group size will encourage ethnic group solidarity and therefore decrease intermarriage (Macias 2006:10).

Finally, the incidence of higher education can also affect intermarriage rates. Grade schools and high schools are usually homogenous because of neighborhood boundaries, whereas colleges and universities draw their populations from a broader regional pool (Heaton and Jacobson 2000:31). Many colleges enroll students not only from across the nation, but also from different countries. Also, college campuses tend to emphasize diversity which reduces social barriers to interethnic interaction.

In addition to cultural and social factors and opportunity variables, it is also important to explore both the external and internal reactions to interethnic relationships because it is telling of the prejudice, discrimination, and ethnic stereotypes that may affect intermarriage rates. The external reactions refer to the responses of family, friends, and strangers to an interethnic couple's relationship. The internal reactions refer to the feelings of the couple involved in these relationships.

The feelings of family and friends vary depending on the discomfort of the situation and the possible prejudice they feel, either consciously or subconsciously, towards the "other" person. According to my own respondents, both family and friends of the couple will do their best to be supportive of the relationship. There might be some initial questioning,

but after the “settling in period” the families realize that the couple is still their loved ones and they want the couple to be happy. Because the couple is loved ones, families may feel overprotective and try to warn the couple of the possible strife and negative reactions that they may have to overcome. “Love and Bigotry”, an article by commentator Elizabeth Stone, describes an interracial relationship between Sean, an Anglo male and Lisette, an African American female, and provides an example of family reaction. Lisette was marrying up according to American society, but her parents raised some initial concern about her interracial relationship with Sean. However, they told her that as long as she was happy they were happy. Sean’s parents on the other hand had a different reaction. Their son was marrying down according to American society, and they told Sean that they were unhappy about his relationship with Lisette. When Sean asked why, his father simply replied, “You just don’t do it” (Stone 1992:168). Sean hoped that they would eventually come around after meeting and getting to know Lisette personally, however, his parents refused to meet her and threatened to stop paying for his college tuition unless he stopped seeing her.

Some friends and family members will even go to such lengths as to refuse to attend the wedding of an interethnic couple. One of my own respondents, Nina, claims that her mother did not attend her wedding. However, Nina’s mother explained that it was not due to Darren’s Anglo ethnicity, but rather Nina and Darren’s refusal to have “a big Mexican

circus wedding with ten cousins as bridesmaids and a Mexican band.”

Some people or families believe that by marrying outside of their race or ethnicity, an individual is betraying his or her culture or losing their ethnic identity. However, according to Nina and the other Mexican American respondents interviewed for this study, they do not feel that they have lost any ethnic identity by being involved in an interethnic relationship. Many times the families do not understand that both partners are usually aware of their cultural differences and oftentimes want to be actively involved in their spouse’s culture.

Many friends and family members have fears that the children of an interethnic couple will have to endure the brunt of ridicule and discrimination. They feel that “the children might have no real place in any community” (Luke and Luke 1998:744). However, this is not necessarily true. If both parents are proud of their cultural heritage, they will do everything they can to make sure that their children are aware and proud also. This is especially true in terms of language. Parents are more and more beginning to realize that to be bi-or multi-lingual is a growing asset in the United States. The fear of being ridiculed or punished for speaking Spanish or another language is not as prevalent as in previous generations. Megan, another one of my participants, wants her children to speak Spanish because “it’ll enable them not only to hold onto their ethnic identity, but it’ll also help when they’re searching for employment opportunities.” However, she fears that



she will not be able to teach them because she is not fluent in the language.

Scholars suggest that the only time a stranger really takes notice of an interracial couple is when they do not like seeing them together (Luke and Luke 1998:741). There are instances of random slurs towards the couple, they are stared at in public places, and in extreme cases they may be unable to use or get service at some public facilities (Luke and Luke 1998:741). Stone (1992:169) gives several examples: Lisette feels this tension when other African American men call her a traitor and tell her to find a man that is the same color as her. Another Anglo woman, Lynne, feels the most resentment from African American women when she is out with her African American husband. The explanation given by scholar Steve Sailer for their resentment is because of the scarcity of middle-class African American men. Many African American men of prime marrying age “are literally locked out of the marriage market by being locked in jail, and maybe twice that number are on probation or parole” (Sailer 1997:4). Some African American women feel that African American men should not date or marry outside of their race because the men should belong to these women and Anglo women should be with Anglo men. Whether or not this is also true for Mexican American men and women is not clear due to a lack of scholarly research on this specific topic, however, no respondents interviewed for this study claim that this is an issue.

The internal reactions of interethnic couples can vary depending upon the feelings and beliefs they hold regarding their own individual culture and ethnicity and the feelings and beliefs they have concerning their partner's culture and ethnicity. Just like any other couple, they have their good and bad times. They work, play, and squabble about daily life such as finances, the affects of television on family life, and the pros and cons of buying a new car. However, with interethnic couples there can also be disagreements regarding each person's cultural practices and religious beliefs. For some couples this is a problem and for others it is not. They must find ways to work out their differences just as any other couple, but they might have a harder time because of their racial and ethnic differences. The very identity of each partner, and their familial unit, "is constructed and reconstructed in relation to how they encountered and remediated the micropolitics" of their relationship (Luke and Luke 1998:743). For some individuals, the relationship has "provided the grounds for them to re-evaluate and reinvent their own ethnicity; it opened out perhaps new, but more explicitly 'marked' forms of identity and self-representation" (Luke and Luke 1998:743). For instance, respondents Lisa and Yohan plan to incorporate both her Mexican heritage and his Korean heritage into their marriage and their children's lives, thus creating their own specific ethnic identity. Also, the negative responses that these couples sometimes receive regarding their relationship can oftentimes draw them closer together as they both

experience the feelings of pain and rejection and feel the need to demonstrate a successful relationship.

An interesting internal response to intermarriage is a change in “expected” gender practices. The change in food preparation and shopping seems to be the most obvious shift in gender roles. In traditional gender roles, women are in charge of food preparation and shopping, but a shift has occurred in some interethnic marriages and the men are taking charge of these traditional roles. Luke and Luke assert that “this shift occurs frequently in households where the husband is a first-generation migrant with limited English language proficiency” (1998:746). Just as the men’s roles are shifting, the women’s roles are also changing. Anglo women married to men of different races are taking on new roles as public negotiators for the family. If the men are unable to conduct household business transactions because of their lack of fluent English, then the women must take over and keep family business and finances running smoothly.

Another interesting gender practice concerns the motivations and perceptions that people have in relation to potential partners from other ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. Some Asian women have claimed that they have a preference for Anglo men because “they considered them less ‘traditional’ in the way they treat women, and participate in family life through domestic and childcare help” (Luke and Luke 1998:747). An Anglo woman explains that she likes the way that Chinese families in

general value children and education. Some Anglo men have stated that they prefer non-Anglo women because they are more “traditional” and less “liberated” than their Anglo counterparts (Luke and Luke 1998:748). Respondent Nina asserts that a partial reason why she chose to date and marry someone who is not Mexican American is because she believed they were more macho and had an exaggerated sense of masculinity.

In sum, various social and cultural factors as well as opportunity variables play an integral role in the rates of all interethnic relationships. It is also important to examine both the external and internal reactions and perceptions that can affect these relationships. Evidence shows that individuals are becoming increasingly colorblind when choosing a spouse. However, in contrast to early theories about marital assimilation and interethnic marriage, this colorblindness does not necessarily mean that a loss of ethnic identity must also occur. This is especially true when considering Mexican American interethnic relationships as subsequent chapters will demonstrate. The following chapter will describe the history of Mexican Americans in general and their history of interethnic marriage.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Understanding the history of Mexican Americans in the United States is crucial when discussing Mexican American interethnic relationships. Mexican Americans did not follow the same steps as most European immigrants and therefore have not followed the same steps of integration and assimilation into American society as European immigrants. Also, it is important to acknowledge the prejudice and discrimination that Mexican Americans have endured and overcome, and particularly how volunteer organizations have worked to build ethnic identity strength and ethnic cohesion while at the same time allowing for easier integration into American society, an increase in upward socioeconomic mobility, and an increase of opportunity for contact with the dominant society. An increase in opportunity for contact will often increase the occurrence of Mexican American intermarriage.

#### History of Mexican American Intermarriage

During the early and mid-nineteenth century in what is now the southwest United States, there was some intermarriage between elite Mexicans and Anglos, mainly Anglo males and Mexican females

(Castañeda 1998:241). The motivation behind these marriages was “the desire of opportunistic Anglo males to marry into the wealthy and well-established Spanish families of the region” (Murguía 1982:45).

American, British, Scottish, German, and French adventurers who had migrated to the region prior to 1846 married daughters of the most prominent Hispanic families, and once related to these families by marriage, they became eligible for land grants and were permitted to engage in trade (Murguía 1982:45). The motivation to intermarry also came from the direction of the Hispanic families. The upper-class Hispanic families hoped that interethnic marriages would protect them from a loss of economic and political influence (Griswold del Castillo 1984:66). The Hispanic elite felt a desire to hold onto their social and economic status, and Hispanic families from the lower classes sought to improve their socioeconomic standing (Griswold del Castillo 1984:67).

After the Mexican-American war during the 1840s and the construction of railroads into the southwest, Anglos began to play the leading role in the economy of the southwest region, which resulted in a marked change in Mexican-Anglo relationships. Mexican Americans were relegated to lower socioeconomic positions that provided little opportunity for upward economic mobility and interpersonal contact with Anglos. Also, Mexican Americans were employed in jobs that often required them to work in all-Mexican work crews or in family units and in undesirable isolated locations (Murguía 1982:46). A lack of upward

socioeconomic mobility and personal contact with the Anglo majority population resulted in a decrease of Mexican American and Anglo intermarriage rates. Furthermore, the amount of prejudice and discrimination directed towards Mexican Americans by Anglos was intensified by employers who kept Mexicans segregated occupationally and created “a situation in which the skilled labor groups have naturally regarded Mexicans as group competitors rather than as individual employees” (Murguía 1982:46).

Since the mid-twentieth century, intermarriage rates of Mexican Americans and Anglos have increased. A decrease in racial prejudice and discrimination along with a moderate increase in socioeconomic mobility and an increase in the opportunity for contact with the Anglo population has contributed to higher intermarriage rates. However, so as to fully comprehend how racial prejudice and discrimination have affected the rates of Mexican American intermarriage, one must delve deeper into the history of Mexican Americans to fully understand the adversities that they have had to overcome in order to decrease prejudice and discrimination and increase upward mobility. In turn, an increase in upward mobility increases the opportunity for contact with the dominant society and a higher rate of interpersonal social contact increases the rate of intermarriage with the dominant society.

