

**RETURN MIGRATIONS, ASSIMILATION, AND CULTURAL ADAPTATIONS
AMONG MEXICAN AMERICAN PROFESSIONALS FROM THE LOWER RIO
GRANDE VALLEY OF SOUTH TEXAS**

A Dissertation

by

JESUS ALBERTO GARCIA

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2011

Major Subject: Sociology

Return Migrations, Assimilation, and Cultural Adaptations among Mexican American
Professionals from the Lower Rio Grande Valley of South Texas

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ABSTRACT

Return Migrations, Assimilation, and Cultural Adaptations among Mexican American Professionals from the Lower Rio Grande Valley of South Texas. (May 2011)

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Studies of Mexican American integration have come to a methodological and theoretical impasse. Conventional investigations have provided limited insight as they are outsider-based perspectives examining native-born minorities within the context of the immigrant experience and race-cycle paradigms. Grounded in cultural ideologies and nationalist narratives, dominant descriptions of minorities have created a conceptual strait that circumscribes the discourse of assimilationists' models of integration. Moreover, studies of marginal groups produce negative consequences by highlighting cultural differences that tautologically reinforce the grounds for exclusion. Little grounded work has been conducted specifically looking at racialized native-born minorities and the dynamics of their generational process of integration. Through embedded ethnography and participant narratives, this research provides direct insight into processes of contemporary integration and the social structural accommodation of native-born Mexican Americans. As a means of sidestepping conceptual barriers, this

discussion theoretically frames the integration of Mexican American professionals within the context of modernity and liberal human development.

By responding to the above critiques, this paper presents an alternative approach to the analysis and explanation of the roots of race-cycle paradigms in the first section. The second section establishes the context for the research and explains the basis for the dissertation's structure and conceptual arguments. As a means of moving the discourse away from established models, the third section provides a critical overview of the classical and contemporary literature on minority integration through a process of textual deconstruction. In addition, the third section also constructs a theoretical dynamic between structural determinations and individual adaptations to modernity that promotes integration. The fourth section describes the non-traditional method of data collection that provides direct insight into the processes of native-born minority cultural and structural incorporation. Through participant voices, the fifth section describes how individual interactions and institutional forces are shaping the social place that Mexican American professionals have created on the borderlands of American culture and society. What the interpretive findings suggest in the last section is that Mexican American professionals are constructing and re-defining their own social and cultural place out of the elements that modern society provides and not as the race-cycle theory predicts.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Race-cycle model descriptions have guided sociological studies of minority integration in the United States over the last century. Considering the social and structural changes that have transpired since early studies it is here presented that race-cycle models have become over generalized and provide inadequate description to diverse contemporary processes of minority integration. Conceptually, race-cycle models of assimilation were formulated to describe the incorporation process attached to white immigrant populations. Such conventional descriptions have been ill fittingly extrapolated to bi-cultural native-born Mexican American minorities. In addition, the rigid description provided by the model tends to use circular logic to highlight minority differences as grounds for their marginalization.

As a means of addressing the experiences of native-born minorities outside narrow hegemonic perspectives this theoretical discussion and research, take the discourse away from over generalized race-cycle descriptions of minority and individual incorporation. As an alternative to racialized paradigms, the research will instead address processes of integration from an unconventional perspective that takes into consideration the interplay of modern structural forces and dominant cultural affects.

The research literature and reviewed studies on Mexican American sociology suggest that as minorities their paths into the mainstream of U.S. society and success within it depends on the cultivation of human capital and the adoption of dominant values.

This dissertation follows the style of *Sociological Perspectives*.

Success within U.S. society depends on functional adaptations and values that cultivate the cultural capital that encourages integration and acceptance (Aguirre and Turner 2007; Gans 2007; Valenzuela 1999). Members of the selected sub-cultural ethnic group have cultivated the human capital, through education and professional environments, conducive of mobility and thus more likely structurally incorporated and less marginalized by American society (Aguirre and Turner 2007; Feagin 2000; Gordon 1964). Recognizing that Latino professionals can articulate their own narratives, the research method seeks to contextualize their experiences from an internal standpoint. Through retrospective discussions participants provide insight into their experiences of trans-regional migration (leaving), integration (how was it there), return motivations (why did you return), and their collective sense of post experiential national and cultural identity on the borderlands of culture and geography. In a globalizing context the south Texas as a region and it's Mexican American bi-cultural population represents what other historically imperial nations are also dealing with; how to social structurally integrate colonial citizen-racial minorities into the established national identity and core culture of a racialized mainstream (Eisenstadt 1974; Gracia 2007; Kazal 1995; Rojek 2007; Stanfield and Dennis 1993).

1.1 Research rationale

As the study of the Borderlands expands beyond geo-political and economic considerations it becomes necessary to investigate how macro forces of modernity affect marginal groups in the process of integration. Modern theories little address how racial

and ethnic categories of identity can influence contemporary processes of social integration and the exclusion of minorities (Giddens 1990; Zelinski 2001). In general, discussions addressing integration assume that racial and ethnic distinctions will become obsolete and functionally disappear under processes of rational differentiation and structural accommodation. However, in modernity, these socially constructed and power laden categories have evolved as a means of maintaining hegemony. Critical interpretations of modern history suggest that dominant social structural and cultural ascriptions persevere as grounds for detrimental social exclusion and marginalization. As modernity, and the subsequent expansion of western culture and knowledge, continues to globalize and incorporate new groups and regions it becomes crucial to investigate processes of native-born minority integration and functional adaptation. Towards this end, this study utilizes a qualitative approach by ethnographically investigating the individual sense of mainstream integration that native-born Mexican American professionals from the Lower Rio Grande Valley have experienced outside the south Texas enclave. Based on their retrospective background assumptions' and borrowing from relevant critical race, cultural, structural, and post-modern theories this study will explore the social place participants have developed post migratory experience.

In describing the wide-ranging social experiences of incorporation for Mexican Americans, we take notice of history as it corresponds to evolving racial and cultural identities and how it has been affected by the structural contexts created by U.S. economic development and growth. The racialized history attached to modern

development in this deep south Texas region, the place where Mexican Americans were born out of nineteenth century U.S. imperial expansion and conflict, serves to illustrate how the structural forces of modern economic development intersect with individual lives (Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Johnson 2003; Montejano 1987; Ochoa 1991; Young 2004). As modern capitalism expands and changes social arrangements so does the process of structural economic and social cultural integration alter the identity of marginalized groups like Mexican Americans (Fernandez 2007; Pachon and Moore 2007; Zelinski 2001).

According to the contentions of structural theorists and the modernity-based changes they describe because of the size and complexity of globalizing economics the system must integrate new regions and populations in order to meet its own growth based needs regardless of individual racial and ethnic identity (Alba and Nee 2003; Fernandez 2007; Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Zelinski 2001). Yet the social patterns of interaction and structural accommodations studied herein suggest that racial and ethnic distinctions continue to influence the life chances of all individuals. Contextualizing the mainstream integration of Mexican Americans and other minorities within the framework of human liberalism and economic development allows us to recognize how ethnic hierarchies and racial identities affect capitalist development and the labor needs of an expanding system. Modern capitalism provides opportunities' for individuals socially oriented towards the dominant values and beliefs governing the system. Acquisition of human capital, through education and mainstream cultural orientations, provide the means with which individuals operate within the systems institutions to affect their own

accomplishments and integrative trajectory (Bourdieu and Passerson 1990; Featherstone 1995; Gans 2007). For contemporary Mexican Americans the result has been a shifting trans-cultural image and social sense of place shaped as much by individual phenotype, class, and racialized ethnic ascriptions as it is by the history of two nations and cultures linked by modern development.

1.2 The Borderlands as living laboratory and site of study

Characterizing modernity's regional development and the individual changes it generates as process allows this research to highlight its potential for positive results beyond those of the ideologies (i.e., racism, neo-liberalism, and ethnocentrism) that privilege economic objectives and certain groups above individual human rights (Mills 1997; Zelinski 2001). Social geographer Patricia Martin (1998) recognizes that globalization as a process also entails multiple shifts in social structural arrangements thorough which capitalism is reproduced and its returns distributed to the individuals and groups affected. Taking into consideration the advent of modern development in the region, her frame of reference distinguishes south Texas as an environment in which these changes can be observed as they occur and gain meaning through the lives of local populations. The modernity-individual dialectic can also be used to illustrate the global-local relation and the more progressive aspects of economic development that provide opportunities for upwards mobility and the de-marginalization of oppressed and racialized groups (Giddens 1971). Globalizing economics have spurred modern regional adaptations that have also contributed to integrative human development and the trans-

cultural/regional migrations of the individuals in this study. Located, as it is at the conflux of geographical, demographic, structural, and cultural forces the region creates a living laboratory where social change can be scrutinized to better understand the inclusive aspects of modern diffusion (Martin 1998).

1.3 The bi-cultural setting

Out of this relationship, and the place where the modern and developing world meet, the Borderland forges into a region where the histories and actions of both nations sometimes collide and arguably create the homeland for subjects in this study. What materializes is a uniquely blended social and cultural environment endearingly referred to by locals as neither here nor there but a place all unto itself. Daniel Arreola and James R. Curtis (1993) discussing the region's distinct social cultural and demographic characteristics, suggest that if ever there would be a recognizable Mexican American homeland south Texas would be it. Directly on its southernmost edge with Mexico, and demographically delimited by a majority Latino population and federal security restrictions, is where the lives in this exploratory ethnography take shape and create a setting where the values, practices, and other cultural artifacts from both societies are incorporated into one (Richardson 1999).

Contact between the two nations has created a bi-cultural ethnic enclave and regional economic zone undergoing modernity-based human and economic development most significantly influenced by capitalists' expansion, international trade compacts, and economic globalization (Anderson and Gerber 2008). In effect, the marginalization that

historically characterized south Texas in general has been reduced under modern economics and its' position along established international trade route and manufacturing zone. Bi-nationally the region maintains multiple ports of entry and an abundance of inexpensive labor that cements its position within the global economy (Martin 1998).

To their advantage bi-cultural Mestizo professionals within the existing global economic context could conceivably become empowered by their ability to bridge nations and cultures. As opposed to mono-cultural ethnics who may not empathize nor relate with diversity and non-mainstream perceptions and experiences. By exercising a somewhat culturally open approach to daily social interactions and relations, trans-regional Mexican Americans have learned to operate within multiple social fields (e.g., class, ethnicity, and region) on the borderlands of Mexico and the U.S. In the process what has resulted is a regional social character that has developed the social acumen reflective of a culturally diverse society (Fromm and Macoby 1996; Martinez 1994; Resiman 2001; Rodriguez, Saenz, and Menjivar 2008).

1.4 Theoretical syncretism

The diversity of individual processes of integration makes a definitive theoretical description difficult in any case but particularly in narrow investigations such as this one. In order to sustain and seek hypothetical support for the assertions contained herein this study utilizes an open system approach to theoretical description and application by extrapolating concepts and ideas from other works and authors (Ballentine and

Hammack 2008). An open systems approach allows researchers to utilize concepts from multiple theories in order to describe macro and micro aspects of human activity and any perceived connections between both analytical levels of interaction. Discussed in terms of modern systems such a general approach places the subject within the dynamics of life structuring social and economic institutions.

Theoretically, the over-arching context of the study will be within the paradigm of modernity and structuring institutions as the dominant macro forces compelling human development and choices (Giddens 1990; Welzel and Inglehart 2005). At the micro level, the research borrows from post-modern, post-structural, and critical race discussions as a means to de-center the hegemonic perspective, develop parallel narratives, and interpret social historical dynamics outside the dominant discourse (Rosenau 1992:82). In doing so, the discussion addresses the effects of how race and ethnicity affects modern social and cultural hierarchies that govern the social location and place of minorities.

Anthony Giddens (1990) has discussed the growth and influence of the nation-state and the expansion of global economics as the two dominant institutions that affect human development in contemporary modern society. Ignoring cultural influences he focuses on macro level factors and describes how the nation-state pursues wealth, and how the relation between capital and government have prioritized the needs of capitalism and presents them as integral to progressive human development and technological achievement (Eisenstadt 1974). The underlying guiding assumption being that without the first, and all its consequences, the latter benefits will not come about, in

essence prioritizing the system above the human factor. Such rationalized explanations' of modern social change tend to ignore the human social component that is the individual, the basic unit of the system itself, and the tendency to create rising expectations for improvements' to the quality of life that are typically slow to benefit marginal populations. Academic descriptions of the Lower Rio Grande Valley's development tend to describe how historically the role of the nation-state and its legal institutions affect national, legal, and social boundaries that have dominated the emergence and control of the borderland and its minority population as a distinct region (Browne, Simms, and Barry 1994; Giddens 1971; Goran 2000; Johnson 2003). They too have ignored in their descriptions how race and ethnicity affect the devolution of the benefits and privileges that modern development materializes and the ways hegemony can color distribution (Gimenez 1992).

Post-structurally it seems that a social-economic system institutionalized to organize and sustain human development has taken on a life of its own and thus we have humans meeting the needs of an emotionally detached system itself. Using theoretical cues from research by Inglehart and Welzel (2005) analyzing multi-national processes of modern diffusion and human development, the research attempts to provide micro-level insight into how the elements of liberalism have been key to the changes the region and local population have undergone for over a century. Creatively, and illustrated by subject narratives human agency, self-determination and individualism have led to adaptations that preserve local cultures in structurally functional and progressive forms (Alba and

Nee 2003; Anderson and Gerber 2008; Giddens 1990; Johnson 2003; Portes and Rumbaut 1996; Zuberi 2001).

Critical analysis of the literature discussing contemporary integration suggests that for native-born Mexican Americans the cultural field paints a form of class-based acculturation and assimilation. Logical induction suggests that descriptively the higher the socio-economic class, the more acculturated and likely the individual will become socially defined as deserving and incorporated into the mainstream (Alba and Nee 2003; Fernandez 2007; Parrillo 2008; Portez and Rumbaut 1996; Tellez and Ortiz 2008; Valenzuela 1999). Interpreting Davila (2008) and her analysis of modern marketing and advertisement, the most acceptable form of Latino cultural identity in U.S. mainstream society occurs and is highly mediated through consumption based displays. As such, the higher the social economic status an individual has the more likely he/she would be able to afford the materials objects conspicuously symbolic of U.S. mainstream identity (i.e., middle-class lifestyle) and status.

From a de-centered and bottom-up perspective, this consumption-based standard has in part become the ideological basis for recognizable mainstream membership. Alternatively, it represents an unrealistic material standard considering that the majority of U.S. Latinos cannot afford to live-up to that standard of living and quality of lifestyle (Davila 2008; Korzenny and Korzenny 2005).

Davila's research (2001) into Latino advertising firms and their marketing strategies points out that such campaigns exploit the traditional values associated with Latino culture such as family and nationalism, and are aimed at cultivating a dependent sense

of social place for Latinos and an Anglo American acceptable pan-ethnic identity. Through contextual analysis of advertising and popular media characterizations Davila also points out that the images portrayed are very often culturally homogenized representations generalized with no regard for the realities of sub-ethnic and class differences comprising Latino society in the U.S. In general, the images portray the Americanized middle-class ideological standard of assimilation for whites and non-whites.

As a means of providing descriptive theoretical substance to the integrative interplay of mediated information and an individuals' awareness of social place Stepjan Mestrovic's (1997) discussion of culture elaborates on how institutions use the media to re-construe history and generate post-emotional connections to past and current events as a means of fabricating a particular sense of referential reality. Over time, traditional sources of self-definition have been mediated and reconstructed by images that neutralize the legacy of historical exclusions carried out by the dominant group.

In the circumstance of the contemporary Mexican American experience, modern identities are assembled from the ideas and symbolic images provided by media distributors. Advertising agents and public institutions play a central role in mediating an ahistorical pan-ethnic sense of community that erases distinct histories of diverse groups into one culturally ingratiating homogenized category. This image projects a consumer basis of inclusion associated with an identifiable middle-class normative standard. Symbolically images attempt to replace the historical inequalities and contemporary prejudices experienced by colonized groups with an integrated

Americanized citizen model. Mainstream and marginalized societies cognitively reference these images in constructing their own sense and definitions of Mexican Americans and other Latino minorities. In this manner the non-white population and their history as colonial minorities is re-negotiated as an inclusive part of the nation's image and legitimates their sense of inclusive social place without disturbing the hegemonic narrative that provides cultural substance and meaning to the mainstream (Feagin 2000; Rojek 2007). Symbolically interpreted, achieving the standard can serve as a status indicator of integration and assimilation demonstrating an Americanized identity for both minorities and mainstream populations (Parrillo 2008).