### A General History of Mexican Americans

The Mexicans who first came to what is now the United States were products of Spanish and Indian cultures. These Mestizos formed communities in New Mexico that predate “the first so-called North American settlement of Jamestown in 1609” (Bigler 2003:210). During the mid-1800s, Mexicans had begun to be incorporated into the political boundaries of the United States, however, Mexicans did not originally cross the Mexico border to enter the United States, the border crossed over them.

Following the Texans’ success in achieving independence from Mexico, the United States annexed Texas in 1845 (Dunn 1975:46). With the idea of imperialist expansion, the United States wanted to extend their southern boundary by claiming sovereignty over territory that extended to the Rio Grande, while the Mexican government held that the Nueces River formed the boundary between the two countries (Dunn 1975:57). This incident, along with the refusal of the Mexican government to repatriate African slaves who had crossed from Texas into Mexico and numerous filibustering expeditions from the United States into Mexican Territory, led to the Mexican-American War (Dunn 1975:57). The United States, with far more economic and military power, defeated Mexico and gained the land that now makes up California, Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and Texas (Bigler 2003:210). Therefore, the Mexicans living on this land “became part of



the U.S. population through conquest, and this means of incorporation profoundly affected Anglos' views of them and their relations" (Bigler 2003:210). By becoming part of the United States population through conquest, early Mexican American populations differed from European immigrants who voluntarily came to the United States and this experience has influenced their patterns of intermarriage.

After the defeat of the Mexicans in 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was put into effect. The Treaty guaranteed cultural, political, and linguistic rights to the Mexican people who chose to stay on the lands annexed to the United States and become American citizens, and the Treaty "also promised to uphold the Mexican American owners' rights to their lands" (Dunn 1975:46). This promise was quickly broken when the discovery of gold in California led to a massive influx of Anglos into the area. The Anglo population soon outnumbered the Mexican American population, which in turn led to an Anglo domination in the state legislature. Shortly after state legislature domination, they began to pass discriminatory laws aimed exclusively at the Mexican American population, such as an anti-vagrancy Greaser act and a foreign miner's tax (Bigler 2003:210). Throughout the rest of the Southwest region, Mexican Americans "were divested of their preexisting claims to land titles guaranteed them through the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo" (Bigler 2003:210). Anglos used the arguments of Manifest Destiny and Social Darwinism to excuse their actions and viewed the Mexican

Americans as another inferior group for them to exploit rather than integrate into American society (Dunn 1975:47).

Both Mexican Americans and Mexican nationals found themselves reduced to exploited laborers as they worked in agriculture, ranching, mining, and on the railroads. Their labor made significant contributions to the capitalist ventures of the Anglos, however, most Mexicans and Mexican Americans “found themselves stigmatized, socially segregated, and politically marginalized through a variety of means” (Bigler 2003:211). Many Mexican Americans were denied the right to citizenship and in Texas were denied “the vote by the use of white primaries, poll taxes, and intimidation tactics” (Bigler 2003:211). Prejudice and discrimination towards Mexican Americans did not stop there and only continued to worsen as time went on and interpersonal contact decreased.

Mexican Americans endured much prejudice and discrimination from the same people who were meant to uphold the rights of American citizens: law enforcement officers. In the early 1900s, the Texas Rangers were often used to break strikes formed by Mexican Americans. In January of 1919, a legislative inquiry was held and committee witnesses claimed that “the Texas Rangers had killed as many as 5,000 people (almost all of them Mexican Americans) in the 1914-1918 period” (Dunn 1975:68). Texas state senator Joe Bernal of Bexar County described the Texas Rangers as “the Mexican Americans’ Ku Klux Klan” (Dunn

1975:68). In 1942, the Sleepy Lagoon case began when young Mexican Americans were jailed for allegedly killing Jose Diaz in a juvenile gang war even though there was no witness, no murder weapon, nor any wounds on Diaz's body (Bigler 2003:213; Dunn 1975:68). Shortly thereafter, the Zoot-Suit Riots in East Los Angeles, California occurred. Sailors, in very large numbers, invaded Mexican American *barrios* and attacked the Mexican American zoot-suited youth. The police arrested the Mexican Americans rather than the Anglo mob members who initiated the rampage (Bigler 2003:213). The prejudice and discrimination Mexican Americans endured from law enforcement officers maintained the stereotype that they were criminals and therefore should be repressed.

Education and public school systems have also been a source of segregation and conflict for many Mexican American children. Often Mexican American children attended segregated schools and were forbidden to speak their native language, sometimes being punished if caught speaking Spanish (Dunn 1975:71). Respondents interviewed for this study, especially the older generation, have confirmed this punishment. Also, most teachers did not speak Spanish and were not able to understand the students or teach them English. Early analyses of Mexican Americans' school performance considered the practices of the schools to be neutral, and therefore the problem was in the cultural and linguistic practices of these families. Therefore, school officials

chose to eradicate Mexican American culture and force the children to conform to American mainstream society (Bigler 2003:230; Dunn 1975:71).

Mexican American students were not the only segment of the population involved in segregation and social conflict with the dominant society. Mexican American community leaders recognized the need for organizations to raise awareness for fair treatment and equal rights. Volunteer organizations such as Alianza Hispano-Americana, the League of United Latin American Citizens, and the American G.I. Forum and also the Chicano Civil Rights movement, have all played an important role in building ethnic solidarity and ethnic cohesion that has allowed Mexican Americans to reduce discrimination, gain upward mobility, and increase the opportunity for contact with Anglo society.

The Alianza Hispano-Americana (AHA) was founded on January 14, 1894, in Tucson, Arizona by Carlos I. Velasco, Pedro C. Pellón, and Mariano G. Samaniego, as a fraternal benefit society (Acosta 1997:1). It was initially set up to offer life insurance at low rates and to provide social activities for Mexican Americans, while at the same time promoting unity between recent immigrants and U.S.-born Mexican Americans (Acosta 1997:1; Macias 2006:46). As members of AHA, recent immigrants were introduced to American society in a welcoming and non-threatening way (Macias 2006:46). Promoting unity between recent immigrants and U.S.-born Mexican Americans and introducing the

recent immigrants to American society increases their chances of a smooth integration into American society and the American marriage market.

The foremost middle class Mexican American organization is the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), which was founded in Corpus Christi, Texas in 1929 (Dunn 1975:97; Macias 2006:47). LULAC emphasized both assimilation and the elimination of discrimination and by the post-war period it had established itself as a key player in the struggle for civil rights (Macias 2006:47; McLemore and Romo 1998:217). LULAC awarded scholarships for education and reflected the “middle-class striving of their members with particular emphasis given to their rights as American citizens and their productive contribution to American society” (Dunn 1975:97; Macias 2006:47). By emphasizing assimilation and eliminating discrimination, LULAC encouraged Mexican American integration into American middle-class society, which in turn increased the Anglo middle-class recognition of Mexican Americans as potential marriage partners. One example of how LULAC functioned in this manner is given by one of my respondents, Sarah. When asked if her parents were politically active or involved in any organizations, such as LULAC, Sarah, a 28 year old office manager, states,

They were both very politically active. My dad was the president of our local chapter of LULAC. And then my mom was treasurer or secretary, or something like that. But it's funny, because of the few Hispanic people that were in that little town, it united us all. It united them with my parents and they had fund raisers and stuff like that all the time. And a lot of it was legal fees for the people

who needed help, so, you know, it was something for Hispanics to turn to when they were having trouble whether it would be with the law, or, any kind of issues, they would call up my parents and say, 'Hey would you come help us?' There was a lot of injustice in that town.

Sarah's parents obviously recognized the positive role of LULAC not only in their town, but also in American society, and the need to protect their rights as American citizens.

World War II profoundly affected Mexican Americans; Mexican American soldiers experienced social climates where they were not treated in a discriminatory way for the first time. The expanding war economy drew more Mexican Americans into urban centers and industrial employment, and "the rhetoric designed to win support for the war positively depicted Latin Americans in the media" (Bigler 2003:213). Mexican Americans were proud of their war-time sacrifices and contributions, and upon returning "from a war fought in defense of liberty against fascist states in Europe and Asia," (Macias 2006:19) many Mexican American G.I.s expected equal treatment and respect from their home country. In 1948, after a Mexican American war hero was denied burial in a cemetery in Texas, Dr. Hector Garcia organized the American G.I. Forum in Corpus Christi, Texas. The organization sought to combat discrimination against veterans and their families and to award scholarships to deserving students of Mexican ancestry (Bigler 2003:213; Dunn 1975:98).

World War II also enabled Mexican American soldiers to work side by side with Americans from different regions of the country and different socioeconomic backgrounds. Their opportunity for contact with the Anglo society increased, and in the process, “they learned a great deal about the opportunities and privileges that most American citizens took for granted” (McLemore and Romo 1998:217).

During the mid 1960s, a number of student organizations such as the United Mexican American Students, the Mexican American Student Organization, and the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán were formed in order to protest discrimination, to demand the hiring of more Mexican American teachers and counselors, and “to demand that classes about the contribution of Mexican Americans be added to the curriculum” (Dunn 1975:81). Students also called for “programs to take advantage of their bicultural and bilingual heritage instead of continuing the practice of trying to destroy it” (Dunn 1975:81). While Mexican Americans called for recognition of their contributions to American society and a decrease in prejudice and discrimination, at the same time they sought to maintain their ethnic pride and identity.

American people of color, disturbed by the continued existence of racism in the United States during the 1960s, began to gain space on the national stage. Government actions such as the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, the Civil Rights Act in 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 affirmed a greater willingness of the United States

government to address racial oppression (Bigler 2003:218). This willingness also demonstrated the political change affecting the people of the United States and a weakening of racial and ethnic boundaries.

Latino communities were inspired by the African American civil rights movement and black power movement and saw parallels between the African American struggles and their own situation. Community leaders challenged the ethnicity theory that “assumed the comparability of all groups and their eventual assimilation into the American melting pot” by pointing out their long history of unassimilability into American mainstream society, a major difference between them and European immigrants (Bigler 2003:218).

By the late 1960s, political and social action in Mexican American communities had come together into *el movimiento*, the Chicano movement. This movement emphasized ethnic cohesion and nationalism, while also emphasizing the need for the social and political reform necessary for the advancement of Mexican Americans in Anglo American society, an advancement that would lead to greater contact with Anglo society and a greater chance of intermarriage.

Cesar Chavez is perhaps one of the most recognized leaders of the Chicano movement. Chavez, along with Dolores Huerta, created the United Farm Workers of America (UFW) and sought to “address the pervasive poverty and the caste-like status of rural Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrant labor by organizing farm workers” (Bigler



2003:218). Chavez organized the farm workers by drawing on their ethnic pride, religious beliefs, and sense of community and history by adapting the Mexican eagle for use on the UFW flag (Bigler 2003:218). He borrowed nonviolent tactics from Mahatma Gandhi such as the use of boycotts and fasting (Bigler 2003:219; Dalton 2003:131).