1.5 Methodological foundations

Considerably, because of the diversity found among the U.S. Latino population a narrow subject to investigate this exploratory research attempts to expand the discussion of Mexican American integration by constructing an empirically based narrative from the perspective of a regional population of native-born professionals that have sojourned into Anglo-dominant communities and environments. In the modern context social integration represents human development and a transition away from ethnic affiliations and towards a functional structural place as determined by the division of labor and structural human capital need. The experiences of the interviewed group could be contrasted with other settings and groups undergoing similar structural-cultural changes. Understanding what change entails for individuals could help to ameliorate exclusionary aspects of modernity that could jeopardize stability and its diffusion. To explore

integrative structural dynamics and construct a narrative this research borrows from ethnography to develop a locally grounded point of view.

Through experiential questions eliciting data from grounded sources, the research will provide insight into the pragmatic sense of social cultural adaptation that this group of native born minorities experienced. Exploring structurally successful threads of allows us to study segments of modern adaptation and emerging subcultures. Critically speaking the implementation of insider subjective approaches in sociology can presumably bias the interpretation of data and compromise the objective legitimacy of any discourse. However and alternatively from a parallel perspective, when studying marginalized populations the grounded voices and mental frames of the directly involved provide empirical definition and insight to the subject in contrast to outsider based top-down ascriptions (Collins 2000; Madison 2005; Rosenau 1992). Being that Mexican American individuals and academics have the ability and skills to describe their own background assumptions this research aims to elaborate on how participants “combine internal and external social forms and worldviews to operate in their multi-layered social-spatial environments” (Rodriguez, Saenz, and Menjivar 2008:11).

By qualitatively investigating the experiences of marginal social groups this research attempts to gain insight into processes of integration by listening and analyzing subject-directed open conversations with 30, 19 males and 11 females, Mexican American professionals. This ethnography utilizes an embedded approach and constructs an interpretive narrative directly from the voices of individuals who have made social inroads into the American mainstream. To add clarity and purpose to this line of inquiry

it should be clarified that more often than not conventional studies and outsider approaches tend to oversimplify and derogate the social subtleties that affect processes of inclusion. In addition, outsider perspectives implicitly over-emphasize the inability of marginal populations to effectively function in mainstream environs and ignore those sub-group members who can and do accomplish in spite of the structural obstacles and social inequalities they encounter. Furthermore, such perceptions tend to legitimate mainstream beliefs and expectations of the social group as inherently different and deserving of social exclusion and cultural alienation. Top down approaches essentially ignore the strengths and successes of individuals from marginal backgrounds and overemphasize cultural characteristics that stand in contrast to mainstream standards. Finally, by denying positive affirmation to marginal sub-groups, contemporary studies fail to critically self-examine the mainstream and its' highly ethnocentric and partially unrealistic expectations. As Madison points out, "how people are represented is how they are treated" (Estes et al. 2000; Madison 2005:4).

1.6 Social place

According to analysis of the race-cycle canons of assimilation, structural integration leads to assimilation and inclusion (Alba and Nee 2003; Gordon 1964; Steinberg 2007). These assumptions are based on the highly idealized experiences of twentieth century immigrant white ethnics whose histories laid the conceptual foundation for race-cycle models. Symbolically speaking their sense of inclusive social place is poignantly illustrated by the loss of hyphenated citizenship provided by multiple and evolving

forms of institutional and cultural definitions. The historically distinct Mexican American colonial experience has not provided the loss of hyphenated otherness and incorporation that other non-Latino white ethnics have been ascribed (Aguirre and Turner 2007; Gans 1997; Waldinger 2003). On the contrary, the history of Mexican Americans represents an under-spoken struggle against racialization as well as the relentless pursuit of the full benefits and rights of citizenship (Frank, Redstone, and Lu 2010; Gracia and De Greiff 2000; Lopez 1997; Montejano 1987). Caught between two nations, and encountering recognizable contemptuous prejudices from American Anglos and Mexican nationals, many Mexican Americans decidedly remain in the borderland regions. Research by Saenz, Cready, and Morales (2007) indicates that the overall increase in Latino population outside the southwest region is more a result of the immigrant Latino diaspora as opposed to internal Mexican American sources.

Consequently, this borderland region can be characterized as a Mexican American minority enclave with its own bi-cultural character and identity. A characteristic often exploited by nationalists, racists, and policy makers to emphasize the regions distinctive otherness and justify the populations' social and economic marginality (Lamont 1999).

Political demagogues and media fabrications aside, for the participants in this study, the Lower Rio Grande Valley represents their homeland and the place where most of them returned. Contrary to canonical contentions' the Mexican American experience demonstrates that acculturation does not necessarily lead to assimilation (Telles and Ortiz 2008). Furthermore, what the literature and survey analysis suggest is that for Mexican Americans the fundamental difference between mainstream integration and

marginalization is contingent on human capital accumulation, class and residential mobility into culturally mainstream communities that create the environment for re-defining adaptations (Foner and Fredrickson 2004).

What interviews strongly suggest is that in terms of cultural orientation and nationalist identity participants' sense of belonging corresponds to the United States and its values. Despite growing-up along the border, the majority of participants pointed-out that throughout their lives, with few exceptions among them, they have always oriented their sense of self northwards. In conversation, all of the participants identified their families as post-1st generation from Mexico. The majority of participants admitted that beyond brief and infrequent visits most incursions into Mexico hardly went beyond the Federal 21 mile checkpoints analogous to the U.S.'s immigration stations located 60 miles from the border. To some surprise, many participants cited the lifelong and countless admonitions that adults have provided about the dangers of going to Mexico (e.g., mostly over the dangers stemming from corruption and lawlessness there). Interpretively and by their own admission, when time came to go seek whatever stage of the lifecycle was next and/or adventure, south was not an option for most.

1.7 Guiding questions and preliminary findings

Despite the presumably deep roots and ties that could traditionally hold minorities in ethnic enclaves this study asks research participants what influenced their decisions to leave the region and seek "something else, something different" as one female respondent related. According to Alejandro Portes (1997) there is no overall

encompassing theory of immigration to date and as such we must acknowledge that individual motivations for migrating are particular to individual circumstances. Although we can suggest explanations such as conditions (e.g., poverty, political upheaval, etc...) at points of origin that are generally applicable, in reality each individual rationalizes his/her reasons for leaving. In general and according to the majority of interview narratives and discussions it seems that for this group individual egresses from the region were part of self-actualization: either to seek better paying employment, to obtain an education, or as matter of military service to country. In short, most research participants left the region to seek opportunities they felt were not available in the local.

For most people in circumstances of relocation to different environments it is common to wonder about local social structures and informal arrangements' as well as their place within it. At base, such inner-discussions revolve around the basic premise is the new environment going to be receptive and will adjustments overwhelm their ability to adapt? As marginalized citizens venturing into mainstream America this investigation also asks participants, in retrospection, what sense of inclusion did they distinguish while living in predominantly Anglo communities? Some research participants acknowledged that in interactions with members of the dominant group their status as minorities was often part of the exchange, although not necessarily hostile but at times interpretively a gesture of intimacy. Overtly, according to the majority of participants, interactions among professionals in formal environments were conducted according to institutional structures and the attached formalities. In their communities, during

informal interactions, similar conduct was recollected with some exceptions that were attributed by respondents to social unfamiliarity not necessarily conscious prejudice or discrimination.

Considering the self-investment and success they experienced outside of the region, and the fact that not one participant was ever ridden out of town, tar and feathered, on a rail, nor chased by mobs wielding pitchforks and torches, part of this research also interrogates why these individuals made the decision to return to the Lower Rio Grande Valley? Herbert Gans (2007) explains that in the case of previous European immigrants there were some that rejected the cultural and religious changes expected by the then mainstream and opted to return to Europe. In the case of Native-born Mexican Americans in this study, the decision to return-migrate was based primarily on the opportunity to be closer to family and not for rejecting mainstream values and expectations. What the narratives suggests is that traditional family networks and kinship ties remain central to trans-regional Mexican Americans in this group

Part of the interview also posited participants to introspect on matters of their own acculturation. At its most basic level and because of the extended time they spent living among U.S. Americans and culture do they feel more American having spent a significant amount of time living in mainstream culture? Have they undergone any type of change or adjustment to their racial or ethnic identity? Taking into consideration how often the race and ethnicity concepts are conflated, compiled, and confused with one another, even among scientists, this aspect of the discussions/interviews basically asked participants to identify themselves post return. Surprisingly the most common and

succinct answer was simply “American”. Regardless of what region they found themselves in, here or there before they left and after returning. If probed further it became “Mexican American”.

In line with Robert M. Kunovich (2009) and his multi-national research with Latino minorities such a response suggests that among upwardly mobile minorities the inclination is to invoke a civic national identity that emphasizes inclusion under citizenship and not ethnicity which is more often used by socially dominant groups for purposes of exclusion. As a way of contextualizing structurally responsive adaptations Mike Featherstone (1990) also describes the emergence of a modern cultural form and identity derived from a sense of shared cultural practices as opposed to one based on ethnicity or other institutions. No matter how they self-defined, what could be interpretively implied from their collective commentaries was their lack of conscious connection, physical (visiting) and emotional (nationalism), to Mexico.

In light of the direction that many of the narratives followed, they led this ethnography to discuss issues of heritage for the next generation. Participants with children were asked to describe what sense of ethnic and racial identity they would be teaching and passing on to their children? In which direction, marginal or mainstream, are they culturally socializing their children in recognizable terms such as language and holiday practices? Participants intend to pass on the culture they know, that culture which has been constructed in the borderlands from two sources.

Bi-cultural identity in the borderlands does not reflect a singular cultural point of self-reference as wholly Mexican or U.S. American but more so an amalgamation of both.

To illustrate, as much as they would want the next generation to reflect their bi-cultural heritage they also recognize that, much like Telles and Ortiz (2008) point out, there will be some challenges. For example, language inheritance, for the increasingly American oriented next generation primarily influenced by American-centric school curriculums and predominantly English mass media and entertainment requires conscious effort (Schechter and Bayley 1997; Valenzuela 1999).

Within the context of these questions and the increasing diversity of U.S. society, this study adds to the contemporary discourse on the integration of racially non-white native and previously colonized groups. In part, the literature and discourse assert that contemporary Latinos/Hispanics have the potential to serve as a quasi- measure for social integration and inclusion as they redefine not only themselves but the American culture and society too (Alba and Nee 2003; Fernandez 2007; Zelinski 2001). Inclusive extensions for the most part still hold dominant expectations as standards. Because of their accomplishments and the subsequent socio-economic mobility they have experienced this category of Mexican American professionals carry the required human capital and thus potential to achieve mainstream integration. Taking into consideration the Americanizing objectives of immersion into public education, military service, and corporate culture it should be no surprise that individuals that spent a substantial time of their formative years within these systems of institutional socialization adopt mainstream standards of inclusion (Aguirre and Turner 2007; Valenzuela 1999).

On the other hand, in this discourse we must also temper sanguinity and contrast centrists' assertions with research and analysis by critical scholars such as Telles and

Ortiz (2008) who suggest that integration is not occurring to the optimistic extent that others argue. By investigating the experiences of this minority sub-group their narrative post-interpretations will be used to describe the sense of social place that native-born Mexican American professional's sense. In view of the limitations of race-cycle and assimilation theories, race-cycle models fail to investigate the contemporary interplay of structure and culture. In many instances canonical assertions do not take into account the ways in which modernity has changed the self-perceptions and context of structural cultural inclusion for non-Anglo whites (Alba and Nee 2005; Gans 1997; Inglehart and Weltzel 2005; Portes and Zhou 1993; Tafoya 2004; Telles and Ortiz 2008; Waldinger 2003).

1.8 Section conclusion

As economic globalization continues to expand, modernity also spreads the ideology of human liberalism and creates tensions between minority and centrist populations competing for the advantages and control of modern development. Western history demonstrates how ethnicity and race have been utilized as grounds for privilege and exclusions. In the U.S. and in other once imperial colonies, social arrangements were created and maintained by multiple forms of institutional and cultural discriminations justifying the exclusion of minorities from the social mainstream and the full benefits of modern development (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Mills 1997; Zelinski 2001; Zhou 1997). The imperial legacy of inequality that characterizes modern society in the cultural west

provides ample evidence of how modern institutions have systematically excluded non-whites based on ascribed racial and ethnic distinctions.

Contemporary centrists' arguments have legitimated the marginalization of native-born minorities based on cultural differences perceived as irreconcilable with Anglo-based values and beliefs. The social hierarchy described in structural and segmented cultural models of integration and assimilation illustrate these differences of compatibility. Centrist descriptions and predictions aside it becomes pertinent to understand the sense of place that modern human development and highly racialized society provide native-born groups (Zhou 1997). This research then critically emphasizes that previous descriptions and expectations of generational assimilation, based on and describing the over-generalized experiences of European white ethnic minorities, do not quite reflect pragmatic experiences of native born minorities. As such, it becomes relevant to investigate the dynamics surrounding integration according to the narratives of the individuals undergoing the processes.

2. WHAT FOLLOWS NEXT

Studies of Mexican American integration have come to a methodological and theoretical standstill. Investigations have thus far provided limited insight as they are primarily developed through outsider based top-down perspectives that frame native-born minorities as perpetual immigrants. Theoretical discussions with exceptions remain rigidly couched in assimilationists' paradigms that conceptually restrict the development of descriptions beyond those espousing conformists' ideologies. Drawn from the experiences of marginalized populations centrist conclusions are tautologically used to validate the social place of all minorities. Little grounded work has been conducted specifically looking at native-born minorities and the dynamics of their multi-generational process of integration/assimilation stand in contrast to dominant race-cycle model predictions of immigrant absorption. Middle class achievement and culturally adaptive experiences premeditate the re-definition of racial and social cultural boundaries for Latino minorities.

This research project overcomes methodological limitations through the implementation of an embedded approach that provides direct insight into the experiences of these group native-born minorities. Relying on their subjective and my own similar experiences as a professional return migrant of living in Anglo-dominant communities and work environments, a pragmatic interpretation of their sense of Mexican American social place is constructed in retrospective light of this set of migratory experiences. As a means of sidestepping barriers to descriptions outside the established discourse, this discussion frames the integrating experiences of Mexican

American professionals within the general contexts of modern structural theory and liberal human development. Structurally, modernity as an evolving system of universal development integrates individuals as a means of meeting the systems operational needs. Theoretically, integrated individuals materialize the benefits of modernity principally through equitable inclusion and the rights and protections that human liberalism and development can provide. Conceptually dominant ideological beliefs limit the discourse of acceptable inclusion to those arguments that project nationalist sentiments and western standards of inclusion.

More than anything else studies of marginal groups produce negative consequences by contrasting sub-cultural differences against the normative standards associated with the often racially defined cultural mainstream. By portraying ethnics and their descendants as fundamentally different researchers, through circular logic, reinforce and reify the grounds for their exclusion on the basis of same highlighted differences. Due to the complexity of perceptive differentiating immigrant and native-born minority populations integration studies are still addressed within the immigrant context. Thus, the penalizing stigmas attached to racialized immigrants carry over to native-born minorities regardless of their cultural attachment and generational category. In an attempt to contextualize the experiences of the native-born in terms of their sense of integration this study focuses on a regional group of native-born professionals that have achieved success despite the racialized structural barriers and cultural prejudices that are an inextricable part of contemporary western society.

By responding to and discussing the fundamental critiques mentioned above this paper presents an unconventional approach to the analysis as well as an innovative explanation of the canonical roots of race-cycle paradigms in the first section of the literature review. Sociologically central explanations of classical assimilation like those by Robert Park, Lloyd Warner, Leo Srole, and Milton Gordon are discussed as a means of illustrating that canonical logic projects conformists' descriptions of integration and inclusion (Steinberg 2007). The data and theoretical arguments constructed by these authors represent the fundamental logic of assimilation. Taking into consideration the social structural changes that have transpired over the last century, linear and mono-cultural models of assimilating integration are hard-fit descriptions for the experiences of diverse populations such as native-born Mexican Americans.

To describe how this fundamental logic carries over to contemporary explanations of cultural (e.g., segmented theory) and structural (e.g., new assimilation theory) assimilation the arguments are critically approached from a subaltern perspective in order to contest that the conformist logic of race-cycle paradigms remains central to new explications. In addition, through de-construction this discussion argues that what are projected as objective studies are sub-textually subjective attempts by the authors to validate the inclusion of previously racialized white ethnics' and the events that culminated in their de-racializing integration.

The second critique and section constructs a theoretical correspondence between structural influences and individual adaptations to modernity within the contexts of social integration and accommodation. As a means of moving the discussion away from

existing racialized anti-immigrant diatribes that conflate the experiences and of native-born Mexican Americans with those of marginalized immigrants, the discussion is couched in terms of modern structural integration away from the nationalist context. By synthesizing Anthony Giddens macro-level description of institutional structuration with Gary Becker's and Pierre Bourdieu micro descriptions of human capital and social reproduction the paper grounds real life experiences to theoretical descriptions outside conventional paradigms.

Responding to the lack of internal bottom-up explications of social integration and accommodation the third critique and methodological section is premised on the idea that significant insight into processes of integration can be gained from internal perspectives without compromising the validity of the collected qualitative data. Drawn from ethnographic and critical methodologies the research utilizes an embedded participant observer approach to tap the lived narratives of the marginalized themselves without the distortion that preconceived expectations and cultural judgments potentially affect when interpreting the observed unfamiliar.

In the fourth section of this explorative study, guided by basic experiential questions contextualizing integration and sense of social place, their voices are framed through corresponding concepts that provide sociological substance to their retrospective insight. Through theoretical extrapolation, the paper contextualizes the general reasons participants decided to egress from the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Utilizing direct and paraphrased interpretations their sense of reception in Anglo-dominant communities are retrospectively investigated as a means of estimating if racialized inequality was in

anyway part of their experiences. Following the process of their physical and social migration the reasons why the decision to return to the region is also discussed as a means of probing the underlying rationale that motivated their action. Finally, their own post-experiential sense of ethnic-self and social place, integrated or still marginal, as Mexican American is and discussed in their own descriptive terms.

The last and final section will address the gold-nugget contributions and conclusions that ethnography can pan from the voices and narratives of the participants involved in this particular stream of experiences. Concisely, what we find is that this sub-group illustrates the re-definition and re-drawing of social, cultural, and racial boundaries that characterize the Mexican American experience.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

This review limits itself to the classical and contemporary voices that investigate and discuss integration according to the established canons of assimilation. A cursory review of contemporary social science literature from European analysts (e.g., Great Britain and France) investigating the experiences of native-born colonial citizens there indicates that studies in those countries take cues from American research and race-relations cycle paradigm to describe analogous dynamics (Bertossi 2007; Greer 2009; Rojek 2007; Thomson and Crul 2007). Overall and in general, the epistemological canons governing marginal to mainstream research continue to project a race-relations model of citizen assimilation for both immigrants and native-born minorities. Centrist interpretations of alternative outcomes construe non-conformity as deviant and the source of self-imposed group and individual marginalization. In so doing conservative frames of analysis on both continents stifle dialogues through preferences for explications predicting conformists trajectories of assimilation (Estes et al. 2000; Gans 2007; Steinberg 2007).

Prioritizing race-cycle interpretations transmits the impression that such dynamics are normative and imply that all minorities could choose to abandon their anomalous paths and escape the margins by adopting hegemonic cultural values and orientations (Leimgruber 2004). Fundamentally, western ideological beliefs lay the causes of the deviant condition on the minority and his cultural attachments (Waldinger 2003). Such rigid structural and cultural summations distract from the multidimensional forms of

discrimination that haunt contemporary minorities (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Feagin 2006; Zuberi 2001).

Analyzing and reviewing the literature on Mexican American integration through a critical lens reveals that many studies suffer methodological limitations obscuring central aspects of the subject as much as what they attempt to describe. External based approaches and top-down interpretations provide indirect insight into the subject experiences thus limiting most investigations. Theoretical descriptions primarily focus on group dynamics and often fail to ground themselves to real life by over-generalizing their findings and not utilizing individual experiences as a means to illustrate theoretical assertions. Finally, integration studies of the marginal have a tendency to highlight the experiences of the non-integrated and ignore subgroups who find success despite systemic prejudices. This analysis suggests that what western thinkers' project as epistemologically objective investigations are critically perceived as products of an ideologically and culturally determined knowledge that validates the hegemony of modern western culture (Estes et al. 2000; Stanfield and Dennis 1993; Steinberg 2007).

Responding to the above methodological critiques this embedded ethnography represents an exploration into the sense of place that native-born Mexican American professionals have developed in retrospect of this particular chain of events and experiences. Contextualized within a framework of modern human development the research explores the background assumptions developed by this native-born minority in light of their experiences and sense of contemporary social place in U.S. society. Social economically mobile and successful by mainstream American standards research

participants represent a little-explored group at the forefront of social reconfiguration and cultural diversification driven by processes of global economic development, cultural diffusion, and social adaptation to modernity at local and individual levels.

This research provides grounded explication of integration subaltern to dominant frames of discourse. From a critical race perspective established frames of study often provide incompatible descriptions of contemporary integration when imposed onto post-colonial native-born whose experiences stand in contradistinction to race-relation model expectations of assimilation (Blauner 1969; Gans 1997; Telles and Ortiz 2008). Contemporary structural and cultural descriptions are fundamental extensions of early twentieth century models that detract from the insidious effects of the structurally entrenched biases of a racialized culture and society.

Notwithstanding obstacles native-born Mexican Americans in this study have achieved structurally integrative mobility through the cultivation of modern human capital (Becker 1964). Despite accomplishments, their individual and collective identity remains overshadowed by the legacy of racialization ascribed to all non-white minorities (Murji and Solomos 2005). Nevertheless, field observations and interpretive findings suggest that native-born minorities are generating their own cultural identity and social place from the elements that modernity has provided on the social and geographical borderlands.

3.1 Review of the pertinent literature

This de-centered and critical examination of race-relations theory and studies has drawn the impression that an inclusive sense of place for minorities has and remains

contingent upon their adopting dominant Anglo-American culture in conjunction with upward class mobility (Alba and Nee 2003; Leimgruber 2004; Roediger 2005).

Established and illustrated through the American sociological benchmark works of Robert Park, Lloyd Warner, Leo Srole, and Milton Gordon, this assessment of their work has argued that canonical-based theorists and researchers estimate the degree of individual and group assimilation in terms of unidirectional race-relations theory. Each through their own application reaffirmed the ideological expectations of nationalism heavily structured by ethnocentric beliefs and racists' practices. Each described integration of immigrants and native-born minorities through comparisons of the marginal population transitioning process towards a normative prototype represented by civilized Anglo-American culture and institutions (Eisenstadt 2000; Kahn 2001; Steinberg 2007). Such paradigms developed from top-down perspectives and the idealized experiences of European immigrants during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Alba and Nee 2003; Feagin 2000; Stanfield and Dennis 1993; Zuberi 2001). From these foundations and into twenty-first century studies immigrant and native-born minority integration are still primarily contextualized as unidirectional and progressively transitioning towards the established Anglo-core despite the reality of modern diversity and the lack of full assimilation among native born minorities of color (Omi and Winant 1994, Maril 1989). Despite generations of presence and social historical contributions generations of institutional exclusions have prevented a majority from realizing the full benefits of modern integration.

3.2 Canonical explanations and expectations

Unidirectional sociological canons were established through urban studies conducted by Robert Ezra Park and his collaborators investigating early twentieth century European immigrant and Negro assimilation. During his time at Chicago the study of race relations brought a shift in American explanations for social structural inequality from innate biological differences to potentially amendable cultural attributes. For non-white ethnic minorities cultural differences became racialized and used to legitimate social and legal ideologies under-structuring their subordination and segregation. Twenty years later W. Lloyd Warner and Leo Srole, conducting field studies in New England bolstered the association between generational class mobility and cultural adjustment witnessed among European ethnic immigrants (Steinberg 2007). Social cultural and class adaptations by white-ethnics culminated in a de-hyphenated re-classification as un-racialized Americans. For early twentieth century race-model and common sense perceptions the abandonment of ethnic attachments and cultural conformity materialized the culmination of assimilation processes. At mid-century Milton Gordon (1964) and his study of assimilation in America cemented the models predictive expectation of adaptive changes (e.g., cultural re-orientation) that remain central to race relations descriptions of integration in American sociology (Alba and Nee 2003). Elaborating on the processes of contact, conflict, accommodation, and assimilation, as progressive social evolution their findings idealized the European white-ethnic experience and projected unidirectional standards of inclusion.

In the case of non-white and colonial minorities social Darwinist thinking and evolutionary optimism among canonical scholars overlooked the bigotry and racism that characterized the experiences of non-white groups in general which materialized as institutional barriers to class mobility, integration, and the entitlements of citizenship. Marginalized into cultural enclaves their process of extended assimilation was summarized as resulting from a failure to adopt dominant values and modern culture. Little discussed and subsumed into discussions of immigrant assimilation the native-born Mexican American experience remained that of another silent minority in American society. Academically central and publicly popular models re-affirmed the ideological beliefs of Anglo-centric society and validated the underlying racially stratified social order. Thus, its content gratified popular opinions and the common sense sentiments of the times (Blauner 1969; Glazer 2000; Gordon 1964; Montejano 1987; Roedigger 2007; Steinberg 2007).

Projecting such mainstream expectations unto colonial minorities as a basis for exclusion falsely legitimates the pseudoscientific justifications and institutionalized injustices that western hegemony intentionally and unintentionally utilized to subdue and oppress racial and cultural minorities. It also established the race-cycle paradigm as the leading frame of analysis and discourse in the race and ethnic studies from which assimilation and integration are approached into the twenty-first century.

During the 1940's Chicago school alumni Lloyd Warner and Leo Srole elaborated on the race-cycle relation theme from the results of a decade long anthropological field studies that rendered straight line assimilation theory to describe shifting identity and

community integration experienced by immigrants in Yankee City. By their observations and interpretations there occurred a transition towards established American celebrations and rituals commonly associated with mainstream middle-class culture and values (Alba and Nee 2003; Steinberg 2007). By their estimations most families would complete the assimilation process within three generations. For other non-European minorities processes could be extended indeterminately due to lingering ethnicity or the unchanged racialized social order. Regardless of duration they too saw assimilation as culminating in migrations out of ethnic enclaves and into the national American mainstream.

Into the second half of the century the assimilatory model of integration persevered and was expanded upon by Milton Gordon's study in *Assimilation in America* (1964) to include a multidimensional description of the acculturating aspects of inclusion (i.e., cultural, martial, identification, attitude, behavioral, and civic). His elaboration of the ethnic aspects of race-cycle dynamics recognizes that complete social and structural assimilation may not occur and attributes such results to the attitudes of both dominant prejudices and minority group preferences. Nevertheless, from his work and through extension to the subjects of this discussion his study addressed how an "ethclass" subcultural group of acculturated minorities could remain marginal to the social mainstream. Acculturated native-born middle-classed minorities were differentiated as socially inferior but relatively superior to un-aculturated lower-classed minorities (Gordon 1964:52). Gordon's discussion also implies that anticipatory cultural compliance was another way for minorities to ingratiate themselves with dominant

society and gain structural integration and culturally marginal social place. Thus, Gordon's descriptions and categories imply that exclusions could continue along racial, ethnic, and class lines. Portions of minority populations through acculturation (e.g., conformity) and human capital accumulation would achieve some degree of inclusive accommodation.

These examples of formative twentieth century research and theory illustrate the canonical foundations for understanding assimilation and integration in American social science (Alba and Nee 2003; Gans 1997; Steinberg 2007). From these canonical perspectives it was not necessarily race that set-up a minority for mainstream rejection instead sub-cultural (i.e., traditional) habits perceived to be incompatible with established modern institutions and western society were responsible (Eisenstadt 1974).

While the above-cited approaches made generalized references to native-born minorities in their studies they primarily focused on white-ethnic immigrants and their descendants who fit the ideological expectations of established society and culture. Any other outcome involving non-conformity implied individual resistance, cultural deviance, and the cause of their self-marginalization (Estes et al. 2000). Only by adopting the lifestyle and cultural habits of modern Americans and eliminating their ethnic identity could non-whites gain mainstream accommodation and inclusion a dynamic factor that seems to remain central to theoretical processes of mainstream integration today. From these central sources and extending to contemporary studies there remains a conceptual tendency to project assimilation as progressively

unidirectional in nature and optimally culminating in a mono-cultural Americanized identity.

3.3 Contemporary descriptions

Twenty-first century theories of assimilation and integration continue to describe the social marginalization of ethnic minorities through explanations framed around the experiences of immigrants and their descendants. Extrapolated and ill fitted to native-born ethnics centrist explanations often serve to reinforce marginal status and convey the general idea that exclusion is the result of extended ethnic retention or individual incongruity with structurally modern society (Estes et al. 2000). Despite the demographic changes that globalization has wrought discussions of universal integration continue to project linear modes of assimilation for native-born integration thus, indirectly precluding the conceptual and real possibility of inclusion and accommodation outside of mainstream parameters. The increasingly global nature of social and cultural diversity in western society draws attention to the dynamics of integration as demographic shifts challenge the established character and identity of national images, ethnic relations, and political hierarchies historically dominated by Whites' (Pearlman 2005; Rojek 2007; Tomson and Cruel 2007). Thus, the minimal attention previously given to native-born minorities and the social place of transnational citizen colonials has gained attention as the effects of large scale migrations and growing minority populations in core nations are creating integrative challenges.

Through a systemic approach, synthesizing structural and cultural theories helps to illustrate and explain how human capital and cultural orientations affect processes of assimilation and integration (e.g., length of process, multiculturalism, and/or amalgamation alternatives). Contemporary cultural and structural studies investigating socially integrative processes approach the subject through extensions of Robert Park's race-cycle model and the life-chances that human capital affects. Intuitively from a de-centered perspective such arguments suggest that beyond modern capital (e.g., skills, knowledge, money) individual must also carry specific cultural capital (e.g., middle-class non-pejorative identity, American social etiquette, language) to ingratiate themselves with mainstream citizens and groups (Macias 2006:22-23).

Nevertheless, remaining conically central to explanations of non-assimilation and marginalization is the attribution of individual choice as the source of modern exclusion and marginalization. Within contemporary frameworks the negative effects and obstructions created by racial, cultural, and structural biases emanating from the mainstream and which limit capital accumulation are given less casual emphasis. From centrist projections individuals bearing valued and in-demand capital (e.g., investment capital, knowledge, and technical skills) are able to access horizontal currents of structural and cultural assimilation meandering towards the established culturally composite mainstream (Alba and Nee 2003). While still dependent on acceptable ascription the accumulation of human capital significantly impacts the extent of integration which an individual accomplishes.

3.4 Cultural descriptions and segmented inclusion

Segmented cultural theories of integration explain adaptive differences by contrasting the integrating trajectories of white-ethnic immigrant waves with contemporary post-1960's non-white minority streams. Early twentieth century Chicago based canons myopically emphasized straight-line processes of mainstream assimilation into one Anglo-centric American culture. Contemporary assimilation theory contends that previous immigrants had only one American cultural flow to navigate (assimilate) into. Progressively, and unlike established canons, discussions by theorists Alejandro Portes and Ruben G. Rumbaut (1996) widened the scientific gaze and described multiple sub-cultural streams into which immigrants and their descendants choose to drift in or out of. From this perspective, individual choices govern assimilation and affect acculturated accommodation into either the social mainstream or marginalization into deviant native ethnic minority sub-cultural currents and enclaves (Parrilo 2008; Perlman 2005; Portes and Rumbaut 1996; Telles and Ortiz 2008).