For over thirty years Cesar Chavez committed himself to the struggle for justice for migrant and seasonal farm workers, the majority of whom were Mexican and Mexican American (Dalton 2003:2). He struggled so that field laborers and their families could be free from

the daily degradation of poverty wages; harsh and abusive working conditions; exposure to pesticides and herbicides; poor nutrition and hunger; inferior housing; inadequate medical care; second-rate schools; persistent underemployment and regular unemployment; and widespread uncertainty of immigration status, which invites social exclusion, economic exploitation, and criminal violence against them (Dalton 2003:2).

Chavez recognized the dialectical conflict between the bourgeoisie, or the farm owners, and the proletariat, in this case the field laborers, as class-related and economic in nature (Murguía 1982). Chavez did not dispel the notion that race played a major role in the exploitation of field laborers; instead he noted social class as the primary basis for conflict because Mexican and Mexican American farm owners also exploited and oppressed their field laborers (Dalton 2003:68; Murguía 1982:26).

The Chicano Civil Rights Movement and the formation of the UFW labor union make up the revolution of the proletariat, the working-class Mexicans and Mexican Americans, versus the bourgeoisie, the Anglo

farm owners. This enabled the development of new social, political, and economic levels for the exploited field laborers and their families. These new levels allowed for greater access to the dominant Anglo society and therefore greater integration into American society.

Overall, the Chicano movement renewed emphasis on cultural nationalism rather than accepting assimilation as a goal that was taking too long and requiring too many sacrifices. Cultural nationalism provided the theme that “succeeded in mobilizing and unifying individuals of Mexican descent, strengthening and reinforcing ethnic identity” and also their chances for an increase in upward mobility (Bigler 2003:219).

In sum, Mexican Americans have experienced a very rich history in the United States, a history that was oftentimes plagued with prejudice and discrimination. Because early Mexican American populations became part of the United States through conquest, they differ dramatically from early European immigrants, which led to different patterns of assimilation and interethnic marriage. Again, it is important to recognize how volunteer organizations and the Chicano movement have allowed Mexican Americans to become more integrated into American society and the American marriage market, while still allowing Mexican Americans to retain their rich cultural heritage. The following chapter describes the dominant theoretical perspectives that scholars utilize in the discussions of interethnic relationships and marriage.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES**

The study of racial and ethnic relations of minority and majority groups in the United States has been a concern among social scientists for many years. Various cultural indicators such as language, dress, food, and religious observances, and structural indicators such as occupation, education, residence, and civic activities, have enabled social scientists to measure the extent of a minority group's interracial relations with the majority group (McLemore and Romo 1998; Murguía 1982). However, one of the best and most important indicators of a minority group's relations with a majority group is the occurrence of intermarriage (Gilbertson, Fitzpatrick, and Yang 1996; Murguía 1982). A high incidence of intermarriage signals the bridging of cultural and social differences, whereas a low incidence can indicate ethnic cohesion, ethnic cultural maintenance, or discrimination and segregation (Murguía 1982).

There are many theories that address the patterns of Mexican American intermarriage. The two predominant theoretical explanations are assimilation theory and structural theory (Hwang, Saenz, and Aguirre

1997), while scholar Thomas Macias contributes a third concept/theory of mestizaje.

### Assimilation Theory

Assimilation is defined as “the process, or the end point of the process, by which two culturally, socially, and genetically distinct populations move toward cultural, social, and genetic homogeneity” (Murguía 1982:6). The assimilation process begins with the initial contact of the two populations and continues, reaching its completion “when all distinguishing external signs of group membership in the smaller group have disappeared” (McLemore and Romo 1998). Through assimilation it is assumed that minorities will become more willing to interact with and more acceptable of the majority population and vice versa. It is also assumed that assimilation is the primary way to integrate and co-exist, however, this is not necessarily the case for the Mexican American population.

Milton M. Gordon’s classic, *Assimilation in American Life* (1964) has made a major contribution to assimilation theory and describes his seven sub processes of assimilation. These sub processes include: cultural assimilation, structural assimilation, marital assimilation, indentificational assimilation, attitude receptional assimilation, behavior receptional assimilation, and civic assimilation (Gordon 1964:71; Murguía 1982:8). For the purposes of this thesis, only cultural,

structural, and marital assimilation will be discussed because they are the most important when describing Mexican American intermarriage.

Cultural assimilation refers to the “learning and adoption of the cultural patterns of the majority group” (Hwang et al. 1997:759).

Assimilation theory uses language as an example of cultural assimilation of Mexican Americans into Anglo American society. The U.S. Census Bureau uses language spoken at home and fluency in English among those that speak a language other than English to assess the language patterns of Latinos/Mexican Americans; the Bureau found that bilingualism is the most common form of language among Latinos/Mexican Americans (Saenz 2004:12). The percent of people ages 25-44 in 1990 who were bilingual is 56.6, however, the percent decreased in 2000 to 53.2 percent, possibly due to the influx of foreign-born Mexican immigrants, most of whom were monolingual Spanish speakers (Saenz 2004:13). The fact that such a large percentage of Mexican Americans are learning to speak the language of the dominant group demonstrates their willingness to become culturally assimilated with the majority population. However, assimilationists would not predict a bilingual population, because as the minority population is becoming more culturally assimilated by adopting the majority language, there should be a decrease in ethnic language maintenance, not bilingualism. Once the minority has undergone a fairly thorough

cultural assimilation, they will proceed to engage in a process of structural assimilation (Gordon 1964:71).

Gordon defines structural assimilation as “large-scale entrance into cliques, clubs, and institutions of host society, on primary group levels” (1964:71). After the adoption of the cultural patterns and beliefs of the host society, structural assimilation can occur through social contact and interaction with the host society. This can occur within primary relationships such as families and friendship groups, and within secondary relationships at work, in schools, in commercial transactions, and in places of public recreation (McLemore and Romo 1998:114). Assimilation theory asserts that the greater the structural assimilation of the minority, the less prejudice and discrimination it experiences and vice versa (Murguía 1982:5). Also, the greater the structural assimilation of the minority, the less ethnic communality it experiences (Murguía 1982:5). Structural assimilation should break down the sociocultural barriers placed upon an ethnic group, and “carries with it the responsibility of accelerating the breakdown of the cultural and social solidarity and unity of an ethnic group” (Murguía 1982:15). However, this is not necessarily the case for Mexican Americans. Not only have many been involved in structural assimilation without complete cultural assimilation, but there has not been a breakdown of their cultural and social solidarity or their ethnic unity, as my research will show.

Mexican Americans have been engaged in structural assimilation in the United States for many years. A good example of Mexican American structural assimilation is educational attainment. The United States' educational system is considered one of the most important institutions for providing opportunities for both socioeconomic advancement and interactions with members of other ethnic groups (Macias 2006:80). Assimilation theory correctly predicts that higher levels of structural assimilation as measured by educational attainment will decrease the amount of social distance between Mexican Americans and Anglos and therefore increase the likelihood of intermarriage.

After the minority group has undergone structural assimilation, marital assimilation is expected to follow as the next step (Gordon 1964:71). Gordon defines marital assimilation as "large-scale intermarriage between a minority group and the majority host society" (1964:71), and in time "the minority would cease to exist as a distinct entity, since the end product of a process of marital assimilation is amalgamation and complete assimilation" (Murguía 1982:5). Marital assimilation is an indicator that the minority population has become more accepting of the host society, and vice versa, and that individual minority marital preferences have changed to include members of the majority population. Mittelbach and Moore and Macias support this indicator by stating that marriage of second- and third-generation Mexican Americans are assimilationist, and among third-generation

persons, “the chances are actually higher that he or she will marry an Anglo than either a first- or second-generation Mexican [American]” (1968:54; Macias 2006:77).

### Structural Theory

Structural theory, first presented by Peter Blau (1982), is another popular method of describing the occurrence of interethnic relations, and in particular, intermarriage. Rather than focusing on the factors that affect individual minority marital preferences such as those in assimilation theory, the structural theory explains intermarriage “in terms of the characteristics of the community within which intermarriages are presumed to take place” (Blau, Blum, and Schwartz 1982:46; Hwang et al 1997:761). Blau notes that the focus is on the effects of a population’s social characteristics and social structure, and as a result of these effects, the occurrence of intermarriage may be high or low “regardless of individual inclinations simply because of the prevailing structural conditions” (Anderson and Saenz 1994:415).

Anderson and Saenz have conducted one of the very few analyses of the structural theory and how it can be used to predict the occurrence of Mexican American and Anglo American intermarriage. They describe six major structural determinants for the occurrence of Mexican American intermarriage and test these determinants using data gathered across metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) in the southwest United States from the 1980 Public Use Microdata Samples (PUMS) available



through the U.S. Census Bureau (1994). The determinants include: opportunity for contact, social differentiation (status inequality and internal status diversity), ethnic language maintenance (in this case, Spanish), group size, and imbalance in the sex ratio (1994:416).

Opportunity for contact refers “to the exposure dimension of segregation which involves ‘the extent to which minority and majority members physically confront one another by virtue of sharing a common residential area’”, and that these contacts are crucial to the development of significant intimate interethnic relations (Anderson and Saenz 1994:416). It stands to reason that a minority group’s higher degree of segregation coincides with a lesser degree of opportunity for contact and therefore, a lower occurrence of intermarriage. Anderson and Saenz expected that their analysis would show a positive correlation between opportunity for contact and Mexican American intermarriage with Anglo Americans, and according to their findings, they predicted correctly (1994:417;425).

Anderson and Saenz also define two forms of social differentiation in respect to intermarriage. These two forms are diversity and inequality, and from these two forms, they list status inequality and internal status diversity as two structural determinants (1994:417). Status inequality refers “specifically to the unequal distribution of status between ethnic groups” (1994:417) and internal status diversity refers “to the distribution of persons across particular status categories within a given

group” (1994:417). As for internal status diversity, the authors state that low within-group diversity will limit the opportunities for interaction outside of the ethnic group, and in addition, high within-group diversity will increase “the likelihood of social interaction between persons of similar status in different ethnic groups” (1994:417). They predict that as status inequality between Mexican Americans and Anglo Americans decreases, the rate of intermarriage will increase, but their findings did not portray a significant relationship; however they correctly predicted that as internal status diversity increases, intermarriage will also increase (1994:417;425).

Anderson and Saenz also predicted correctly that the tendency for a person to marry out of their ethnic group will decrease with a greater degree of ethnic language maintenance because language maintenance is an indication that ethnic group members attach high importance to their ethnicity (1994:418;425). They defined another determinant, group size, as “the total population of an ethnic group in a particular area” and incorrectly expected a negative relationship between group size and intermarriage (1994:418;425). Finally, Anderson and Saenz incorrectly predicted that sex ratio imbalance defined “as the unevenness in the number of males per 100 females” would force ethnic group members to find spouses in other ethnic populations (1994:418;425).

Thus, of the six structural determinants Anderson and Saenz tested, three are significant predictors of Mexican American and Anglo

American intermarriage. The opportunity for contact, internal status diversity, and Spanish language maintenance all showed significant results in the predicted directions (1994:425). The other three, group size, sex ratio, and status inequality showed results in the expected directions, however, the results were not significant enough to suggest high correlations between these determinants and Mexican American intermarriage (1994:427).

### Mestizaje Theory

Scholar Thomas Macias offers a different theoretical perspective that draws from both Gordon and Blau. He suggests that the theory of mestizaje should also be considered when discussing Mexican Americans rather than placing so much importance on the unidirectional assimilation theory. Instead of the minority group assimilating into the majority group by adopting the new culture and losing their own culture, Mexican Americans adopt some of the new culture and still maintain some of their old culture. Macias defines mestizaje as cultural and social mixing and the hybridization that takes place with this mixing (Macias 2006:4). He asserts that Mexicans are mestizos, a cultural and social mix of Spanish and Indian, and Mexican Americans are the result of a cultural and social mix between Mexicano/mestizo and American. As an example, Macias gives a personal account of his family's dinner table around the holidays. He states that there is a mix between the old and

the new, the Mexicano and the Gringo, and they mix the cultures by eating both tortillas and canned cranberry sauce (2006:3).

Macias' central argument is that, even though social integration for third-plus-generation Mexican Americans shares some elements of the social integration for third-plus-generation European Americans,

social forces related to ethnic concentration, social inequality, and identity politics have combined to make ethnicity for Mexican Americans more fixed across generations than it has been for other groups with multiple-generation histories in the United States (2006:7).

Macias describes four central components that make up his argument. First, ongoing, long-term immigration increases ethnic concentration in the Southwest, which in turn increases social distance between the Mexican-origin population and Anglos and also increases the ethnic awareness and identity of Mexican Americans. Second, Mexican Americans have more access to Latin and Mexican culture through the television and radio that facilitates "the 'imagining' of Mexican ethnicity that can occur without having to actually live within an ethnically concentrated community" (2006:9). A third source of fixed ethnic identity stems from the racial and ethnic identity movements such as the African civil rights movement and the Chicano movement during the 1960s. These movements rejected assimilationist expectations and encouraged group pride and ethnic identity. And lastly, Macias asserts that since the mid-twentieth century, inequality has increased in the United States, leading to more segmented assimilation. The

deindustrialization of the United States economy has led to the “disappearance of stable, well-paying, often unionized working-class jobs” (2006:10), and in turn weakened the “cross-generational link between the hardship endured by recently arrived immigrants and the middle-class status of their third-plus-generation descendants” (2006:10).

Macias uses Mexican American intermarriage among third-plus generations as an example of how Mexican Americans can be involved in marital assimilation without losing their ethnic identity, a process that Gordon failed to consider. Macias emphasizes the importance of both assimilation theory and structural theory in his research, but modifies the theories to include the special case of Mexican Americans rather than the classic European immigrants that Gordon and Blau discuss. Macias uses mestizaje theory to explain why Mexican immigrants have not followed the same integration patterns that European immigrants have followed.

Macias also acknowledges the importance of ethnic organizations and the Chicano movement. He asserts that ethnic organizations and the Chicano movement were important because not only did they strengthen the ethnic identity and ethnic cohesion of Mexican Americans, but they also allowed Mexican Americans to gain upward socioeconomic mobility and increase their chances for social contact with the dominant Anglo society.

There are three reasons why it is important to take class structure, and how it relates to intermarriage, into consideration (Murguía 1982:28). First, higher class status exposes Mexican Americans to greater interpersonal and cultural contact with the majority, or host, society. Second, there is a direct relationship between social class and Mexican American intermarriage. Third, Mexican Americans as a whole are experiencing a slow rise in social standing in the United States (Murguía 1982:28). Therefore, as the Mexican American population moves upwardly in class status, the rate of intermarriage should be expected to increase.

#### Positive and Negative Consequences of Intermarriage

There can be both positive and negative consequences of Mexican American intermarriage. On the positive side, social integration allows Mexican Americans to come into contact with a wider world. Also, the absorption of a minority group into the majority group's economic structure can oftentimes provide a higher standard of living. Structural assimilation "breaks down sociocultural barriers, and since usually it has been the majority who has established those barriers, their destruction is a reflection of greater tolerance and of a more open society" (Murguía 1982:15). Therefore, ideologically, a positive view is that an increase in the rates of Mexican American and Anglo intermarriage is considered a healthy sign that indicates a decrease of prejudice and discrimination and a lowering of the barriers dividing people in the

United States, which in turn allows for economic advancement and upward mobility of Mexican Americans.

Scholars used to believe that a negative consequence of Mexican American and Anglo intermarriage would be the disintegration of ethnic solidarity and ethnic cohesion. According to Murguía, if large-scale assimilation occurs, “a distinct culture and philosophy with many positive aspects will be lost” (1982:15). From the cultural nationalistic perspective, widespread intermarriage will result in the dissolution of a group and a culture to another group who has historically been known to cause damage to it (Murguía 1982:17). Mexican Americans who intermarry with Anglos are “selling out” to a majority society who has never fully appreciated the Mexican people nor their culture. However, one must keep in mind that Murguía was writing prior to the notions of *mestizaje*, transculturation, and multiculturalism, and few anthropologists today, myself included, would agree with his argument.

The eventual disintegration of ethnic solidarity and cohesion due to assimilation, especially regarding Mexican Americans, can be and has been challenged. First, as my research shows, ethnic identity and cultural practices are very strong within the Mexican American community, even among third-plus generations. Most are very proud of their ethnic and cultural heritage and many incorporate their cultural practices and traditions in their day-to-day lives. Second, the influence of Mexican culture on mainstream America can be seen everywhere from

food and music to language. Perhaps this is more so in the southwest United States, however, by examining the current projections of the population, it is bound to become more widespread throughout the country.

In conclusion, it is necessary to discuss more than one theoretical perspective when evaluating the occurrence of interethnic relations and intermarriage because there are many factors involved. The discussion of intermarriage began among sociologists with the assimilation theory, which then branched into the structural theory, and the most recent variation is the mestizaje theory. The assimilation theory is considered an individual-level explanation of intermarriage, while the structural theory focuses mainly on the social organization of societies, and that “beyond the matter of individual characteristics and preferences, the prevailing social structure strongly determines the opportunities for interaction between different groups” (Macias 2006:81). The theory of mestizaje moves away from the one-way model of change that the assimilation theory follows and allows for the discussion of cultural change. Anthropologists usually speak of culture change and often use the concept/theory of transculturation to discuss the occurrence of intermarriage, which refers to a “two-way street” where the majority society is also adopting the culture of the minority group. Although sociologists have made great contributions to the topic of intermarriage, anthropologists have a better understanding of culture and culture



change and can also make great future contributions to the study of interethnic marriage and Mexican American interethnic marriage.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **METHODOLOGY AND DATA**

The main focus of this chapter will concern the methodology used to obtain in-depth research and data regarding interethnic relationships, specifically, Mexican American interethnic relationships with someone of non-Hispanic descent. Various methods such as literature reviews, archival research, participant observation, continuous monitoring, and interviews have been utilized in order to identify the social and cultural factors that influence the rates of intermarriage over time. Each data-gathering method will be discussed and analyzed separately.

#### Literature Review

The main source of research and data for this topic has stemmed from books and scholarly journals and articles. The amount of research regarding interracial/interethnic relationships in general is vast, with the majority focused on African American and Anglo relationships. Information concerning Mexican American intermarriage is fairly sparse. Also, because there are many different social and cultural variables to take into consideration, only the most pertinent factors that influence the

rates of intermarriage and Mexican American intermarriage are included in this research.

### Archival Research

Archival research was conducted in two separate places. The first was located on the PBS website under the title “American Love Stories.” This archive contains personal accounts and stories that individuals have written and submitted in order to demonstrate how their intimate relationships have crossed not only racial and ethnic boundaries, but also religious, geographical, and gender boundaries. In addition to interviews, these emotional and candid stories are a great source for personal accounts. Unfortunately, out of eighty stories submitted by viewers, there are no stories that directly involve Mexican American interethnic relationships. This is a significant omission because, as noted previously, Mexican Americans are the largest Latino group. Perhaps the individuals involved in these relationships view them as commonplace and therefore, not “special” enough to write in and tell their story, or perhaps Mexican Americans as a group are not PBS viewers and were not aware of the call to submit stories. The story that came closest to this topic concerned an Anglo woman and a Mexican-national man.

The second archival research was conducted through the U.S. Census Bureau. The U.S. Census Bureau gathers data across the nation regarding everything including, but not limited to, age, occupation,

race/ethnicity, education, household characteristics, and even interethnic relationships. The main hindrance when exploring these data stems from the fact that until 1970, the census did not include a separate question specifically on Hispanic origin. The data that could be found concerning interracial relationships prior to 1970 included White, Black, American Indian, Asian and Pacific, and the Other race, which included everyone who was not in the aforementioned categories.

Hispanics could either check White or Other, a trend that still continues even with the addition of Hispanic and Mexican American. Many older people chose to check White for so long, that they still continue to do so. This greatly limited the data that could be found for past relationships. Past data could have been located in the Public Use Microdata Samples, samples of housing units with information on the characteristics of each unit and each person in it. However, I chose to focus on ethnographic interviews rather than statistical analysis and did not obtain data from the Public Use Microdata Samples.

#### Participant Observation and Continuous Monitoring

Three of four participant observation activities took place at Ruta Maya coffeehouse in south Austin. This establishment was chosen because of its strong Latin American identity and because of the various activities they host everyday such as art exhibits, yoga classes, language classes, and live music. Every Wednesday night, Ruta Maya hosts “Cuban Night.” From 7:30pm to 8:30pm, a dance instructor teaches free

salsa dance lessons and from 9:00pm to 11:00pm, a local salsa band, Cienfuegos, performs.