According to Alejandro Portes and Ruben Rumbaut's (1996) minorities can relinquish their primary ethnicity and gain structural incorporation through the adoption of mainstream values and prosper, retain both cultures and remain marginal to both worlds, or acculturate and assimilate into minority counter-cultures and enclaves living on the social and economic fringes.

The first theoretical projection asserts that individuals disposed to adaptation actively acquire, or pre-poses through skills and credentials, both social and cultural forms of human capital necessary for mainstream incorporation. Canonically this conformist

trajectory re-affirms textbook race-cycle descriptions of assimilation as well as demonstrating the most potential for gaining mainstream acceptance.

In the second instance, minorities and other social cultural go-betweens can accumulate the necessary human capital and achieve class mobility by exploiting intermediary positions and networks. However, in instances of marginal existence the duality of the social place accorded their bi-cultural status could possibly make them suspect and marginal to mainstream and minority environs (Gordon 1964; Reisman 1954).

In the third alternative self-segregation into ethnic enclaves and acculturation into deviant “rainbow underclass” lifestyles creates institutional, geographical, and individual constraints and barriers to accessing integrative social networks and resources (Gans 1997; Portez and Rumbaut 1996:45; Saenz, Cready, and Morales 2007; Waldinger 2003:248).

Extended to native-born experiences segmented approaches purport to explain the lack of upwards mobility and integration among marginalized ethnic groups in the U.S. on their ethnic retention. Interpretively and from a critical perspective, segmented descriptions suggest that marginalization is the result of selective attachment to sub-cultures and value-sets that make it difficult for individuals to cultivate the human capital necessary for achieving mobility and mainstream integration. Once again, centrist descriptions detract from the socially embedded prejudices that reject ethnics and create enclaves of exclusion where critical institutions are inadequate, inaccessible, or non-existent. Segmented sub-cultural trajectories invoke mainstream standards and

describe one rewarding and two penalizing linear trajectories of self-achieving integration. Transmitting linear predictions and pathways to integration onto native-born minorities, whose status remains circumstantially dependent on multiple factors beyond individual choice (i.e., phenotype, race, class, and ethnicity) and structural economic conditions, obscures centric expectations of conformity. Similarly, as illustrated by the theoretical misfit between the experiences of structurally integrated professionals, there is a complex diversity that circumstantially dependent social place and identities produce that linear arguments' cannot adequately describe amidst modern diversity (Macias 2006; Pearlman 2005; Telles and Ortiz 2008).

Within the context of the xenophobic rhetoric heard in the U.S., and the European resentment of non-white colonial return migrations, social structural exclusion on the basis of maladaptation's to structural forces and social environmental conditions permeate the discourse (Pattie, Seyd, and Whiteley 2004). Once again transferring responsibility to individuals portrayed in the popular conscious as inherently different and responsible for their own state of marginalization and lack of success (Stanfield and Dennis 1993).

3.5 Structural approaches and marginal accommodations

Alternatively, from a de-centered and bottom-up interpretation, structural approaches re-formulate race-cycle assimilation theory to suggest that human-capital dependent integration and class-based adaptation has promoted the emergence of a dual-axis process of structural accommodation and cultural integration for immigrant and native-

born minorities. To illustrate, the reformulation of assimilation theory by Richard Alba and Victor Nee in *Remaking the American Mainstream* (2003) horizontally expand the mainstream to include the racial and cultural diversity that globalization has produced. Structural explanations of assimilation contend that modern legal institutions and structural economic necessity have reduced barriers to opportunity and integration for human-capital bearing (e.g., knowledge and technical skills, investment capital) immigrants and native-born. Access to institutions and constitutional mechanisms have helped minorities cross ethnic barriers by increasing access and protections from discrimination. Earned rewards and upwards mobility allows minorities to move into predominate white communities where overtime interactions reduce the social distance and boundaries between groups (Alba and Nee 2003:62-63). Similar to race-cycle canons, vertical class uplift and inclusion for immigrant minorities' results from education and training that makes better wage opportunities available and residential mobility more likely. From this perspective, social and economic marginalization results from a failure to self-invest and acquire dual forms modern human capital. Conceptually similar between classic straight-line theories and today's structural explanations is the emphasis that human and cultural capital affects individual trajectories of integration. Contemporary centrist re-formulations demonstrate how modern social constructs have evolved a multidimensional process of inclusion/exclusion involving structural adaptation, social economic mobility, and class-based cultural adoptions (Perlmann 2007). What they fail to realize is that the institutional and social barriers out of

marginalized geographies are formidable and do not provide the equal access as do non-marginal situations.

In brief modern integration, compelled by economic growth and systemic necessity requires the universal incorporation of skilled labor regardless of individual characteristics such as race or ethnicity (Fernandez 2007; Zelinski 2001). Individuals with no marketable human capital encounter occupational and economic barriers to occupational integration and upwards class mobility. From a centered perspective, in a universal society, human capital deficiencies relegate minorities to low-wage status jobs and culturally marginal lifestyles where penalized and constrained by environmental conditions. Thus, the racialized caste-like modern social and occupational order is a result of ethnic (e.g., traditional) retention and not the cumulative legacy of institutional exclusions that the dominant group has intentionally and un-intentionally used as a means of advantage.

From a de-centered Marxist perspective, remaining sub-textually central to structural approaches is that assimilation into a dominant ideological mainstream remains the optimal endpoint of integration. Structuralists' perspectives of modern integration conflate and interpret social mobility with demonstrated acculturation, assimilation (Gans 2007; Kahn 2001). Originating out of western intellect, inclusive adaptations comprise of ethnic minorities conforming to the needs of modern development as defined by Europeans (Eisenstadt 2000). Material and class disparities result from individual differences in human capital value. In the context of re-formulated race-cycle

models, contemporary integrative expectations represent class-based social structural accommodations into the established order (Alba and Nee 2003; Featherstone 1995).

Innovative as structural re-formulations may be the work of sociologists Alba and Nee (2003) represent optimistic re-formulations of race-relation cycle approaches. From their perspective, the social mainstream, that ambiguous social location where racial and ethnic factors have the least impact on life chance, has altered under immigrant currents and their cultural contributions to reflect a diverse and inclusive de-racialized society. To illustrate they describe the core as Western centered (e.g., high-culture) and diminutively point to the culinary and entertainment (e.g., low culture) ethnic contributions manifested in pop-cultural rituals and celebrations. Thus, the American mainstream has functionally evolved into a complex of different ethnic practices set within structuring ideological beliefs, institutions, and cultural continuity established by early Anglo immigrants.

Structuralists' reformulations of assimilation perceive that this universal incorporative dynamic continues among contemporary immigrant flows and native-born citizens but at differing rates and according to individual capital accumulation. Moreover, it is out of this central cultural source, they assert, from which acculturated minorities today continue to draw from and construct their own structurally compatible Americanized ethnic identity at their own extent and pace. Over time all differentiating categories that separate groups would become irrelevant and of no consequence. Such optimism ignores the die-hard social cultural and institutional barriers that obstruct class mobility for the differentiated. Attached as it is to material cultural standards class

position would enable the capacity to acquire and recognizably demonstrate the symbolic tokens of inclusion attached to mainstream society.

In part pluralists streams of inclusion are 21st century ideological kinfolk to Milton Gordon's ethclass categories in that both conceptualizations, the multidimensional and new assimilation theories, project cultural homogenization (e.g., acculturating assimilation) and class mobility as central to universal processes of assimilation and modern structural integration. Then as now, class status, demonstrated through the consumption and display of status producing objects, symbolically represents and materializes an individual's capacity to integrate according to and having met mainstream normative standards. Occupational and class marginalization symbolically signifies an inability to access and capitalize on the benefits of modern institutional changes and producing incomplete acculturation and integration (Alba and Nee 2003; Gans 2007). All the same, much like in the early twentieth century acculturation today does not necessarily concede an inclusive or receptive sense of equitable social place within the American social mainstream.

Perceived as progressive, new assimilation and segmented theories provide limited explanation or description for the social place that structurally compatible individuals such as the ones in this study achieve and are afforded. For structural and segmented views, minimal and/or incomplete acculturation explains why racialized minorities fail to benefit from new mainstream inclusion but gain marginal accommodation into the ethnic-caste like occupational economic hierarchy.

In the multidimensional context of re-modified assimilation and segmented theories of inclusion, integration is described not only by vertical class mobility but also by horizontal accommodation within acculturated currents flowing parallel to the central mainstream. Upwardly mobile and capital bearing individuals could theoretically navigate in the direction of central cultural flows and access institutions that lead to integrative structural economic inclusion (Fernandez 2007; Zelinski 2001). The economically less fortunate, while acculturated would still suffer exclusions and constrained by the social and institutional barriers associated with marginal positions. Alternatively, ethnics could create their own sense of social place along cultural and geographical borders.

3.6 Deconstructing the canons and apostles of assimilation

Analysis of assimilation theory by Stephen Steinberg (2007) and Herbert J. Gans (2007) reveals a connecting thread of logic between early twentieth century race-cycle and contemporary cultural and structural descriptions. Both place the cultural center around the Anglo middle-class normative model of inclusion just as classical canons did a hundred years. They also subsume the native-born experience into the immigrant context. Taking into consideration the demographic differences and structural changes over the last century, generalized grand-narratives and external based methods developed at a different time, place, and with different groups may not be suited or provide direct insight into diverse processes of contemporary native-born integration and culture (Featherstone 1995; Singer 1977; Smith 1998; Steinberg 2007).

From the Chicago school's canonical foundations, consistent lines of racialized discourse continue to dominate the discussion on immigrant and native-born integration. Stephen Steinberg in *Race Relations a Critique* (2007) deconstructs the works of Robert Park and traces the conceptual foundation for race-relations approaches to experiences with Booker T. Washington prior to his placement at Chicago University. Herbert J. Gans through journal discussions titled "*Assimilation*" and "*Pluralism*" (1997) and in *Acculturation, Assimilation, and Mobility* (2007) interpretively sees classical canons and contemporary pluralist paradigms as biased products of the indirect interpretations of researchers seeking validation for their own legacy as once outsider and now internal ethnics. Through both discussions, critical de-construction and de-centered interpretation suggest that race-relation cycle explanations continue to detract from the racialized prejudices that Anglo-American epistemology has embedded into western society and the modern social order (Stanfield and Dennis 1993).

Fundamentally, this study begins with the critical point that centrist perspectives of marginalized populations are outsider-to-the-subject-based and provide limited direct insight into processes attached to present-day experiences of integration (Estes et al. 2003; Gans 1997). Critically speaking, all observed data is interpreted through how the researcher makes sense and understands any information and experience (Omi and Winant 1994). Aside his secretarial tenure with Booker T. Washington, Robert Park's race-cycle summations were in part derived from fieldwork conducted by him and graduate students observing mostly white immigrant inner city minorities in Chicago.

Interpretively both experiences seem to have influenced his perspective on integration. At the time, both men optimistically saw the racial uplift of colonial minorities in terms of civilizing them out of poverty and into a modern world through education and technical skills development. Thus advancing the latter described conflation that assimilation into the Anglo-Saxon white standard was a civilizing progress and the cumulative end for modern social incorporation (Featherstone 1995). The possibility then emerges that under Booker T. Washington's tutelage Robert Park conceptualizations of modern integration and cultural racism were intellectually diffused to subsequent generations of race scholars (Steinberg 2007).

Within a generation anthropologists Lloyd Warner and Leo Srole reaffirmed race-relation models with their perceptual emphasis of class mobility as a concurrent part of linear assimilation into the mainstream (Gans 2007). Warner and Srole interpretations of structural and cultural dynamics can be seen as similarly projecting assimilation model descriptions developed at the Chicago school (Gans 1997: 886; Steinberg 2007:114). It would take an unrealistic mind to accept that all white-ethnics integrated according to an overly idealized predictive model. For some immigrants the ethnic retention and enclave residence temporarily extended the integrative process as previously noted. However, Warner and Srole portrayed enclaves as part of the transitioning process where temporary acclimation took place and was thus an integral part of assimilation processes (Steinberg 2007:127). As per their model, gainful employment, class mobility, and migration out of marginal places exposed ethnics to mainstream culture and provided a

socializing environment where middle-class Anglo values could diffuse and replace ethnic ones.

Disregarding the structural and cultural effects of racism, canonical projections assumed that the retarded nature of minority assimilation would come to its own functional and irreversible conclusion under the influences of rational individualism and modern development (Alba and Nee 2003:10-15). The minimal reference given the experiences of colonial minorities by later generations of canonical scholars summarized that as a group their processes of assimilation could be indefinitely extended because of cultural retention and racism (Alba and Nee 2003:3; Gordon 1964; Zuberi 2001:90).

Returning to Steven Steinberg's (2007) and Herbert Gans' (2007) analysis of race studies Milton Gordon's *Assimilation in American Life* (1964) is noted as another elaboration of race-cycle models. Expanding on the work of previous scholars Gordon introduced categories sustaining assimilation as the dominant process of integration. In contradistinction to previous external based top-down approaches, Milton as an ethnic Jew himself can be framed as arguing for the inclusion of acculturated American Jews at mid-century. Both Gans and Steinberg interpretively suggest that Gordon and other post-WWII race scholars were ethnic minorities themselves whose generational process of assimilation had progressed into the final stages of integration and were thus seeking validation for their heritage. Demonstrated through the acquisition of modern lifestyles what acculturated and accommodated middle-class white ethnic intellectuals were arguing for was their sense of inclusive social place within the American mainstream (Steinberg 2007:121).

Academically, mainstream twentieth century studies represent the *Zeitgeist* of the times and so we must recognize that they are also a reflection of the established theory and evolving ideologies through which racial inequalities are reproduced. Steven Steinberg points out that “the (historical) call for cultural pluralism seemed more a plea for tolerance than a radical re-visioning of the Nation” and thus questions the objectivity of race-cycle theorists and their studies (2007:121).

Indeed Herbert Gans (1997) extends this argument to contemporary race and ethnic scholars re-asserting assimilationists’ paradigms into 21st century immigrant and native-born experiences. As descendants of un-hyphenated European ethnics their post-integrative perspectives have no direct marginal experiences and essentially provide an assimilationists’ narrative that validates their own sense of integrated heritage and popular expectations.

Interpretively derived from Herbert Gans discussion contemporary reformulation of assimilation theory extends the cannons by socially re-configuring the American mainstream as a cumulative composite of diverse immigrant cultural contributions. Conceptually Alba and Nee’s definition of the mainstream locate it as the place where race and ethnicity have no detrimental influence on life chances (2003:11-12). Culturally they situate the mainstream as centered on Anglo-American history and institutions. In doing so, from a bottom up perspective, what is projected is that the mainstream is an ideological construct that makes the boundaries of inclusion identifiably insubstantial and amendable over time (Waldinger 2003). Fluid boundaries and shifting standards of inclusion allows hegemony to re-define the standards of

inclusion and exclusion for minorities. Critically, conventional outsider-based modes of inquiry tend to downplay and ignore how irrational and counter-productive exclusionary factors like racism and ethnocentrism compromise the objectivity and progressive stability of a modern rational system of development.

3.7 Synthesis of theoretical perspectives

Canonical research for the most part discusses individual dynamics within over generalized processes of acculturation and structural integration. In most instances, descriptions primarily focus on group dynamics and often fail to ground themselves to real life by generalizing their findings instead of utilizing individual experiences to illustrate theoretical assertions. C. Wright Mills through his discussion of the sociological imagination advocated the significance of describing human activity within social and historical contexts, in this instance, modern history and individual structural integration. Because of the complexity and diversity of modern society, this work describes individual integration by synthesizing contemporary structural theories and individual micro responses of self-determination.

As a means of theoretically bridging modernity-based descriptions of development with the social structural history affecting individual actions, this discussion synthesizes Anthony Giddens (1990), Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (1990), descriptions' of modernity with Gary S. Becker (1964) and his collaboration with Kevin M. Murphy (2003) conceptualization of human capital as a way of illustrating the hypothetical market relation between modern institutions and individual strategies of

structural-cultural adaptations. In doing so we also illustrate how factors such as racialization and cultural orientations play into processes of integration. Macro constructs are then grounded with micro actions observed through an ethnographic approach exploring the background assumptions developed by participants' within the context of regional enclave emigration, return, and post-experiential sense of integrated social place.