This choice of locations for participant observation was valuable because of the ethnic mix of both couples and individuals that attend. I was able to observe Anglos, Hispanics, African Americans, and Asians interacting with one another in a very casual, yet lively atmosphere. The age of the people who attend Cuban night ranges from late teens to early 60s, with the majority between 25 and 35 years old, and most appear to be middle-class. The older people would oftentimes sit and watch the younger crowd dance while chatting with friends and drinking a glass of wine. There seemed to be an equal mix of both single men and women and they usually danced with many different partners throughout the night. The “regulars” mingled and chatted with each other and oftentimes danced with many partners, which made identifying couples and interethnic couples very difficult.

Another factor that made identifying interethnic couples difficult is that I was basing it primarily on phenotype, but Mexican Americans have a broad range of phenotypes due to their European, Indian, and African heritage. I was reminded of the fact that just because a person has dark skin and “looks” Latino or Hispanic, does not necessarily mean that they are Latino or Hispanic, much less Mexican American. Similarly, they might have lighter skin and actually be Latin. In addition, there were a few instances when I would observe couples together and assume that

they were Mexican American, only to find out that they were actually Spanish, Cuban, or even African American. Because salsa dancing is not specifically Mexican, but can be found in many different Latin American countries, many different ethnicities can be found participating.

The continuous monitoring activity also took place at Ruta Maya's Cuban Night. Originally, I had two couples who attend regularly in mind for monitoring, but on the chosen evening, neither of the couples attended. Therefore, I chose two couples who appeared to be involved in Hispanic-Anglo interethnic relationships. I use the term Hispanic here because I am unsure of their exact ethnicity. The first couple was an Anglo-Hispanic lesbian couple. Throughout the night they danced together and also with men of various ethnicities including Anglo, Hispanic, and African American. The second couple was composed of an Anglo male and Hispanic female sitting near me. Every ten minutes for two hours I monitored their actions. Both couples spent time dancing and speaking to each other and to other friends. Unfortunately, I did not gain much information from the time spent on continuous monitoring.

One thing I was able to learn was the interest that others had in the topic of interethnic relationships. I spoke with an African American-Anglo interethnic couple and informed them of my research. They immediately began thinking of friends of theirs who were involved in Mexican American interethnic relationships whom I might be able to interview and asked what I had learned thus far. I found it interesting

that they did not speak about their own interethnic relationship. I also spoke with a single Anglo male about my research and he was also eager about the topic.

The fourth participant observation activity took place at a weekly meeting of Latinas Unidas, a Latina student organization at Texas State University-San Marcos whose goal is to promote the education and empowerment of Latinas through networking, support, and friendship. I chose this event in order to gain another perspective from participant observation and also to ask for volunteers for a future focus group concerning Mexican American interethnic relationships.

While sitting in on this meeting, I observed that the girls showed a strong sense of ethnic identity. Most spoke with strong Spanish accents, many would include Spanish phrases in their conversations, and they are involved in an organization that is meant to empower Latina college students. I am not the only person who is aware of this organization's strong ethnic identity. One member who I interviewed, Melissa, mentioned that she felt the group had a strong identity, perhaps too strong for her liking. She stated, "I just don't feel like I belong in there [the group]. I don't feel proud enough."

### Interviews

The most productive field method utilized, in terms of obtaining qualitative data, was interviewing. The subjects that I interviewed were interethnic couples comprised of a Mexican American and any non-

Hispanic residing in central Texas. In order to gain both a past and present comparison, the age range is twenty-one to fifty-three. Because of my age and the people with whom I come into contact on a daily basis, it was easier to find young respondents than older respondents. I was able to obtain interviews with older respondents mainly by using the snowball effect. I would ask my younger respondents, and basically anyone else that I thought might be of help, if they knew of any older Mexican American interethnic couples who might be interested in volunteering for an interview. I interviewed eight couples, three single males and two single females, and two Mexican American males with prior marriages to Anglo females, a total of 23 respondents.

Each respondent was properly informed of the topic of research, the goals of the research, and that their identifying information would be kept confidential. Informed consent was obtained from each respondent.

The interviews were face-to-face and semi-structured, following an interview schedule of both closed and open-ended questions. The sixty-three questions addressed personal information, family history, ethnic context, cultural practices, ethnic identity, and interethnic relationships, with the majority of the questions pertaining mainly to the Mexican Americans involved in the relationships. Questions concerning ethnic context, cultural practices, and ethnic identity were asked in order to identify the strength of each Mexican Americans ethnic identity and how this relates to their interethnic relationship. The remainder of this



chapter will include examples of the questions asked and a small example of the answers given. The majority of responses will be discussed in the following chapter.

Each respondent was asked basic personal information such as: Where were you born? Where did you grow up? What is your occupation? What is the highest level of education you have attained? For a description of the respondents, refer to Appendix One.

Questions regarding family history pertain mainly to the familial background of the Mexican American respondents. These questions include: Where are your parents from? What is their occupation? What is the highest level of education they have attained? Most parents were born and raised in Texas and the parents of seven respondents were born in Mexico. Occupations included custodian, homemakers, singer, entrepreneurs, retail store manager, government professor, and retirees with previous employment at Levi Strauss and Santa Fe railroad. The parents of one respondent have both attained master's degrees but the majority have only basic grade school educations.

Ethnic context refers to the context in which the respondents were raised. Ethnic context questions include: Do you speak Spanish? If so, did your parents teach you? About what percentage of the local population where you grew up was of Mexican ancestry? How do your parents feel about their Mexican ancestry? Fourteen of the fifteen Mexican American respondents are fluent in Spanish, or speak enough

to carry on a conversation, and all were taught by their parents except one, who learned in high school and college. The percentage of Hispanics in their local populations fluctuated from ninety-nine percent, the majority, to ten percent. Almost every respondent claimed that their parents are proud of their Mexican ancestry. One interviewee, Marc, stated that his mother was proud of her heritage, but downplayed it in order to get along better in mainstream American society. Her family had struggled with prejudice and discrimination and she felt that it would be advantageous to be as American as possible.

Cultural practices refer to the traditional, ritual, and day-to-day activities that they perform in accordance to their Mexican heritage. Questions regarding cultural practices include: Do you eat Mexican food? What is your religion? Do you listen to Latin music? Every respondent eats Mexican food and they were usually taught how to cook Mexican food by female family members. The most common religion that the interviewees practiced while growing up is Catholicism. Only five still practice and attend services regularly. Of the fifteen Mexican American respondents, only six do not regularly listen to Latin music.

Questions regarding ethnic identity included: What is the term you use to identify your ethnicity? Do you feel more comfortable around people of Mexican ancestry? Do you feel it is advantageous or disadvantageous to be identified as Mexican American? The term Mexican American is most commonly used to identify ethnicity. The

reasoning behind this is so that they can identify their Mexican heritage and the fact that they were born in the United States. Hispanic and Latino are also used depending on the context, although most said that these terms were too broad. Almost all of the respondents stated that they felt more comfortable around other Mexican Americans, however, it is not necessarily a preference. They tend to feel more comfortable because other Mexican Americans can identify with certain aspects of their lives without explanation. The respondents feel that it is both disadvantageous and advantageous to be identified as Mexican American. The most common disadvantage is prejudice and discrimination, especially for the females being in an Anglo, male-dominated society, and the most common advantage is the ability to obtain scholarships and grants. Another advantage described is the ability to identify oneself with a rich, colorful, and strong heritage.

The questions regarding interethnic relationships pertain to both individuals in the relationship. These questions include: What is your partner's ethnicity? Do your parents approve of your relationship? Have you experienced any strong reactions to your relationship from family/friends/strangers? Do you feel any apprehension about raising bi-racial children? Every partner is identified as Anglo, except for two, one of whom, Yohan, is of Korean ancestry and the other, David, Japanese and Danish ancestry. The couples have been accepted by their parents and have not experienced any strong reactions concerning their

relationships. They have only a slight apprehension of raising bi-racial children due to the possibility of other children making fun. Most have no fear that their children will not be able to identify with their cultural backgrounds, except for Ricardo, who mainly dates African American women and feels that his bi-racial children would be more accepted in African American groups. He gives an example of his Mexican American cousin who had a child with an African American man, and Ricardo's grandmother "didn't want anything to do with the baby, because in her eyes, the baby was black."

In conclusion, this chapter has discussed the methodology used to gather data, a few pros and cons of the methods, and a brief analysis of the findings. The following chapter will discuss my findings in detail and how they pertain to the theories of interethnic relationships.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **FINDINGS, ANALYSIS, AND CONCLUSION**

This chapter concerns the major findings from the interviews of the 23 respondents described in the previous chapter and an analysis of how the findings relate to the theories discussed in Chapter Three. As stated earlier, refer to Appendix One for their individual details such as name, age, hometown, education, occupation, and the term they use to identify their ethnicity. A complete list of interview questions can be found in Appendix Two. This discussion will include findings related to their ethnic identity and cultural practices in order to demonstrate how strong their ethnic identity is and how it relates to interethnic relationships.

#### **Ethnic Identity**

The fifteen Mexican Americans interviewed all seem to have a strong ethnic identity. When questioned about the strength of her ethnic identity, Melissa, a twenty-one year old full-time student answers, “I think I’m cultured in the sense that I speak Spanish, I know my history, I cook Spanish food. And that’s where I’m cultured. I’m not so much Chicano pride, but I know my culture.” In other words, Melissa feels that she has a strong ethnic identity, however, she does not identify with the

strong political and social nature of the Chicano movement. As stated in the previous chapter, growing up, all of the participants' parents were very proud of their Mexican ancestry and it appears that their parents have passed their ethnic pride on to their children.

When asked if being Mexican American is important to them, each of the respondents replied, "Yes" and agreed that it is important to know where you come from and with whom you can identify. Luis, a thirty-three year old archaeologist, claims, "Yes, it's important...It's my identity." Megan, a twenty-eight year old student, says,

I feel that I grew up very Americanized. I didn't really start to think about my ethnicity until a few years ago, when I went back to school and took a Chicano studies course. That kind of opened my eyes to this deep, rich culture and history that is my own. It's funny, because when I was applying for college, I definitely checked the box that said Hispanic, and yet I had no idea about anything that went on during the Chicano Civil Rights movement. Now, I try to pay more attention and try not to take my ethnicity for granted.

When growing up, most of the respondents did not recognize their ethnicity; of course this also depended on where they grew up and attended school. In areas that were predominantly Hispanic, recognition of their ethnicity did not come until later in life, usually when they left for college or to work elsewhere. Twenty-three year old student, Norma, says, "I knew I was Hispanic, but it didn't really mean anything because everyone was Hispanic at my school. It wasn't until coming to college that I realized." Depending on their hometown, the majority of their friends were either Anglo or Hispanic, or a mix. For example, a high

percentage of Hispanic population equals a high percentage of Hispanic friends.

### Language

All of the parents of the respondents speak both English and Spanish, although Spanish is the preferred language at home for most of them. Their parents taught them to speak Spanish when growing up, except for three, Megan, Dolores, and Sarah. Sarah claims, “the neighborhood we lived in was kind of an upscale neighborhood and my parents didn’t want their kids to be looked down upon, you know, with kids running around speaking Spanish.” She also speaks of an incident that many others have mentioned concerning their parents and speaking Spanish,

My mom went to Catholic school when she was a kid, so, if they got caught speaking Spanish they would get slapped with a ruler. So at home she spoke Spanish, because her parents only spoke Spanish, but at school she only spoke English.

Marc, a fifty-three year old chef, also mentions a similar experience for his father and claims, “my father’s parents scrimped and saved so that he could attend a Catholic school where the nuns would slap them for speaking Spanish. Luckily, he held onto his native language and taught me to speak it.” However, when Marc describes why he did not teach his own children Spanish, he tells another story:

They wanted us to be very proud of who we were and to speak the language, but they ingrained upon us that if you were among a group of people where you had non-Spanish speakers, it was rude to speak in another language. I was raised very strictly that way. It was considered improper. So, that ended up being a

subconscious thing that I was not able to kick when we met, married, and had children. She [wife Kate] wanted me to raise the kids in Spanish, but I couldn't figure out how to do that because she doesn't speak Spanish and it would have been improper for me and the children to speak it around her.

### Cultural Practices

When describing specific cultural practices, the most commonly described is eating Mexican food. Each respondent, even the Anglo partners, claim that they eat Mexican food on a regular basis, at least once a week if not more. This could be related to the very large number of Mexican restaurants in Austin, specifically south Austin, where many of the respondents reside. Their favorites include tacos, arroz con pollo, rice and beans, enchiladas, and carne guisada. As previously stated, the majority of respondents can cook Mexican food and mainly learned from female family members and trial and error.

Very few of the respondents watch Spanish language television programs on a regular basis. When they do watch, it is usually the news in order to get a different perspective. Norma states, "I like watching the news because it's not just focused on what's going on here. I think it has a different view. I think the U.S. news is very one-sided."

Almost all of the respondents, except three, listen to Latin music fairly regularly. Roberto, a forty-two year old music professor, states that his father began and toured with a mariachi group and his mother was a popular Latin singer, and currently, Roberto directs the Texas State mariachi group. Forty-four year old project manager, Carmella, claims,



“I love it! I love to dance!” and Dolores, a fifty year old office manager, states, “I listen to some, especially if it has a good jazzy beat. I like the sound and the rhythms, and you know, I think it sounds romantic.”

The main holiday that the respondents associate with their Mexican heritage is Christmas, with both cultural and religious observances. For instance, eating tamales is a big cultural tradition that many of them were raised with and have continued in their adult lives. Setting up a nativity scene and attending midnight mass are examples of the religious aspect of the holiday, but are not specifically Mexican. Also, many of them associate seeing and spending time with their family members a cultural Christmas tradition. Other holidays that they observe and relate to their Mexican ancestry include Easter, Cinco de Mayo, and Día de los Muertos.

Other than major holidays, there are a variety of day-to-day activities that the participants also connect with their Mexican heritage, with the most common being cooking, as earlier described. Luis lights religious candles on occasion and twenty-eight year old administrative associate, Nina, makes the sign of the cross before she begins driving. Lisa, a twenty-seven year old student, speaks of the rules her parents had concerning her Spanish accent:

When we started learning English and the English accent, we wouldn't say Cancún [Spanish accent], we'd say Cancun [English accent] and my mother would be like, 'Don't say it like that. You say, Cancún [Spanish accent]. You're Mexican and that's how you say it.' It's interesting because they wanted us to speak English

without a Spanish accent, but at the same time, still say certain things with a Spanish accent.

Six of the fifteen Mexican American respondents are involved in organizations, either ethnic or not. Teresa, a thirty-eight year old news promotion manager, and Carmella are mainly involved with their churches. Nina belongs to the Hispanic Faculty and Staff at the University of Texas at Austin. Lisa looks forward to joining Latinos in Film and Melissa is active in Latinas Unidas at Texas State University-San Marcos. Twenty-six year old student, Ricardo, is actively involved in the Latino Student Association, also at Texas State, and was the president for a semester. When asked why he joined this organization he states, "A lot of times when you go to school, sometimes people in your old neighborhood accuse you of forgetting where you came from. So, I didn't want to come to school and somehow forget who I was and lose the culture." According to Macias, leaving one's neighborhood for school or work does not necessarily mean that a person will lose their ethnic identity. He states that changes "related to the emergence of identity politics in the 1960s have meant entry into society's mainstream institutions of business and government no longer requires the exchange of ethnic for professional identities" (2006:44).

When questioned about the ethnic groups of their friends, coworkers, and neighbors, the majority responded that their friends are made up of an ethnic mix, including, Anglo, Hispanic, African American, Korean, and Japanese. As for their coworkers, the majority stated that

their workplaces are predominantly Anglo and they are usually one of a very small number of Hispanics. Seeing as how almost all of the respondents are employed in white-collar, middle-class jobs, this is not necessarily surprising. Also, their neighborhoods are comprised of mainly Anglo populations, except for Lisa, who lives in a middle-class Hispanic neighborhood.

One interview question asks whether or not it is common for strangers to question their ethnic background. According to the respondents, it is not common for most of them, but it does happen on occasion. Sarah claims,

I get it pretty often. Well, not people like walking down the street like, "Hey you!" But, it's funny because I automatically assume they're Mexican, if they say they're Hispanic or something, and I automatically think, "Oh, she's Mexican." Like, no, she's Peruvian, or Honduran or Guatemalan, something like that. So, it's like, sorry, my bad. But I do get asked and I get asked it a lot by Anglos, more than anybody.

NG: And how do you feel about that?

Sarah: It doesn't bother me. Better they ask than assume. I find it funny that people think it's rude to ask. "Is it ok, I hope this doesn't bother you, but what are you exactly?" I'm Mexican.

It appears that the commonality of strangers inquiring about the respondents' ethnicity is directly related to phenotype. For instance, Lisa claims that she is often asked because her relatively dark skin and very curly hair give the impression that she is of African ancestry. Megan states that it is also fairly common for her because,

I have pretty light-colored olive skin and high cheekbones. So, people assume and then ask if I'm Native American, Spanish, Greek, Italian, or some other Mediterranean ethnicity. I've even had a person or two ask if I was Persian. And then when I tell

them I'm Mexican American, they say, "Oh, are you half?" I think it's funny that some people have such a hard time believing that a full-blooded Mexican American can look like me. It doesn't really bother me. I just think it's funny, I mean, look at the stereotypes they're basing it on. Although, I'm sure I've done the same thing.

Macias asserts that Mexican ethnicity is still a highly contested area of self- and group identity within the United States (2006:115). This claim is supported by his research and also my own research.

### Interethnic Relationships

As stated previously, of the fifteen Mexican American respondents, all of their spouses, ex-spouses, and/or long-term committed partners are Anglo, except for Lisa, twenty-seven, whose husband, thirty-three year old first aid instructor, Yohan, is South Korean, and Dolores, fifty, who is married to David, a forty-nine year old retiree, who is of Japanese and Danish ancestry.

The respondents met in various places including high school, college, at work, at a quinceañera, or they were once next door neighbors, which is the case for Lisa and Yohan. The fact that four couples met in high school, college, or work provides a good example of the opportunity for contact determinant. Three couples have children, Marc, fifty-three, and Kate, fifty, Dolores and David, forty-nine, and Carmella, forty-four, and Greg, forty-seven, and in all three of these cases, their children are in their late teens and early twenties.

### Mexican American Attitudes to Endogamy and Exogamy

When asked if their parents preferred for them to date someone who was ethnically Mexican American, their answers varied. Megan, twenty-eight, Teresa, thirty-eight, and Lisa claim that their parents never said that they should date within their own ethnicity. However, not everyone's parents felt the same way. Sarah's parents supported endogamy in order to feel protected against discrimination. She says,

Yeah, I would say, it was not necessarily dating, but it was always focused on, you are going to marry a Mexican, you should marry a Mexican. Marry your own kind.

NG: Why do you think they felt that way?

Sarah: Well, because they were so discriminated against growing up. I mean people discriminated back in the 60s and 70s, and they [parents] didn't trust them [Anglos]. That's what it came down to. It's like, "Why am I going to trust these people, and I sure don't want my kids dating them," you know. Obviously as times have changed, they've gotten over it. Although, I think my mom always wanted, and still, wants me to marry a Mexican, but she's like, "As long as you're happy."

Norma's story is similar, however it pertains to African Americans rather than Anglos. She claims,

My parents never said you can't date so-and-so or anything, but I knew my parents would be upset if I dated a black person.

NG: Why is that?

Norma: Every once in a while my dad would make racist remarks towards them. Never anything extreme, but dad always felt that black people were more lazy, he would call them lazy black people. He felt that they acted like they deserve something, I guess because of the whole slave thing. I kind of feel that way too, not racist or anything, but you know, they have more of an advantage than we do. They know English, they can go to school, they didn't just cross the border, and yet many don't do anything with their lives. But I guess there are other people that are like that too. I know white people who are like that.

Henry, a fifty-three year old psychology professor, states, "I think both my parents preferred Latinas. They were more traditional. It wasn't a

negative type of thing, but you could see there was a greater preference for Latinas.” In Marc’s case, his parent’s preference was aimed more towards their daughters. He states,

It didn’t matter, but there was a gender-specific, double standard, if you will. My mom, as a product of how she was raised, she encouraged my sisters to go after Anglo American boys of wealthy families. But when it came to me and the other boys, it didn’t matter whether we dated Mexican Americans or Anglo Americans.

Marc’s mother viewed marrying an Anglo male as an avenue towards upward mobility and higher class status. Even though when growing up their parents may have preferred for them to date a specific ethnicity, now that they are older and involved in interethnic relationships, each respondent claims that their parents approve and there are no negative feelings involved. This eventual parental approval follows the “settling in” pattern mentioned during the overview of interethnic relationships in Chapter One.

#### Non-Mexican American Partner Attitudes

As for the non-Mexican Americans’ parents and family members, they assert that dating or marrying someone who was not Anglo, or Korean or Japanese, was never discussed. Twenty-eight year old chef, Jason, states,

My parents never told me that I had to date or marry another white person or that I couldn’t date a specific race. Maybe that’s because we lived in a white neighborhood and I attended mainly white schools. Maybe they never thought it would be an issue, I don’t know. Of course now that I’m married to a Hispanic it definitely isn’t an issue. They love her [Megan] and have welcomed her into our family, just like her family has done with me.