3.8 Fundamental exclusions

This analysis of race-cycle projections of individual structural occupational integration and acculturation imply that the concepts have been conflated into a singular linear process of assimilation. Doing so has distracted attention from structural biases and prejudices that compromised the models predictive and explanatory capacity. Inescapably, what the canons failed to anticipate is that the historical exclusion of racialized minorities has instead caused ethnicity to reactively persist and remain central to contemporary minority group self-attribution and ascribed social place (Telles and Ortiz 2008; Zelinsky 2001). In contradistinction from a centrist perspective the inability of minorities to achieve conformists' expectations is considered as resistance. This then reinforces the perception of structural cultural incompatibility that then serves as tautological logic for their ascribed marginalization (Estes et al. 2000).

Modernists' scholars such as S.N. Eisenstadt (1974) and Mike Featherstone (1995) contest this narrow range of compatibility asserted by western epistemology. Instead, they argue, modernity's evolutionary diffusion is neither linear nor pre-determined to

produce a globally homogenous and universal culture. To help explain this fundamental logic of exclusion particular to western thought Israeli sociologist Eisenstadt (1974) through meta-analysis points out that sociological theory has dichotomously conceptualized tradition (i.e., ethnicity) as static and modernity as progressive, mutually exclusive, and fundamentally antagonistic in nature.

Sub-textually what we can garner from his article is that uncritical sociology fundamentally continues to portray the relation between tradition (e.g. ethnicity) and modernity as existential opposites unable to coexist. Modernity is progressive and rational while tradition is emotional, static, and oppressive of individualism. Any deviations from expected paths of human development are interpretively considered abnormal and contrary to progress.

3.9 Parallel perspectives

In essence, mainstream discussions disagree with the possibility that integration is taking new functional forms outside canonical expectations. The underlying objective concern being that integration through conformity creates stability by maintaining the established power structures and social order. Functional deviance away from linear assimilation would put hegemony into question and the privileging of modern western centric thought. S.N. Eisenstadt (2000) discusses the multiple forms of modernity that are being formed by culturally specific and local adaptive responses. All along the southwestern border, where tradition and modernity create a frontier of modern development and ethnic cultural adaptation that blurs national and cultural borders.

Popular thought on both sides of the border disconnect the region from its dual national origins and isolate the region and its people unto themselves. In turn, mutual rejection creates a particular environment and perspective in that the excluded learn to be aware and operate in a world of existing and fluid boundaries in multiple settings characterized by social and cultural diversity. Out of the marginal context the social position and identity of Mexican American is constructed and runs parallel with the histories of both nations.

Supporting and illustrating the arguments for the emergence of modern cultural diversity are the findings of political scientists Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel's research described in *Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy* (2005). Their multi-national investigation leads them to reformulate modernization theory away from hegemonic predictions and to propose that unique cultural forms are emerging from springs that reflect modern values and local/traditional culture. Scrutinizing human development as they do points out that in addition to structural alteration modernization also initiates empowering changes in individual and group value-sets that encourage political and cultural self-expression (2005:32). Based on the rise of individualists' values people become intellectually and socially aware of their choices for political cultural expression and draw from the many sources that modern globalization provides. Survey explorations of modernity's diffusion suggest that in contradistinction to western hegemonic expectations, individuals are grafting their own cultural adaptations and identity by combining traditional sources and modern lifestyles.

Synthesizing modern and cultural theory serves to juxtapose local experiences within the framework of structural hegemony that represent and transmit the characteristics and circumstances of mainstream inclusion. Parallel and localized description of human development such as this one allows us to explore the diversity of contemporary and independent integration. The dis-embedding and constructionists nature of modern society and culture allow ethnics to integrate without relinquishing ethnic cultural attachments and orientations as race-cycle theory proposes. Investigating the multiplicity of trajectories at the micro level provides social scientists a means of gaining a broader understanding of responsive accommodations in other locales undergoing similar social, demographic, and structural changes.

3.10 Structural considerations

Through *The Consequences of Modernity* (1990) Anthony Giddens description in part provides the institutional-structural context for this discussion. His emphasis on the relation between the nation-state and economic processes of development lends description to the structural forces dominating the history and lives of the region and its population. At its crux, both Mexico and the U.S. have mutually pursued neo-liberal policies as a means of national economic growth and the modernization of the borderland regions (Browne et al. 1994). In the geographical and economic context of deep south Texas economists' John B. Anderson and James Gerber account of the Lower Rio Grande Valley's industrial development in *Fifty Years of change on the U.S. Mexican Border* (2008) illustrates the role Giddens' grants to the nation-state in terms of

its invested relation with capitalism and regional development (2008:56-57). Parallel explanations of the regions development serve to critically argue how profit oriented remote interests and extractive exploitation have influenced State decisions more so than local interests and/or considerations (Browne et al. 1994; Lorey 1999; Johnson 2003; Telles and Ortiz 2008). The bi-national border zone also exists under a state of increased law and regulatory surveillance as both governments attempt to control material trade and human traffic. Easily categorized as a high intensity corridor for both legal and illicit trade a multitude of police and military operations perceptively delimitate the border and contribute to the conceptual marginalization of the region and population. Bi-lateral investment and development have brought quality of life improvements towards the stage of human development and awareness that empower individuals and groups to pursue their own determination (Inglehart and Welzel 2005).

Contemporarily, the regions socio-demographic and modern economic growth has increased the number of professional occupations. Subsequently, the need for credentialed labor has also increased. In part, some participants pointed out that the growing availability of professional employment was part of their decision to return to the region. From a structural point of view of assimilation, upwards mobility provided Mexican-American professionals the means to adopt middle-class lifestyles modeled according to mainstream references if chosen (Ramos-Zayas 2001). However, unlike previous ethnic experiences, assimilation and integration have taken a distinct course as the racialized identity ascribed to Mexican Americans' in general has persisted and served as a continual referential basis of identity and general marginalization. Extended

local awareness of external social and cultural distinctions has created a definitive sense of ascribed otherness and subcultural affirmation.

3.11 Bridging structure and human action

Focused as Giddens theory is on the structural institutional aspects of modernity he minimizes the role of human agency by excluding from the discussion the culturally hybridizing and emotive responses modern development stimulates. Including how the ethnocentric biases administrators and competitive nature of capitalism compromised the systems objectivity and the equitable distribution of benefits and advantages (Eisenstadt 1993; Inglehardt and Welzel 2005; Kahn 2001; Zelinski 2001). Responding to exclusion has led to ethnics to respond with innovative strategies that exploit the elements made available by modern diffusion to create their own sense of social place.

From a structural standpoint, although structure and people are mutually determinate, modernity and the advantages it provides induce rational individuals to abandon traditional practices and cultivate strategies for advancing their life-chances beyond ethnic customs. Structurally embedded dominant discrimination materialize in the human social economy materialize as cultural prejudices and institutional boundaries that prevent equitable inclusion. George Ritzer (2008:390-404) explains that through Anthony Giddens perspective the structural centrality of capitalism within the system itself is ontologically materialized as rationalized practices of human activity socially determined and defined in terms of marketable value within the system itself. Successful self-marketing through achievement provides occupational opportunity and

structural integration but in the context of the modern division of labor, development and incorporation have outpaced the ability of hegemony to reproduce it self. Critical history demonstrates how biased the Eurocentric administration of modernity has been. As such, it was inevitable that human development and self-realizing empowerment would bring about demands for change from once oppressed groups demanding equality and the rights and benefits of inclusion promised by modern human liberalism.

Drawing on this logic of individualist economic determination to the retrospective experiences of participants, the decision to leave was partially based on the pursuit of self-fulfillment and of course, the material rewards that success would enable for them. Modern institutional access, through education, the military/government service, and economy, provided avenues towards accomplishment, class based rewards, and the cultivation of human capital conducive to inclusive social re-definition for minorities.

As a means of theoretically connecting the economic relation between modern structure and human action, the research turns to the works of economists Gary S. Becker and structuralists Pierre Bourdieu to posit how contemporary inclusion is contingent on structural and cultural conformity. Through their concepts of human and cultural capital combined the research argues that the rational-economic presumptions which under gird contemporary structural explanations of integration are also biased by western epistemology and expectations of structural utility (Eisenstadt 1974; Kahn 2001). Functionally individual status, value and reward are set according to systemic needs. From a synthesized structural cultural viewpoint, the research utilizes the concepts of human and cultural capital as abstract tools with which to describe how they

affected the individual structural integration and mainstream inclusion of professional minorities in this study. Structural presumptions also preclude the possibility of structurally successful responses outside of established epistemological imagination.

3.12 Micro dynamics and human capital

Drawn from economics, Becker's (1964) along with Bourdieu and Passerson's (1990) concepts of human and culture capital can be combined to bridge the theoretical relation between individual social orientations and mainstream integration. Extensions of their concepts provide the theoretical means by which this research frames culture, language, social background, identity orientation, as components of human capital. Within contemporary sociological economic descriptions both forms of capital function as currency for the social marketplace and field where individuals utilize operative and network strategies for advantage within the competitive social order (Portes 2000; Becker and Murphy 2003). Through theoretical synthesis and by critical extension this argument asserts that societies use institutions to cultivate and reward the systemically necessary human capital that promotes the reproduction of the established social order and the ideological beliefs that benefit and validate the status quo (Bourdieu and Passerson 1990).

Becker in *Human Capital* (1964), *The Economic Approach to Human Behavior* (1976), and in subsequent work with Kevin M. Murphy (2003), broadly contextualizes human capital in an economic and market framework in that any expenditure towards education, training, migration, schooling, and information, is perceived as a form of

investment with the potential to improve the life chances and quality of life for individuals. Derived from these perspectives self-investment through education and specialized training increases earnings that lead to class and residential mobility the hallmarks of structural integration and inclusion according to the canons of assimilation. Mentioned but largely left out of the discussions are the subjective aspects of human capital that can function as currency within the social market and in human interactions to improve the chances of being integrated into the dominant social and cultural mainstream. These materialize as barriers to inclusion in the form of cultural prejudices and institutionalized discriminations.

3.13 Hegemonic reproduction

By way of theoretical fusion, Bourdieu and Passeron in *Reproduction in Education* (1990) present that the non-material aspects of modern integration are socialized and cultivated through educational institutions and a rewards system that privileges existing western epistemology as natural and reproduces class-based hierarchies. Within the lines of structural cultural logic it can be argued that as necessary as objective modern skills and knowledge, so too are the cultural orientations learned in schools that serve to reproduce the dominant values that functionally integrate individuals into the system of structural rewards and existing social arrangements (Dumais and Ward 2009; Heyting, Kruitikof, and Mulder 2002).

3.14 Social rewards and inclusion

Mexican American scholar Angela Valenzuela provides description and example to the above dynamic in *Subtractive Schooling* (1999) through which she investigated the educational experiences of Mexican American youth attending a Texas high school. Based on her two-year ethnographic observations she demonstrates that educational institutions are not as objective as presumed. Schooling, in the cultural context of Mexican American values goes beyond formal education and includes learning etiquette through experience or exposure. Her observations lead her to suggest that rather than using both formal and informal aspects of a students' cultural and linguistic knowledge and heritage to create functional bi-cultural and bilingual students the schools through curriculums and social pressures "subtract these characteristics from them to their social and academic detriment" (1999:25). For example, culturally there exists an emphasis on familial obligation as a value that could be used as soft coercion and remind/urge students that their obligation to the family also involves to progressively move forward through education. Instead, from an external cultural perspective students are told that such ties are a detriment to their futures. Based on her observations and interviews with students, faculty, and administrators she concludes that those students who are able to learn and incorporate the knowledge and values of Anglo-American English dominant culture are rewarded with support and encouragement to pursue the American dream. Students who retain their ethnic orientations were channeled into curriculum tracks better suited for low-wage labor industries preparation instead of higher education and middle-class opportunity.

3.15 Advantages and adaptive strategies

This reproductive dynamic of successful integration and rewards are theoretically illustrated through the assertions of contemporary American sociology. Fundamentally, segmented and new assimilation theories imply that the learning of culturally dominant mainstream values, preferences, and nationalists' American identities, socializing acculturation through public education, aligns individuals with modern opportunity structures and mainstream cultural orientations. In line with Becker's concept of human capital investment, both approaches invoke acculturating education as central to ethnic mobility out of marginal enclaves and towards integrative American middle-class, residential and occupational, environments where immersive processes of assimilation will over time transition them into mainstream status and inclusion much like immigrants and ethnics in the past (Perlmann 2007; Roedigger 2005). Analogous to canonical projections segmented and new assimilation theories reflect social reproduction assertions and project upwards mobility and acculturation into the middle-class American standard as crucial for modern structural and national cultural inclusion.

Critically, contemporary sociological descriptions of public education are synonymous with Bourdieu and Passerson (1990) theory of reproduction as a tool for reproducing hegemony. Analysis of established studies suggests that in the U.S. minority individuals who develop valued credentials and nationalists Anglo-American cultural points of self-reference are in most instances provided institutional access to opportunity structures, social economic returns, and integration (i.e., class mobility, status, prestige) (Leimgruber 2004; Murguia and Telles 1996). In contradistinction,

ethnics that retain minority traditional cultures are described as experiencing downwards assimilation into deviant segments of native-born societies (Portes and Rumbaut 1996). Isolated in ethnic enclaves', labeled deviant, and marginalized minorities find it difficult to overcome social structural constraints to mainstream institutions and opportunities (Telles and Ortiz 2008).

Returning to humanist S.N. Eisenstadt's (2000) assertions and critically extrapolating to circumstances, what we can also garner from his article is that mainstream sociological paradigms fundamentally continue to portray the relation between tradition (e.g. ethnicity) and modernity as existential opposites unable to coexist. Native minorities insistently framed through the immigrant context, are described as marginalized on account of their retention of traditional culture considered incompatible with modern western society. Fundamentally, cultural structural explanations hold that all non-western societies are mired by ethnic traditions considered irreconcilable with modern structures (e.g., western civilization) and human (e.g., civilizing) development (Eisenstadt 1974; Kahn 2001; Featherstone 1995). Consistent with canonical and contemporary theories is the expectation that tradition will give way to modern forces and civilizing progress. Reacting to mainstream exclusions human affection and attachment to that which grants them a sense of social place and identity continues to imbue value to local customs and local social orientations in the face of stratifying exclusions. Structural accounts rely on individual non-conformity to explain the choices and decisions of that create their marginality. Cultural explanations frame non-western ethnic societies as irrational, static, dysfunctional, and thus unable to operate

functionally in modern environments. Neither gives any regard to how the prejudices and discrimination affect structural determinants and the social place of individual lives. From these narrow perspectives, marginalization results from individual choices not the structural cultural dysfunctions of a compromised system of social determination.

Overall, generalized descriptions of assimilation in most instances do not ground their theoretical contentions with realistic processes of integration and/or marginalization. Deviation from expected paths of human development and assimilation are typically dismissed and considered self-created and an impediment to individual progress. Generalized descriptions of assimilation ignore the experiences and narratives of minorities that successfully integrate into modernity and create new cultural forms and racial definitions. Despite the challenges that structural marginalization creates for minority populations the Mexican Americans in this study have managed to cultivate structural requisites and cultural acumen to achieve success according to the standards of mainstream American society without the cultural jettison. Moreover, it is because of the lack of focus on successful marginal groups and their adaptive strategies that the research chose to investigate the experiences of this cultural sub-group considered to be on the vanguard of changes to and redefinitions of Mexican Americans in the United States.

4. Methods

4.1 Parallel narratives

Contradistinctive to most integration studies this research investigated the experiences of successful non-immigrant Mexican American professionals through their own retrospective narratives. Through postmodern methods and from a parallel perspective, by focusing on marginalized groups mainstream inquiries fail to consider the experiences of citizen minorities beyond their own epistemological expectations for assimilation (Collins 2000). Most often, conventional discussions narrowly perceive social class mobility, acculturation, and residential migration away from ethnic communities' and into the American social mainstream as the cumulative functional end to integration. In the case of the present group under study, integrative accommodation has taken a parallel path and produced cultural forms that are redefining social and ethnic boundaries in the U.S.