Perhaps Jason's parents felt that because there was very little opportunity for contact with other ethnicities, interethnic dating or marriage was an issue they did not need to discuss with their children.

Out of the eight interethnic couples, only two respondents, Greg and Kate, mention minor issues with friends and extended family members concerning their relationships. When Greg began dating Carmella, a friend of his told him, "It's okay to date her, but don't marry her." Greg says that since then, his friendship with this man has weakened. Kate claims, "I had a distant family member who initially challenged our marriage, but after he realized he was the only one who cared, he put it aside quickly."

As far as strong reactions from strangers, the respondents claim to have experienced or noticed very few. Lisa states, "Austin's a pretty laid back town, so there haven't been any reactions from strangers as far as I know." Nina, twenty-eight, states that for her and her husband Darren, thirty, they have never experienced anything in Austin. However, in Laredo, "I do see people staring at him. I don't think it's because we're together, I think it's because he's white and they don't see that regularly. So they stare at him, not because we're a couple, but because he has blond hair and blue eyes and everyone else there is dark."

Another interview question asked if there was a particular reason why they chose to date or marry someone of a different ethnicity. As expected, twelve of the fifteen Mexican American participants said no.

Dolores asserts, "I fell in love with the individual." However, a couple of respondents give other reasons that mainly pertain to gender stereotypes similar to the ones mentioned in Chapter One. Nina states,

Basically I didn't want to marry somebody that was going to be controlling. Usually pretty much every Hispanic male says, 'I have to take care of the family, you have to stay home and make babies. You don't need to go to school, you don't need to further yourself.' And I'd rather be with somebody who's gonna bring me up than keep me down.

Megan agrees and says,

I think that when I was younger I came across a lot of Mexican men who were full of machismo and that really turned me off. I grew up with a single, independent mother who never let a man tell her what she could and couldn't do. She was going to work, go to school, and spend her money however she saw fit. And, later on, that became a big problem with my ex-stepfather. So, I think all of that kind of carried over into my teens and adult life. Now, I'm the boss.

Jason: Yes, that's true.

These are interesting statements in the fact that almost every respondent did or would not admit that there may have been other reasons, either consciously or subconsciously, pertaining to why they chose to be with someone of a different ethnicity. Almost every participant stated that they fell in love with the individual. Perhaps this is true or perhaps it is a romantic ideal that they thought the researcher wanted to hear.

Although both Nina and Megan seem to be basing their reasons on common stereotypes of Mexican American men, Teresa's claim deals more with the lack of opportunity for contact with other Mexican American men,



It wasn't necessarily a conscious decision on my part, although I did think about it at the time. When I went to college, there certainly weren't a lot of Hispanic males in college and around me. I was more exposed to the white male population. That's who was there at the time. And, the few Hispanic males that were there, I don't think they were looking for a Hispanic mate, I think they were looking for a white mate.

### Ethnic Cohesion and Continuity

With each of these relationships, the Mexican American does not feel that they have lost any ethnic identity. This is an important challenge to Gordon who asserts that assimilation would lead to the disintegration of ethnic identity and ethnic cohesion. In fact, many, if not all, of their partners had expressed an interest in and have become actively involved in their Mexican American partner's culture. Nina's husband, thirty year old claims examiner, Darren, is very open to everything. He claims,

I love to talk in Spanish, especially when it's just us. I say funny things to her in Spanish. I can read it and write it. I would listen to Spanish radio in the car so that I could understand it better, the fast talk, and be able to understand when her grandmother talks to me. When we visit her, she's old, I talk to her in Spanish so she doesn't have to talk in English. She's old, why am I gonna make her struggle?

Lynn, Teresa's thirty-seven year old husband, a lead design engineer, has taken Spanish courses and refers to her family's Christmas Eve tradition of eating tamales as Tamale Day. He states, "We did our own Tamale Day once. That's something that we want to keep doing and I want to pass down to our kids." In the case of Lisa and Dolores, they would like to be actively involved in their husbands' cultures. Lisa asserts, "Yohan

definitely incorporates Korean marinades, spices, things like that into his cooking and barbequing.” Yohan agrees and states, “She’s also gone with me when my family has practiced Jesa.” Jesa, he later explains is a way of honoring the ancestors on their birthdays. Incense is lighted, ceremonial bows are performed, the departed’s favorite foods are cooked, and the spirit is invited in. Dolores says,

If I was more active in my own culture, he would definitely be involved. Actually, we’re more involved in his culture. On New Years Day, New Years is more recognized to them, and so, it is a tradition to eat sushi on New Years Day and that’s what we do. We celebrate the new Chinese year. Also, my daughter practices Taiko drums. So there are things that she does participate in, knowing her Japanese background. And she also does things that relate to her Mexican background, she does all this on her own because, I can’t really help her.

### Children and Cultural Heritage

Another interview question asks if and when they do decide to have children, how important is it that they know and understand their Mexican background. Teresa asserts, “I’d like it to be strong, but I think it won’t be, just because where we live, we’re not surrounded by that. We’re not surrounded by my family and we don’t live in a Hispanic neighborhood.” Marc states, “I like to talk about it with them. It’s not something I harp on, but whenever there’s an opportunity, I like to make them aware.” Lisa claims,

I would say it’s as important as it is for them to learn their Korean background. We’re going to try and incorporate both as much as we can. I want them to speak Spanish and I want them to be familiar with Korean as well. So, I want both of those languages and both of those cultures to be incorporated into their identity, as well as being American.

Almost every respondent, either in a relationship or single, states that they would definitely want their children to learn to speak Spanish. For some, it's a way of preserving their cultural heritage and for others it is considered more of an asset that will help them in future endeavors. When asked if they have any preferences towards who their children date/marry, each respondent gives a resounding "No." The consensus is that their children can date or marry whomever they choose. Norma states, "I may want them to be with another Hispanic, so that they would lose less of the culture, but I don't think I would enforce it. I don't think I could enforce it."

As stated in the previous chapter, overall the respondents do not feel any apprehension towards having bi- or multi-racial children. Ricardo's example is the only one that really sticks out. Teresa admits she has some fears, but for a different reason. She says,

I don't have any fears about that, in relation to how others would react to them. But, I worry that something could be wrong with them and they would need a donor for something and there wouldn't be enough out there that could help them. I realize it's a far-fetched worry and that things are changing, but still it's something I think about.

### Benefits and Problems of Interethnic Marriage

When questioned about benefits or problems that relate to marrying someone who is not of their ethnicity, the answers are very diverse. Kate mentions that she enjoys being married to a Mexican American because of the closeness and intimacy that she experiences

with his family and the fact that she gets to take part in such a rich and colorful culture. As for being married to an Anglo, Nina claims,

I think their culture is definitely more sensible. They actually talk things out instead of putting it under the rug. They're very open instead of being very secretive. A lot of Hispanic cultures keep it within the family, keep it with whoever it's between and nobody can find out about it because it's very embarrassing. His family is very open and they like to talk things out and ask for other people's opinions. They don't hold grudges the way our families do. And it's definitely smarter that way.

Carmella states,

When you go to an event or a place where you're the minority, it's always good to have a white, Anglo friend or partner with you. Also, there are just the positives of being married in general. [long pause] However, I have noticed that there isn't that machismo that occurs when you marry a Hispanic man.

NG: How do you mean?

Carmella: Well, for example, he helps out more with the kids, he cooks and cleans. Maybe it's not just because he's Anglo, but because he's a *modern* Anglo.

As for problems, there are not many, but the main one that almost every Mexican American respondent mentions is the fact that their Anglo partner doesn't always understand their culture or why they do the things they do. Carmella's husband, Greg, states, "In the beginning it was hard for me to get used to the idea that I didn't just marry her, I married her family too." Norma says, "I think it's hard for him to understand a lot of the things I believe in. He doesn't understand why my family thinks a certain way or why they depend on me for certain things." Megan mentions,

Well, I'm sure that if I was stronger in terms of my ethnic identity and background he [Jason] might have issues with understanding my family. Although, he does have a problem in grasping why I'll

talk to my mother and sister on the phone for over an hour.  
 Jason: That's true. When I talk to my family it's like, "Hi. Everything going alright? My job's the same, Megan's the same, the pets are the same. Ok, bye." But when she talks to her family she tells them everything. It's like there are no boundaries. I need boundaries when I talk to my family.

The findings thus far have been used to describe how strong the ethnic identities of the Mexican Americans interviewed and the different factors that make up their interethnic relationships. Now that this has been discussed the next section will analyze these findings in accordance to the different theoretical perspectives described in a previous chapter.

### Analysis

As stated previously, Gordon's assimilation theory posits a series of steps that a minority group follows in order to become assimilated into the majority society. It begins with cultural assimilation, then moves to structural assimilation, and finally ends with marital assimilation and the loss of ethnic identity.

It appears that the Mexican Americans interviewed for this research have undergone a fair amount of cultural assimilation, but not the complete cultural assimilation that Gordon feels is required before they can move onto structural assimilation. For instance, using the previous example of language, each of the fifteen Mexican American respondents speaks English fluently. However, English was the first language learned for only three, Dolores, Sarah, and Megan, and these are the same three that speak only enough Spanish "to get by" in casual conversations. The others learned English mainly during their first few

years of grade school. This shows that they are becoming culturally assimilated with the Anglo majority group by learning the dominant language, but at the same time, still maintaining their ethnic identity by speaking Spanish as well. In this case, if their parents had taught a larger percentage of the respondents English as their first language, it might appear that they are more culturally assimilated.

In terms of structural assimilation, it is beneficial to discuss how the respondents have been structurally assimilated into the majority society through education and occupation. Every one of the Mexican American respondents has completed at least some college and eight have at least a bachelor's degree or higher. This is important because not only are they able to reap the benefits of an education, but by being involved in such an integral structure of Anglo society, they are exposing themselves to the attitudes, skills, and social traits of the dominant Anglo society.

Each of the Mexican American respondents is employed in what would be considered the white-collar, middle-class sector. Also, each one stated that the majority of their coworkers are Anglo. These respondents have integrated into another integral structure of Anglo society, which in turn enables them to establish primary contacts with the dominant society.

As for marital assimilation, each of the respondents is either currently involved or has been involved in an interethnic relationship

with an Anglo, except for two instances. Of course the couples interviewed were chosen specifically because of their interethnic relationships. Therefore, to truly know the extent of marital assimilation of Mexican Americans with Anglo partners, more data must be collected.