4.2 Critical ethnographies

This section of the research effort is guided by the methodological suggestions of ethnographer D. Soyini Madison. Through her work in *Critical Ethnography* (2005) she provides ethical guidelines for ethnographers in the field. Critical ethnographies require investigators to begin their projects out of a sense of "ethical responsibility" to alter the inequality of specific subjects "within a particular lived domain". Doing so requires investigators to "resist domestication" and disrupt established assumptions that externally define situations and "obscure operations of power and control" (2005:5).

Entering into unfamiliar and little explored social places demands that ethnographers resist methodological constraints as these encourage constrained understanding, uncritical thinking, and limit the ability of the non-marginal to imagine life outside the mainstream. As such, empirical methodologies become the means by which theoretical descriptions are grounded with the living experiences and social conditions of the little explored. Therefore, critical ethnographers should not hesitate to use their subjective position to access “the voices and experiences of subjects whose stories are otherwise restrained and out of reach”. In this way, ethnographers can “probe other possibilities that will challenge institutions, regimes of knowledge, and social practices that limit choices, constrain meaning, and denigrate identities and communities” (Madison 2005:5-6).

Imaginably positivist approaches would find disagreement with the above recommendations and would dismissively insist on quantitative validation of any conjectured assertions. Nevertheless, the complexity of fitting quantitative data and generalizing it to the subjective experiences of individuals would be quite challenging considering the diverse structural transitions and social transformations involved in processes of individual integration (Lofland and Lofland 1995). Sociologists Thomas Macias succinctly states in *Mestizo in America* “aggregate trends do not make good predictors of individual cases” within a population as diverse as Mexican-American and Latinos (2006:117). His interview studies focused on the integrative experiences of third-plus generation Mexican Americans living in the southwestern United States. Pointing to the limitations of most conventional studies he notes that most focus on

particular immigrant subgroups through ethnographies, oral histories, and case studies that extend our ethnic knowledge of the cultural richness that exists amongst Latinos in America. Furthermore, demographic studies, with exception, often provide quantitative descriptions of macro based affects but seldom connect observable trends to individual responses in the context of theoretical and/or highlighted changes. Critically, Macias points out that even when connections between quantitative data and qualitative information are made they are typically within the context of immigrant populations and their descendants existing on the social and cultural margins of a host society (2006:117).

Exceptionally among demographic investigations of native-born integration is Edward Telles and Vilma Ortiz's *Generations of Exclusion* (2008). Their discussions propose that group-level experiences can help to describe the general effects of integration but that individual trajectories are still buffeted by a wide range of contextual forces beyond their control. Culled from a multigenerational study of Mexican Americans in Los Angeles California and San Antonio Texas the authors describe some key factors influencing contemporary assimilation. Through their comparative survey analysis they note education gained human capital as the most significant direct influence affecting individual processes of social inclusion. Directly their findings point out that the current generation of non-white middle-class respondents tended to have educated parents and/or access to economic and social resources available for human investment, another key factor and advantage in contemporary social class mobility and structural integration. Furthermore, economically successful and socially mobile

individuals are more likely to adopt the linguistic and cultural elements of the American mainstream and identify less as an ethnic and more as an American (2008: 274; Tafoya 2004). Not surprisingly, conversations with research participants reflected Telles and Ortiz's key assertions in that with no exception all noted the importance of education and training in their occupational careers and accomplishments as enabling of their mobility.

4.3 Structural cultural accommodations

Distinctively, because of its centrality in Mexican American history, Telles and Ortiz's (2008) longitudinal description argues that unlike European immigrants racialization, ascription along a racial hierarchy of social value and place, along with institutional and cultural prejudices have indirectly retarded social structural process of assimilation and integration. Critical evaluations of history and structural development suggest that intentional and un-intentional institutional practices have disadvantaged minority and marginal groups more so than cultural attributes or value sets (Murji and Solomos 2005). To illustrate, public schools through inadequate funding and curriculum tracking under prepare students and reproduce social status quo. Extrapolating from Telles and Ortiz's discussion and synthesized with Valenzuela's thesis of subtractive schooling we can envision a process whereby ineffective schools affect the quality and quantity of education received by Mexican American youths (Ream 2003). Poorly educated, ill prepared for contemporary labor markets, and relegated to lower-paying occupations the cycle of resource deficiency and stigma that limits education and

mobility for Mexican Americans duplicates itself for the next generation and compounds the obstacles delaying integration.

Nevertheless, the conventional focus on immigrant categories and marginal ethnics, while revealing of processes of integration, or more precisely the lack thereof, tends to leave out the parallel and structurally self-accommodative experiences of native-born non-immigrant ethnics hard pressed to fit into existing racial and ethnic categories (Gonzales 2000). Their identities and social place is dependent on the ascribed status that dominant cultural images and the definitions of academia and popular culture provide for them (Macias 2006; Davila 2008). Garnered through analysis of media studies, ethnographic field work, and interviews this research provides an insider perspective derived from participant narratives as they describe the background assumptions through which they understand and construct their own sense of social place within these particular experiences. As such, their narratives provide direct insight into processes of functional, non-deviant integration outside of narrow-bound objective mainstream explanations.

4.4 Data sources and sample selection

As in any study this work began with a literature review and historical analysis of modernity in relation to the south Texas borderland region and its development. Included in the secondary sources were analysis of economists, anthropological, psychological, and sociological investigations of the Mexican American population,

social and cultural history, and the role-played by modernity in the regions settling and development.

Primary sources of data for this project were the narratives of research participants themselves. As a means of grounding theoretical descriptions to individual experiences the voices of those living processes of structural integration provide direct access and insight into these particular chain of events related to the social cultural integration of native-born professional minorities.

Thirty participants were interviewed during 2008-2009 and were selected based on characteristics recognized by canonical projections as key for assimilation. Theoretically, the combination of class and residential mobility increases the potential for integrative structural mobility and social re-definition. Participants were chosen based on their achieved status as professionals who have resided in communities among a predominant Anglo-American population and the integrative environment it represents. Demographically, according to 2009 government census figures, only 12.9% of the population has a bachelor's degree in Hidalgo County. As such, the sample represents a sub-minority among the total county population. In most instances the pursuit of professional credentials and occupations provided individuals the means for class mobility and residential migration out of marginal ethnic environments like the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

Access to interview participants developed according to a snowball process of references among subjects. Primary contacts with interview pool were obtained through acquaintances, personal introductions, and serendipitous opportunity. After a brief

introduction, where respondents were explained the research purpose and interest to investigate their retrospective sense of social experience, interviews were relatively unstructured and allowed to proceed at their own thematic pace. Participants were given expressive liberty with their narratives except for the basic questions that guided the conversations. In most instances, the flow of their biographical narratives presented opportunity to introduce basic questions as a sequence of conversations guiding queries. The questions were proposed and respondents were encouraged to approach the theme with as much detail as they were comfortable to explore.

Participants ranged in age from twenty-four to fifty-two years. Age parameters were not purposely selected. The basis for pool selection was that individuals had already attained their credentials and established themselves as professionals in their respective fields. In addition, an extended period of time and opportunity to reside in non-minority dominant communities and work in integrated environments was also a requirement.

Some interviews were single session while other subjects, as circumstances allowed, were gracious enough to provide multiple opportunities for interview and follow-up visits. A brief list of participant occupations is as follows; veterans and active duty soldiers, educators, lawyers, students, law enforcement personnel at local, state, and federal levels, and self-employed business owners.

Sex was not an issue in participant selection. However, interview participant breakdown amounted to twenty-one males and nine females. Individual narratives did suggest that there were experiential differences in parental expectations that reflected traditional gender patterns and expectations when individuals contemplated whether to

leave the familiarity and structure of home or venture. Since the focus of this structural integrative research is insight into a particular set of events dealing with ethnic individuals' and their general sense of social place, the inclusion of gender differences was unsolicited and included only when interview participants raised the theme themselves.

Participants themselves typically chose interview locations so as to afford them an environment of comfort and ease in which to express themselves. Sights ran the gamut from social gatherings (parties, family reunions), public places (restaurants, bars, and coffee shops), personal/ workspaces, and their homes. Interview conversations were conducted in English and Spanish. Only a few were English monolingual, most were bilingual and shifted between English and Spanish as is the common practice along the border.

4.5 Embedded field methods

Approached as ethnography the research data was collected through single and multiple interviews whenever participant schedules permitted. Innovatively, the relation this native-born regional researcher has with the national and cultural borderlands, the population, their history, and integrative experiences created an opportunity to approach the subject as an embedded investigator. In part serendipity and in part inspired by de-centered perspectives developed by feminists, structural, and critical race theorists, this unconventional and direct approach to empirical study allows the researcher direct understanding and localized exposure to the processes being investigated. As Soyini

(2005), Donnan and Wilson (1999) suggest through their discussions, position and immersion provides grounded basis for the observation and understanding of local experiences and subgroups.

Questionably such an approach would presumably have the potential to compromise the researcher's observations and interpretation of subject narratives. Never the less, investigating the social margins from the center also creates biases of observation and interpretation concealed by an epistemology of deception and distraction. External researchers' risk biases when interpreting their observations due to their lack of direct insight and empathy. Critically, their interpretations are clouded by cultural judgments born of established dominant ideologies and hegemonic reproduction. Subjective and de-centered narratives may contradict the researcher and his/her preconceived certainties and encourage them to dismiss parallel and critical assessments of established social and intellectual arrangements (Stanfield and Dennis 1993).

Responding to the methodological limitations faced by external investigations this ethnography provides direct insight into this particular chain of integrative events and their cumulative result. Through the subjects narratives the study explores the social and ethnic sense of place retrospectively developed in light of their interactions with mainstream American society. Collected from the marginalized the study gives voice to a racialized native-born ethnic population silenced and subsumed under the preconceived notions of assimilation. If the findings are interpreted as subjective let it not distract from its potential for exploratory discovery and the grounded insight it provides to descriptions of modern integration. Any such failings should be attributed to

mine own inability to interpret and articulate the observed and not to the concepts of cited scholars and the experiences of individuals who inspired this effort to understand.

4.6 Limitations

An obvious limitation to this description of integration processes is its lack of generalization to all Mexican American and Latino groups. Never the less, it does provide insight into local response to social structural changes occurring along the borderlands of modern American society. Social scientists have an obligation to provide descriptions connecting social structure and individuals so that in this way we can gain understanding and empathy of human dynamics outside our own narrow experiences. Using participant narratives to construct a grounded description of integration and social cultural adaptation provides the opportunity for the process to be described by those undergoing the changes.

Furthermore, macro-structural to micro-individual theoretical explanations could be reproached as tenuous descriptions at best and have a tendency to come-off as an author's attempt to bend observed knowledge to their own theoretical conjecture (Macias 2006). Moreover, while that may be the case here let it not detract from its usefulness as a legitimate source of scientific description and interpretation of how individual strategies of self-determination play out on the cultural and geographical borderlands. As globalization, modernity's vehicle of diffusion, expands into underdeveloped regions, it will continue to encounter borders and boundaries. In part, our scientific obligation to humanity is to expand the horizons of thought and knowledge. As such, humanity's

capacity for intellectual development is only restricted by the boundaries of narrow intellect and sociological imagination, our capacity to provide answers to what is unassumingly experienced and which will hopefully lead to more questions and not epistemological dismissal.

4.7 Contributions

As ethnography, the research contributes insight into a small portion of marginal society and some of the background assumptions that have guided their decisions. Indirectly, as ubiquitous as references to the concept of mainstream society are it is more easily identified by oppositional states rather than its' concrete or abstract existence. Directly, description and discussion of the margins and marginalized populations using these critical and subaltern methods delimits the boundaries and tolerances of mainstream society and culture (Leimgruber 2004).

Above all by infusing a macro-structural context to micro-ethnic experiences the research provides imagination a conceptual window with which to observe and further analyze similar processes in other borderland areas of structural and cultural integration. Not only in terms of modernity's diffusion and the manner in which minority individuals innovatively adapt to structural changes outside dominant expectations to create parallel social and cultural forms, but also in the sense of how race and ethnicity fit into modern social and cultural hierarchies.

5. INTERVIEWS AND FINDINGS

Giving sociological interpretation to the voices of study participants provides a method to explore lived experiences within theoretically contextualized descriptions. Examining how individual actions and institutional mechanisms have influenced the structural and cultural integration of Mexican American professionals gives research a means of identifying patterns of ethnic minority adaptive inclusion into modern societies.

The guiding interview questions; why did you leave, how would you describe your experiences there, why did you return, what is your sense of cultural identity, and narrated responses are described within the dynamics of structural modern integration into culturally mainstream society. Through process of rationalization, individuals left seeking opportunities and human capital necessary for success in a modern world and economy. In many of the cases individuals returned out of feeling of what can be described as traditional obligation and/or attachment to family. Some participants described the emotional sense of comfort that comes from living in the cultural and geographically familiar homeland. Nevertheless, retrospectively and just as before they left, the shared sense of identity among interview participants conflates cultural orientation and citizenship into one category; American. The cultural directions participants are oriented towards and the next generation's social sense of self are discussed. Their opinions argue that in a borderland environment individuals that can operate in both, through a sense of unrecognized social cultural fluidity, appear to have an advantage.

The historical cross border ties, a majority Mexican origin population, and the continuous influx of immigrants, generate an unavoidable bi-national population and environment (Anderson and Gerber 2008). English primacy and practices of subtractive schooling in public education, the influence of mass media institutions along with recent government border-crossing restrictions have narrowed bi-cultural and bi-national influences and lifestyles (Valenzuela 1999). As such, institutional affects do seem to have had a generational effect and produced a noted re-orientation away from strictly Mexican identities and nationalists attachments among participants. Successes within U.S. institutions have been rewarded with opportunities for social economic mobility and access to integrative environments. However, unlike the narrow projections of race-cycle and assimilation models, ethnic retention persists in an Americanized form reflecting cultural amalgamation on the border of two distinct countries. Mexican American borderland professionals have adapted and adopted their own sense of social place and identity out of modern values and their bi-cultural heritage.

5.1 Departure

Most of the interviews began with the simple question, why did you leave? Single and in her mid-thirty's Ms. Color has a degree in communications and left the Lower Rio Grande Valley in 2000. Over drinks at Applebee's our conversations on two separate occasions drifted in and out of theme as she described the different places she traveled around the Caribbean with her previous job rating resorts and selling advertisements before migrating into her present slower paced job...

SUB: I guess that I wanted to experience something different...something not here. There was nothing wrong with here...I was working after graduating college and living on my own close to family and friends. There was really no reason to go other than wanting to experience something else.

INT: Did you find what you were looking for?

SUB: Yes. I moved, found a good paying job with a travel magazine. It was great, my job allowed me to meet people with different experiences to speak of. Sure there was some adjustment to living in the big city but I can't remember anytime feeling excluded because of race or ethnicity.

INT: How long were you there?

SUB: Six years.

Ms. Black /Houston/3rd gen.

Not all subjects were young people striking out on their own for the first time as testified above. Mr. Gomez, a man of strong Christian faith from eastern Hidalgo County can be described as mature in age (early fifties) and primarily motivated by responsibility. A self-employed bookkeeper, he departed the region after obtaining skills through a state-funded skills training program. Sitting in his at-home office, throughout the interview in conversation, and between two servings of chili sauce and fresh tortillas cooked by his wife, he spoke of his family and the success of his four children; two have bachelor degrees, one is a Baptist minister, and one home-maker daughter living close by. Through hindsight, he altruistically cites his motives as an attempt to look for higher wages and seek a brighter educational future for his children. An objective he feels he accomplished...

SUB: We left in the mid-eighties after I had received some bookkeeping training and had had no luck finding the kind of job I wanted here. We packed our things, we only had three children then, and did not have more than what could fit in one truck anyway. I wanted a better paying job in a place where my children could get a better education. So, we left to Ohio where through some people I knew helped me to find a job working for a state program that served the needs of migrant farm workers. We helped them to find housing and gave out vouchers for utilities bills or for clothes for their kids going to school and things like that. I spoke both English and Spanish and was able to accommodate myself

as a valued member of the staff because I could easily communicate with both Anglo co-workers and the mostly Hispanic community we were serving.

INT: How long did you end up staying there?

SUB: 18 years.

Mr. Gomez/Ohio/2nd gen.

Classical migration theory asserts that most migratory experiences begin as a search for resources not available in the local. The particular resource that motivated individual migratory experiences differentiated among participants' and usually represented ambitions for accomplishment, job opportunities and training not available locally, and or the elusive and ethereal "something" that drives humans to wandering. From these examples emigration out of the southwest, and in line with migration literature, is more likely when participants carried some human capital; training, education, and or access to social networks that provided information for and facilitated the geographical transition as it did for participants (Saenz, Cready, and Morales 2007).

Illustrated by the initial voices above and the inferred similarity with other narratives we can deductively interpret that the decision to leave for the majority of participants were motivated by the pursuit of personal goals, ambitions, and accomplishment. From a rational choice perspective, individual decisions were based on calculated costs and benefits analysis of real or imagined returns. The distinction the subjects imbued the region, its culture and people through their narratives suggests that participants are consciously aware of the regions definitive separateness in cultural and geographical terms. Moreover, it is out of the awareness and differentiation that the lower region of south Texas is constructed by internal and external sources as a place with a distinct

population and character (Nostrand 1970; Martinez 1988). At no point was a rejection of the region or its culture part of the decision to emigrate.

On the contrary, and illustrative of the borderland's cultural uniqueness described by Oscar Martinez (1988), during interview conversations participants described different ways that some holidays are celebrated in Mexican American culture (e.g., Easter festivities, summer vacation pilgrimages to Mexico to visit distant and old relatives, nativity parades, thanksgiving/bowl weekend visits from college, etc..) that blends elements from both nations. Their conversations also demonstrated that the emergent culture is indeed modern as it combines what is environmentally available from the media and the cultural memories that have shaped their lives. Despite any sub-cultural alteration in ritual, and in common with the American mainstream, most of these customs symbolically revolved around the value and centrality of familial, religious, and nationalist celebrations.

Through these retrospective narratives, it is interpretively described, through modern rational and economic frames of human behavior and development, that even if it was beyond their own calculating awareness, many of the subjects had invested in themselves with either skills and/or educational credentials before leaving. Gary Becker (1964) discussed human capital and defined it in economic terms of investment through education, skills, training, and investment into the self as a means to improve earnings. Research participants achieved and wanted to go beyond minimal education and sought opportunity through academic, economic, and government institutions the literature considers the structural mechanisms for integrative mobility. These sources and their

biographies provide support for the assertion that self-selective individuals departed the region with awareness of and the intentional pursuit of opportunities estimated as not available in the south Texas region.

Recognizing the common basis for leaving draws attention to the subaltern question if there were any personal or otherwise resistance to their departing. The easiest and most obvious categorical breakdown for their responses was along gender lines. From a critical perspective, stereotypes of Mexican American culture often highlight the macho-male tradition-based authority of male patriarchy. While not to say that it does not exist, narrative analysis of subject opinions on the matter suggests that in the majority of cases parental concern revolved around their safety and well-being regardless of gender as it would imaginably be expected from loved ones in most other cultures. Miss Diaz a gun-toting Federal employee with a can-do attitude from the central valley in her early thirty's relates...

SUB: My father was set against it at first and my mom was not thrilled either. Because I was going into an all-male environment at the academy of course, they were worried. I was committed and had a couple of months to convince my father. In the end, he was more worried about me being (i.e., emotionally) hurt by failing the training than being taken advantage of in any way. Once I knew that, I was able to convince him I would be just fine. I let him know how serious I was and explained the confidence I had, how I was preparing myself. Slowly between my mom and me, we assured and convinced him.

INT: What if he had not changed his mind? Would you have gone anyway?

SUB: Yeah. I would have. It would have made things harder by having that between us for a while but I think that eventually he would have accepted it.

INT: What about now? How many years has it been since then?

SUB: About nine years ago (1999). My dad is very proud and still helps me move each time my job has re-located me.

Miss Diaz/Phoenix AZ./3rd gen.

Conversely, among the male narratives, depending on which institution they were accessing parents raised similar concerns. Imaginably the elevated risks involved in military service during the current extended period of war were well warranted. Civilian participants enrolled in universities or involved in professional occupations did not face such critical situations but also described similar parental concerns for their well-being.

5.2 Reception and experiences

When the conversations in eventuality evolved in the direction of perceived or possible threats, and in attempt to probe their own notions of what they expected outside of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, the opportunity was taken as an opportunity to introduce the next question; how would you describe your experiences there? Being that the study's central theme is concerned with subjective descriptions of integration, or the lack of it, and the marginalizing potential that their individual social and ethnic differences might present in their respective migratory destination, it seemed like a self-emerging point of conversational transition.

5.3 Military trajectories

Descriptions of military life differed but some general points can be culled from their perceptual narratives to provide examples of how the institutional context and the participants' gender, in their own estimation, played a more dominant role in shaping their interactions than was their being Mexican American in most cases. John R., a Gulf

I army veteran turned police officer, dismissing the racist boundaries being probed at by the research, describes...

SUB: Growing up mostly in the valley you hear about how things (e.g., race relations) are different outside the valley. How the people do or do not get along. You hear the experiences of others so you kind of have an idea of what to expect. My parents and grandparents had told me stories of how they had been treated when they were young here and there. So you already have an idea of what could happen. In the military things are different because of the rank system. There people have to respect your rank regardless of your color or where you are from...while on duty. Sure like anywhere else you could get off the base and run into people who you could tell did not like you being there. You assumed that it was because of the uniform not because of color. Besides, I never worried when I went off base because I would usually be with a mix bunch of soldiers who would give me back-up. When I lived off-base the complex I rented at was mostly other military types and their families so the rules kind of carried over.

INT: So can you remember ever feeling uncomfortable or self-conscious by sensing that you were not welcome or respected in any situation because of your ethnicity?

SUB: Not really, I had some rank, I am a fairly big guy and don't look Latino or Hispanic or whatever.

INT: Did you ever see anybody else singled-out on his or her ethnic identity?

SUB: Sure. Sometimes you saw it. Once a sergeant was getting on the case of some enlisted guy and called him a spic before he sent him off. Afterward, I called him on it and asked what calling him a spic had anything to do with giving him his orders. I reminded him of the name on my chest by pointing at it. You should have seen him backtrack and try to explain how it was just an expression and that he was not a racist or anything like that. I let it go.

John.R./South Carolina/4th gen.

Female participants who enlisted in the military consisted of Army veterans.

According to their narratives they did experience prejudice and disrespect while in the military but felt that it was more likely based on their gender not race or ethnicity and the testosterone driven environment according to one commentary. As enlisted personnel they knew that they were joining a traditionally male institution and expected some form of verbal gender based harassment.

One narrative in particular illustrates the negative extremes that female military personal can experience. Ms. Sol, two years out, now works as a manger for a call center while she studies for her bachelors in psychology. Her narrative describes the racists' sexual harassment that soured her military service. In her narrative, she described how another soldier regularly made sexualized references about her ethnicity. She would complain but the chain of command was in her opinion ineffective and slow to respond. The harassments continued, increased, and progressed to the point of sexual assault. Through hindsight Ms. Sol, who served as a supply specialist in war-time Iraq, angrily summed her description in terms of the gender prejudice she sensed during her service...

SUB: It (e.g., confronting the sexists/racists environment) didn't matter. For almost two years, I worked and put up with the male macho bullshit you would expect in the military. If you complained, investigations would drag on until someone was shipped to another post. If it ever was concluded the punishment would be the least harsh possible. In the end, you heard the nasty rumors and then you begin to feel that the rest of the people you work with are avoiding you because now you're seen as capable of blowing things out of proportion and as a potential source of trouble.

INT: So what was the result in your case?

SUB: I was moved and things just went on.

Ms.Sol /California/4th gen.

From interviews with both male and female veterans what stands out in terms of their sense of inclusion is that gender and ethnic based ascriptions remained part of individual identities in the military. From their commentaries, the services as total institutions and its ranking system suppressed some of the overt racialized acts of discrimination. However, gender based inequities and ethnic prejudices remain part of the experiences for both females and males respectively. Interpretively, according to both male and

female admissions, personal slights were tolerated so as to not antagonize the quality of the remainder of their time within the ranks and among their peers.

Others', mostly male, military experiences were generally more positive. Soldiers serving in integrated and specialized units (military intelligence in one case and as part of a deployable trainer detachment in another) felt/perceived no hostility or disparate treatment. Asked if they thought their experiences were common for Latinos in the military, they replied that in current time of war yes.

Interpretively summarizing the responses of this subgroup suggest that their shared insight appears to be based on the assumptions that working within small-specialized groups over an extended period allowed them to develop close relations with the individuals they worked with regardless of their race and/or ethnicity. Suggesting that, at least within the military, the structured nature and gendered contexts of the interaction in conjunction with group-size dynamics contributed to the sense of integrative inclusion that participants developed. Once out of the military their experiences within the civilian world and institutions they moved onto typically followed the same patterns as civilian participants.

5.4 Civilian trajectories

Interviews with civilian participants suggest that their experiences were similarly affected by ethnic ascriptions. Deduced from their shared experiences, these voices draw a broader picture of public and interpersonal interactions not tempered by the rigidity of organizational structure. For descriptive purposes again the findings draw

experiential distinctions along gender lines as the characteristic with the most salient basis for differentiation within the sample. In addition, the analysis also takes into consideration the self-described phenotype of participants who introduced it out of a sense that it was a situational component in their interactions with mainstream whites.

Contemporary political literature and social theories interpretively argue that the contingent and intersected basis of a socially constructed identity are highly dependent on the cognitive basis of individual ascriptions (Nagel 1994; Collins 2000).

Retrospective analysis of participant voices suggests that Mexican American identities are defined through individual distinctions composed by the situational intersection of gender, ethnic, class, and racialized ascriptions. Critically, in the modern context of mediated communication, the materials for said construction are drafted from post-emotional media fabrications and racialized assumptions that are used as grounds for exclusion (Davilla 2001; Kahn, 2001; Mestrovic 1997).

Sitting in a cigar bar on a Friday afternoon, a place I've become more familiar with since being introduced to it by subject participant, is where the first of multiple conversations began with Mr. Lawrence, a serious minded late-thirty's attorney and former veteran. He describes the way in which he became aware of the difference...

SUB: I attended school in west Texas and was excited about living on my own in a different place and meeting new people. Growing up and going to school in McAllen my whole life I had always been fortunate and did well with not much effort. Being a varsity athlete (tennis), I always felt welcomed no matter where I went and never consciously experienced any kind of discrimination that I can speak of here. Growing up when traveling with family, I do not remember feeling or ever noticing that kind of treatment. None of us looks Hispanic or Latino, or whatever. It could be easily said we look white and blended in wherever if you want to ask things that way. It was an unusual realization for me. I didn't go through all this who am I now introspection or anything like that

but it did make me slightly more aware of how others might see me. Settling into the on-campus housing, I had met my roommate, he was a white guy from San Antonio, and we got along just fine. Classes started. It was when I met his friends, who I suppose were not from San Antonio and not used to being around Mexicans that I guess I can say I noticed a little difference in attitude . One day I went to the theatre with my roommate and a group of his friends. We went to watch “The Mexican”. After the show on the drive I realized that there was a lot of references to “you guys” when they would talk about the different scenes in the movie (by his post-interpretive description “you guys” implied the Mexican actors and stereotyped over-derisive characterizations of their screen parts and their identification of him with them, never mind that the movie is about a small-time white American hoodlum). Looking back, I realize now as a possibility that I was being placed in the same category and being made fun of by association.

INT: Did it bother you at the time enough to speak out?

SUB: No.

INT: What about now?

SUB: Not really but I think that most of those guys had never really been around people like me. Once they realized my last name was (Hispanic) I felt that their attitude towards me changed.

INT: For example, in what way?

SUB: I do not remember being invited to the movies again by Tim and his friends although we roomed for two semesters. I mean I hung around with Tim some and we were still friends. I just don’t remember ever hanging around with those friends again.

INT: What about at that moment?

SUB: They asked me questions like where I was from, how long me and my family had been here, when and where did I learn English, do we still go back to Mexico, what is it like to live ‘down there’? Hmm, what can you say, I think they were just trying to figure out whether I was from here or not. I suppose I was trying to explain to them that I was from here.

INT: Do you think you convinced them?

SUB: I am sure I did. If it made any difference to them, I couldn’t say.

Mr. Lawerance/Texas/3rd generation

While not always so passive the interrogation of an individuals’ ethnic and national identity by Anglo acquaintances reappeared in the narratives of both male and female respondents. Interview participants who self-defined as having a dark complexion (e.g., saw themselves as ethnic), out of their own experiences, were aware of the differences

that phenotype can make in the presumptions that Americans make about nationality and social place.

Attending universities throughout United States a few spoke of the social isolation they initially felt and the difficulty they had tolerating and adjusting to the sense of marginalization they felt. Among both males and females that pursued this particular trajectory the narrative included a few descriptions of their effort to fit-in and enjoy the on and off-campus student social life that major universities offer. Either as athletes or on full-ride scholarship this minority recollects telling their story of how and when their families came to become Americans one to many times.

Living in western Hidalgo at the time of the interview Mr. DeSilva, a forty-five year old former customs agent turned teacher and Missouri graduate narrated...

SUB: In the course of the 1st day of arriving and settling into the athletes' dorm and meeting others being a minority became almost routine. You've been through this before I am sure...When first meeting others everyone goes through the motions of describing who and where they are from. When it would come around to my turn, I would explain from where I was and the extended questions would begin. In one way or another someone would eventually get to asking if it was on 'this or that side' (e.g., of the Rio Grande river) 'where did you go to school', 'where were your parents born'? Perhaps they were genuinely curious at times but it seems like I was asked more questions than the others were and they typically came down to me explaining that I was from here and not an immigrant or the child of immigrants. I was interested in pledging that first year. I approached two different fraternities and at each the question of whether I was a citizen would come up.

INT: Does it matter where you are from to join, or pledge, a fraternity?

SUB: I do not think so. But it would be asked. Then over the course of mingling someone would suggest in conversation how some of the other fraternities on campus were more Latino oriented and worthy of me checking them out.

INT: So did you join any? How did you feel about that?

SUB: No. In the end, those things cost extra money that I did not have. I was there on scholarship and would not spend it if I'd had it.

Mr.DeSilva/Missouri/2nd generation

Their identities similarly interrogated by colligate peers some female participants in hindsight felt the emotional sting of class prejudice and social differentiation. Mary Elizabeth, currently a math teacher, enrolled at a South Carolina university in 1999. Except for the barely noticeable accent, her description can be summarized as normatively transparent and non-ethnic in appearance. His grandfather had immigrated during the *bracero* era and brought his wife by the beginning of the nineteen fifties. Her parents had met and married as summer migrant workers in the fields and packing sheds throughout the mid-west until they settled in the lower south Texas region. Even then, she and her siblings were also summer migrants into their high school years but without the early withdrawals or the late registration typical to seasonal laborers. Her parents would return earlier than other families so that they would not miss attending school. A fact she recognizes as her central to being able to do well in school and continue to college. In her narrative, she too described the extended “I am from here” explanations and the increase in social distance she sensed from others once her identity was ascribed ethnic minority status. In addition, her speculation invoked class before ethnic differences as the basis for her sense of marginalization...

SUB: At times I felt so isolated...the life of a social reject was mine. For the longest time I convinced myself that it was me being overly sensitive. Now, in retrospect, I think that it was not just my ethnicity but my economic class too. I could not afford to live off campus. The Latinos on campus, met in a class or a party here or there, were not from the U.S. or were from the East coast New York area, or Florida, so I felt little in common with them and I am sure they felt even less with me. They (girls she would approach) would be friendly and talk to you and after listening and getting to know each other a little, it would dawn on me that we had nothing that we could relate to each other. I even tried getting a boyfriend for a while but it was just casual and pointless.

INT: What about Anglo-Americans, whites....could you relate to them? Did you feel accepted and included when around them?