These respondents have not necessarily followed Gordon's three steps of assimilation. There are incidences of cultural assimilation, however, these incidences are not very strong and the respondents appear to be maintaining their Mexican heritage rather than fully adopting the cultural norms of the dominant Anglo society. It appears as though this group, and perhaps Mexican Americans in general, have not undergone large-scale cultural assimilation. Also, the assimilation theory is a unidirectional model that assumes only the minority group will adopt the cultural patterns of the majority group. This is not the case for Mexican Americans. The dominant Anglo American society has integrated much of the Mexican culture in terms of Spanish language, food, and media. This suggests that rather than assimilation, both groups are undergoing transculturation. It also seems that these respondents did not undergo cultural assimilation and yet achieved a fair amount of structural assimilation, which does not follow Gordon's theory.

Blau's structural theory is best supported by the opportunity for contact determinant in regards to Mexican American intermarriage and this data pool and has been discussed as the most important

determinant throughout this study. For instance, Teresa's comment that when she was in college she came into more contact with Anglo males than Mexican American males, and Ricardo's assertion that because he grew up in a predominantly African American neighborhood, he was in better contact with African Americans than either other Mexican Americans or Anglos, and therefore chooses to date African American females.

Anderson and Saenz's internal status diversity determinant cannot be fully tested with the data obtained. Each of the respondents is considered middle-class and therefore able to socially interact with persons of similar status in different ethnic groups. If this study had also included members of a lower-class, the internal status diversity determinant could be tested and the findings might support Anderson and Saenz's prediction and findings.

The ethnic language maintenance determinant is not fully supported by the respondents' data. Anderson and Saenz predict that a greater degree of ethnic language maintenance will decrease the chances of intermarriage. According to the data gathered from the respondents, this is not necessarily true. As stated earlier, each of the Mexican American respondents speaks Spanish fluently, except for three, and yet they are all involved in interethnic marriages or long-term, committed relationships. This is in opposition to Anderson and Saenz's prediction.



Macias recognizes the importance of discussing Mexican American mestizaje to explain why they have not followed the same integration patterns that European immigrants have followed, and therefore recognizes that the early assimilation model does not fully apply to Mexican Americans. My findings support Macias' assertion that Mexican Americans can be involved in marital assimilation without losing their ethnic identity. Each of the Mexican American respondents has shown that they have a strong ethnic identity and practice cultural traditions in day-to-day activities. The fixed ethnic identity of the respondents may be due to Macias' four components: on-going immigration, Spanish media, ethnic identity movements, and increasing inequality; however, the results of my findings do not fully support this claim and more research is required to be able to do so.

I agree with Macias' recognition of the importance of ethnic organizations and the Chicano movement and the role that these identity politics have played in increasing ethnic identity and ethnic cohesion, while at the same time decreasing prejudice and discrimination and promoting upward mobility and social interaction with the dominant Anglo society. However, only four of my fifteen Mexican American respondents are actively involved in ethnic organizations and only two of the fifteen have parents who have been or are currently involved in ethnic organizations. Ethnic organizations and identity politics may have aided Mexican Americans in the past and allowed them to achieve the

status they currently hold, but according to my respondents, the need to be involved in identity politics has decreased over time.

### Conclusion

The goal of this thesis has been to identify and discuss the social and cultural structures that influence rates of Mexican American intermarriage and how the occurrence of Mexican American intermarriage has changed or remained constant over time by conducting ethnographic interviews with interethnic couples consisting of a Mexican American and non-Mexican American as well as single Mexican American respondents.

The findings of these interviews have demonstrated that it is not necessary for a Mexican American to lose ethnic identity in order to become involved in a colorblind interethnic relationship, as the classic assimilation theory would assert. This study has also illustrated that the immigrant assimilation model of European immigrants does not accurately describe the manner in which Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans have integrated into American society. There has been a fair amount of cultural assimilation, however, there has been an even larger amount of structural assimilation that has allowed for an increase in socioeconomic mobility and an increase in interpersonal social contact with Anglos and other ethnic groups. A large amount of structural assimilation could be attributed to volunteer organizations and the Chicano movement that stressed the importance of recognition of

Mexican American contributions to American society, equal rights for education and occupation, and the importance of maintaining ethnic identity. However, as previously stated, this claim cannot be fully supported by my findings.

The three theories discussed in this thesis all play an important role in describing the occurrence of intermarriage. However, Blau's structural theory and Macias' mestizaje/transculturation theory are more accurate when discussing Mexican American intermarriage than Gordon's assimilation theory. However, there is still a need for more research, especially in regards to Macias' theory. Further research regarding Mexican American intermarriage is also required to comprehend the future ramifications of Mexican American ethnic identity and ethnic cohesion.

## APPENDIX ONE

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Hometown</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Ethnic Term</b>
Sarah	28	Colorado City, TX	BHA	Office Manager	Mexican American
Norma	23	San Antonio, TX	Some college	Student	Hispanic
Nicholas	24	Tucson, AZ	Some college	Game Technician	Anglo
Teresa	38	Amarillo, TX	BA	News Promotion Mgr. Lead Design	Hispanic
Lynn	37	Amarillo, TX	BS	Engineer	Anglo Mexican
Lisa	27	Austin, TX	Some college	Student	American
Yohan	33	Fort Worth, TX	Some college	First Aid Instructor	South Korean Mexican
Marc	53	Chicago, IL	Some college	Chef	American
Kate	50	Fort Worth, TX	BA	Design Instruction	Anglo Mexican
Megan	28	Amarillo, TX	BLS	Graduate Student	American
Jason	28	Amarillo, TX	Some college	Chef Administrative	Anglo
Nina	28	Austin, TX	MS	Associate	Hispanic
Darren	30	Austin, TX	BS	Claims Examiner	Anglo
Roberto	42	San Antonio, TX	MA	Music Professor	Hispanic Mexican
Henry	53	McAllen, TX	PhD	Psychology Professor	American Mexican
Neil	52	Edinburg, TX	PhD	English Professor Internet Tech	American
Melissa	21	Eagle Pass, TX	Some college	Support	Hispanic
Ricardo	26	Austin, TX	Some college	Student	Latino
Luis	33	Seminole, TX	BA	Archaeologist	Tejano Mexican
Dolores	50	Houston, TX	Some college	Office Manager	American
David	49	Japan	Associate	Retired	Japanese/Danish Mexican
Carmella	44	Austin, TX	Some college	Project Manager	American
Greg	47	Austin, TX	Some college	Police Sergeant	Anglo

## **APPENDIX TWO**

### **Interview Questions**

#### **Personal Information**

1. Where were you born?
2. Where did you grow up?
3. How long have you lived where you live now?
4. How old are you?
5. What is your occupation?
6. What is the highest level of education you have attained?
7. Did you attend a public or private grade school/high school?

#### **Family History**

8. Who in your family originally migrated from Mexico?
9. What part of Mexico did they come from?
10. How long ago did they first arrive in the United States?
11. How do you know this information?
12. Where were your parents born?
13. What is their occupation?
14. What is the highest level of education they have attained?
15. Where do they live now?
16. Do you maintain regular contact with your parents and/or siblings

### Ethnic Context

17. How did your parents feel about your Mexican-origin background?
18. What is your parents' first language?
19. Did your parents speak Spanish to you or to each other when you were growing up?
20. Did they ever discuss their choice of language usage with you?
21. Do you speak Spanish? If so, in what contexts do you usually speak it? How did you learn to speak it? If you do not speak Spanish, can you understand it?
22. Did your parents belong to any organizations or clubs, ethnic or not?
23. About what percentage of the local population where you grew up was of Mexican ancestry?
24. How did you consider yourself ethnically/racially when you were growing up?
25. Of what ethnicity/race were most of your friends growing up?

### Cultural Practices

26. Do you regularly eat Mexican food? What is your favorite? Can you prepare Mexican food? If so, how did you learn to do this?
27. What religion were your parents when you were growing up? What religion are you presently? Do you attend services regularly?
28. Are there any holidays that your family celebrates that you associate with your Mexican heritage? What about these holidays seems particularly Mexican?
29. Are there any Spanish language programs on television that you watch regularly? If so, what are they and why do you watch them?
30. Do you listen to Latin music? If so, what artists do you like and why? When and how did you first get interested in Latin music?

31. Are there any other customs or practices you can think of that affect your day-to-day life that you associate with your Mexican heritage?

### Ethnic Identity

32. What term do you use to identify your ethnicity? Have you always used this term? If not, why has it changed?
33. Is being Mexican/Mexican American/Chicano important to you?
34. Do you belong to any organizations, ethnic or not?
35. Of what ethnic group are your friends?
36. Of what ethnic group are your co-workers?
37. What is the most common ethnic/racial group in the neighborhood where you presently live?
38. Do you feel more comfortable around people of Mexican ancestry than other people? Why?
39. What kind of contact do you have with first-generation immigrants?
40. Do you maintain contact with relatives or friends in Mexico? How often do you see or communicate with them?
41. Have you ever been to Mexico? If so, what was that experience like?
42. Is it common for people to ask you about your ethnic identity? What are these interactions like? How do you feel about them?
43. On the whole, do you believe it is advantageous or disadvantageous to be identified as being of Mexican ancestry? Why?

### Interethnic Relationships

44. What is your partner's ethnicity?
45. Where and when did you meet?

46. If married, how long did you date? When were you married? Do you have children?
47. Was it important to your parents that you date someone who was ethnically Mexican?
48. Did or would your parents approve of you marrying someone who was not of Mexican ancestry?
49. How have your friends reacted to your relationship?
50. Have you experienced any strong reactions to your relationship from strangers?
51. Is this the first time your partner has been involved in an interethnic relationship?
52. Is this the first time you have been involved in an interethnic relationship?
53. Is there any particular reason why you chose to date/marry someone of a different ethnicity/race?
54. Do you feel that you have lost any of your Mexican identity by being in an interethnic relationship?
55. What Mexican cultural traditions do you both adhere to?
56. Does your partner want to be actively involved in your cultural/familial practices?
57. If and when you decide to have children, how important would you like for their Mexican identity to be to them?
58. Do you feel any apprehension concerning having bi- or multi-racial children?
59. Would you prefer your children marry someone who also has Mexican ancestry? Why?
60. Will you teach your children Spanish? Bilingual?
61. Will you teach your children about their cultural background? Both backgrounds?



62. Can you name one good thing or benefit from being married to someone of your spouse's ethnic group?
63. Can you name one bad thing or problem about being married to someone who does not belong to your ethnic group?

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## **VITA**

Nina Micaela Guerrero was born in Amarillo, Texas, on September 27, 1978, the daughter of Benita Chavez Guerrero and the late David Daniel Guerrero. After completing her work at Tascosa High School, Amarillo, Texas, in 1997, she entered Southwestern University, Georgetown, Texas. She received the degree of Bachelor of Liberal Studies from St. Edward's University, Austin, Texas in May 2002. In August 2005, she entered the Graduate College of Texas State University-San Marcos.

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