SUB: Yes, the guy I dated was white. The people I dorm-ed with were friendly. But whenever they did things...like go on trips to each other's homes or weekend trips for this or that always seemed like an unaffordable expense on my very limited budget. I never accepted and after some time they did not ask anymore.

Mary Elizabeth/South Carolina/3rd generation

From their retrospective insight, this sub-group of participants who took the scholastic route noted in their conversations that perhaps in diverse university settings where rapid racial and ethnic integration occurs, statuses potentially create tensions and social boundaries could have affected all involved. Synthesized from their opinions they suggested that many of the formative events conducive for social maturity and the ability to accept/tolerate others have yet to occur or are still in process. Not just among the dominant but among minority individuals too.

After graduation and into the professional work environment the narratives suggest that interactions improved and were interpretively described as more accepting and inclusive. Imaginably, in their professional occupations, and much like the military veteran narratives, small, close quarter, interaction over an extended period provides opportunities for members of the dominant group to move beyond preconceived notions and stereotypes that can affect the lives of ethnic minorities. Some spoke at length of the relationships they established then and that continue today with all the intimacy that opportunity, distance, and modern communication/travel allow.

5.5 Business trajectories

In part, some of the college trajectory participants' spilled-over into the subgroup of narratives that took business opportunities after graduation in Anglo dominant

communities ranging from Metropolitan cities like Chicago to small rural hamlets in Georgia. A few had graduated from local universities in south Texas and moved northwards seeking better wages elsewhere.

Mr. Frank, in his late thirty's moved to Georgia (and back) with his Anglo wife, originally from there, whom he met while she was on Christian mission with her parents. Both his wife and he have degrees in education from Pan American University. Initially, she was first hired by the local school district in her Georgia hometown and took the job with the expectation that he too would eventually be accommodated once a position became available. So while waiting he opened a small Mexican breakfast and lunch place. He smiles with self-content, broadly, as he tells his story with a noticeable drawl, picked-up from years living in the South according to him...

SUB: Yes. I felt I was very accepted you could say. When I met the banker for help financing my business, he was very excited. I was amazed at how fast all the paperwork was processed and approved. I was even asked to go to the chamber of commerce meetings and join as part of the business community, mind you all this before I was even in operation. It was very strange but how the hell was I going to refuse...I needed something to do. You know. I opened the doors to my business and all went really well. Hand over fist, the community responded and business was steady and good. Eventually in time....about four months, me and Frank the banker became good friends beyond the chamber of commerce meetings and the business relation....enough to go to each other's homes with our families for football Sundays' and stuff like that. Over the course of time, I kind of figured why or at least had my suspicion why things were so open. In the community, blacks were the minority and of course, most of them were working class poor people. At the chamber meetings I had noticed that there were no black members in attendance....In the chamber commerce member photo I was positioned not in the middle, but not too far on the periphery either. You see? Well things went fine and all good. Everyone was nice to us (as he would later say "we had three children now teenagers that are as dark-skinned as I"). After about a year and a half a position opened up at the school and it was time for me to close the business and go back to teaching. When I informed Frank of my decision, the first things out of his mouth were "how are we going to show our diversity now".

INT: Were you offended by that? Then or now?

SUB: No. Not at all. He was right. We remained friends and he later on explained that they had been eager (the bank and the chamber) to help him start his business with those intentions because they finally had a minority walk into the bank with potential (cowboy assumed a degree), some capital, and minimal risk. It was their way of having diversity on his client list and in their association.

Mr. Frank/Georgia/4th generation

Correspondingly female participants who followed the business path spoke of their sense of inclusion. Much like other respondents, most of them when asked admitted that they too on occasion went through the extended version of explaining themselves to their new friends, coworkers, and acquaintances. Among their friends and co-workers, they admit to being identified as a minority but not as the only minority in their respective Anglo-dominant occupations and destinations.

Four of the females interviewed shared similar integrative experiences in cities like San Antonio, Austin, and Dallas Texas and as far north as Michigan. Three of the young women were single and had remained in Texas cities after graduating and finding jobs. From their recollections they sensed very accommodating experiences among their peers and truly enjoyed their time there. One of the females married and moved when her husband, now a production engineer, landed a job in Michigan. Living in the mid-valley at the time of the interview, she had worked in the insurance industry 12 years when they decided to move back. In her narrative, she stressed how she experienced rapid (less than 3 yrs.) occupational mobility in Michigan because of her bilingual skills...

SUB: The move was somewhat intimidating at first being away from family and all the people you are familiar and comfortable around with. My husband had relatives living around the capital so it was not as if we were going to be completely isolated among strangers but still it was a little intimidating.

INT: Did you experience any difficulty in making new friends either at work or the community in which you lived in? Did you ever sense any sort of bias towards you, or you thought you were treated differently, because you were a minority?

SUB: Yes, but I don't think of it in a bad way. It was about two or three months into my job at ____ when someone asked if I would assist translating a phone call. I agreed. Dealing with that one client turned out to be on a regular situation. Phone calls became documents and letters eventually I was promoted, sent for training, and moved to another office within the company to a position that dealt mostly with the accounts of foreign clients. I was the only Latina out of three translators.

INT: What about outside of work did you have any bad experiences within the community as far you sensing that you were not welcome, or accepted by the Anglos you interacted with?

SUB: No not at all! My husband made friends with his co-workers. We tended to socialize more with his and their friends then we did with the people I worked with. One couple among his friends were involved in an inter-racial marriage so it felt like everyone was kind of open about our ethnicities and we often kidded each other around and made fun of one another with racists type humor.

INT: Could you give an example?

SUB: Well for example, whenever we would get together for cookouts and swim parties everyone would contribute a dish. Of course, we always brought Mexican food... and other stuff like that, our friends liked our cooking and would often poke fun and make jokes about their 'Mexican cooks' just like at all the best restaurants. But of course it was always in good fun and we did our own poking. We would make fun of our inter-racial couple friends by asking them how they would decide on what type of food to bring... would it be black food... would it be white food... what is white food? These things were never said in hurtful way with bad intentions it was just a way of getting along. My husband worked at _____ for over 8 years. Even after he changed jobs, we remained friends with the same group of people. All of us were close. I don't believe we could have been saying those things to each other if we weren't.

Mrs. Ricardo./Mich./3rd gen.

By way of snowball sample, Mrs. Ricardo was gracious enough to refer the research to her husband Mr. Ricardo who willingly shared his perspective of their experiences. Like his wife, he too could not remember any sort of overt hostility worth recollecting. As a production engineer/manager and liaison between the floor and the shop he described himself as the only minority in an office dominated by white males. Mr.

Ricardo in his early forty's through his voice, reflects a color-blind strict working-man work ethic and attributes it to his having worked his way-up from the factory floor, through college, and into management. His decision to leave the valley of lower south Texas was for finding better paying jobs and broader career options. Family relatives on his mother's side had migrated to Michigan in the 1940 and 50's so there was an established social network and extended family that influenced their decision to choose and settle in the area. He describes his relationship with his co-worker and friends...

SUB: Among the group of people that we had as friends I really do not think color had anything to do with it. It was a matter of working. It did not matter, we all worked at the same place, and if you worked hard alongside with us, you were one of us.

INT: What about out in the community outside the circle of immediate friends?

SUB: No one ever called me a dirty Mexican or anything like that. Sure sometimes having conversations with people in general they would say things like 'you people' typically when referring to a question about Latinos or Texas...usually related to something they had seen on television, but I never saw it as racism or anything like that because I never felt that insult was intended. I am not saying that it isn't out there but the working people that I associated with were about the things they did which was work. Don't get me wrong, I had plenty of 'where are you from' conversations but once you got past that it was about the working hard and sharing good times. If it did come up among our friends it, was matter of teasing each other not about excluding, or hurting each other's feelings.

INT: So in general how would you describe your time there? How many years did you stay?

SUB: We stayed about 12-13 years. My eldest daughter was four when we left and seventeen when we came back. I would say that it was a good time. I went and accomplished all that I wanted with my career and myself...went to school got a degree, landed a great job that I enjoyed, and made really good friends while there and shared some wonderful experiences with them. We still have property there and return to visit at least once a year. I always think that at some point we may even move back if need arises. I suppose that if things take and economic turn for the worst we can always return and look for work in a larger job market.

Mr. Ricardo./Mich./3rd gen.

5.6 Return reasons

Allowing the course of the narratives to guide the questioning, and in light of the positive heartfelt descriptions attached to their experiences and success outside the Lower Rio Grande Valley, the rhythm of conversation materialized the moment to ask why they returned. Typically, the most common answer was “family” alone, or in conjunction with another factor, at the request of aging parents who wanted their children close by, some spoke of satisfaction with their accomplishments and success in their respective careers enough to relocate back to the places they grew up. Among those with children some returned out of a desire for their children to live among and experience life with extended families and relatives. Similar to mainstream, values, the narratives of native-born Mexican Americans explained and described the centrality of family in their lives and the emotional and physical attachments they have to the region as the basis for their return.

Mr. Weatherford, a public school teacher explains his experience. He, his Anglo wife and three children, moved to the valley at the request of his ageing mother in 2008. He had been living in northeast Texas for sixteen years. Straight out of college, he landed a job and remained in that region. While living and teaching there he met and married his Anglo wife of fifteen years...

SUB: My father had already passed away a few years before we moved back. I had been visiting the valley every weekend family holiday like Easter, Christmas, Thanksgiving, mothers' day, and at least one extended-stay over the summer since I married fifteen years ago. Both my wife and I were noticing that since my dad's death it appeared as if she (his mother) was aging fast (at interview age 71). I mean to say that she could still get along on her own, drive, shop, and my brothers and sisters living here visited and checked on her regularly so her safety and being able to meet her needs were not too much of a concern. On one of the

Christmas trips down here, she asked if we would consider moving back. She explained that as she was getting old she wanted to have all of her children and grandchildren close by to enjoy them. Both my wife and I are teachers and we figured we would have no problems finding a job down here. We discussed it on the road trip back, weighed out the pro's and con's, decided yes and began to prepare to move and sell the house we owned then. We moved at the beginning of the summer 2008.

INT: Your wife and children, how did they respond to moving to south Texas?

SUB: My wife had no problems. She had been and spent enough time down here to know where she was going. She likes it down here, except for when it is really hot in the summer's, and was ok with the move. My children, at first my eldest daughter who is now 19 did not want to. My two boys are younger and were eleven and nine when we moved, were excited about moving closer to grandmas and the ranch.

INT: What about now? How do you see your decision?

SUB: No regrets. Both my wife and I found jobs teaching in____. My children have gotten used to living down here...even my daughter has settled in. Sure, there are some things that we do miss like the house and friends we had known all those years we that lived up there. But we are home now, our jobs allow us to have a good life here, there are many old friends and our family is close by.

Mr. Weatherford/ East Texas/ 4th generation

Other participants noted how the regions recent economic development has created employment opportunities with government agencies and private industries that allowed them to earn as much as they would outside the region and be close to their families. The demographic growth in the region has also created the need for credentialed professionals with experience to meet the needs of a growing population and sub-urban expansion. Infrastructural development has also improved the quality of life as noted by some of the return immigrants. Most often, they were referring to the availability, and being able to afford, of entertainment, retail options, and the more obvious improvements in regional highway transportation and medical services.

Ms. Gwen, a fortyish state employed mental health counselor living in McAllen at the time of the interview, spent eleven years living in the central Texas Austin area. She too

returned to the valley four years past to be close to her family after a divorce, to raise her two boys among relatives and the extended family she experienced growing up in western Hidalgo County. She animatedly describes her return...

SUB: It was so nice to be home. The divorce had been very difficult for me raising the boys in the big city was not easy. I found myself a single-mom and felt like I spent the majority of my time driving around between school, daycare, and work. My brother and sisters still lived in the valley. The boys' father had left they did not take it too well at first but after a while, my ex had moved away and does not make too much of an effort then nor now to be around them, as young as they were they seemed to adjust and adapt to it just being us. It was not too difficult of a decision to move. I needed the kind of help that only family can provide. Moving back was great as everything is so much closer here; my sisters and I watch and sit each other's kids. My boys enjoy their grandparents, cousins, and now that they are a little older, it makes a big difference. Although we live in different cities around the valley we get together often. The freeway improvements make getting from one side of the county to the other a really short trip. Living in Austin you really get used to that way of life. That was one of the things I thought I was going to miss by moving down here. So many activities I thought the boys were going to miss. Since I have been back so many new things have been completed, the stores, the arena for concerts, the schools even getting from one place to another fast. In Austin everywhere I drove, it took me at least forty minutes. Here in forty minutes you can be halfway across the valley and at the beach for the day. It is great!

Ms. Gwen/Austin/4th generation

In this group of conversations, the similarities that made their narratives stand out were their observations and commentaries on the suburban-growth of the region. Collectively, the way they spoke of them could be interpreted as noticeable evidence of the quality of life improvements that modern development brings as well as the significance that class position is to accessing emerging commercial advantages. Most recognize through their stories that these options were not available when they left and which they consider as one of the better outcomes of development.

Standing out among the pool of narratives were a few exceptional biographies made so by their occupational accomplishment. In the cases of two attorneys and an engineer in the participant pool, their position on the border permitted them to cultivate a bi-national trans-regional business niche and maintain their primary residence in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The participants in this subcategory represent the optimum in potential for Mexican American bilingual professionals in a modern economy. Capable of operating in different/diverse environments multiplies the opportunities an individual can access and exploit. The narrative of a private attorney illustrates the bi-regional adaptations encountered among this group of Mexican Americans. Collected over multiple sessions with Mr. Ricaby, a man in his early forties marked by his gregarious laughter and positive disposition describes how he was able to cultivate a niche with clientele on both sides of the border as a private attorney...

SUB: After completing law school in 1998 I landed a job working in Austin for a firm, the kind where you have cubicle space and share a front office if you actually get face time with a client. At one point, a client from Mexico was assigned to me obviously, because I was fluent in Spanish. I traveled to Mexico and we hit it off great! The client was an established business man needing to incorporate an investment on the American side of things. It took a couple of trips to get everything squared away. Each trip I was introduced to other businessmen in his networks needing services in the U.S, I realized that this could be something that could be exploited and I just smoothly moved myself into that position. By 2003 I was already spending more time in the valley as clients preferred to meet here where many have residences and businesses. I resigned at the firm and struck out on my own and set-up a shingle closer to the border. I do mostly contract negotiation and translations for them, setting-up corporations and stuff like that. Lately I have been doing many immigration and naturalization applications. For many of the businessmen setting-up a front here helps expedite their entire families' naturalization process. Since many of them live here now as a way of avoiding the violence there, they are repeat customers and always need me for this or that. Not bad for a hometown local boy? I still travel to Mexico with work but I typically fly and avoid traveling the roads where all the trouble seems to be these days. I also represent clients outside of

the valley in the U.S. Those are typically criminal or civil cases at both State and Federal level. I go to wherever I need to.

INT: Do you ever feel slighted because of your race or ethnicity in any of the places you travel to either in Mexico or the U.S.?

SUB: No. I look at it this way. I am fairly easy to get along and I generally don't allow the negative attitudes of others get to me. If someone is being offensive, I typically just avoid them. In general, the types of individuals I deal with are professionals seeking my services so I would not imagine it would be prudent for them to be rude.

Mr.Ricaby/Austin/5th generation

Although a minority, the success of bi-national professionals such as Mr. Ricaby and Mr. Martin, a man with a preference for bourbon who operates as a petroleum engineer for Chevron in Central and South American drill sites, represent the international employment opportunities created by a globalizing economy. Other participant narratives revealed that the trans-regional migration had been undertaken multiple times in their adult life. In a minority of cases, subjects moved their families in and out of the region more than once. Reason given was that well-paying job opportunities cyclically emerged and attracted them to exit the region. In time, the opportunities would dissolve and subjects would return to south Texas. For others the desire to be close to families would draw them back temporarily. What these experiences and narratives establish is the trans-regional and trans-national potential that capital bearing culturally diverse bilingual individuals can find and exploit in a modern economy.

At the regional level, part of the new economy has been the growth and expansion of the prison industry in south Texas. Beginning during the late twentieth century the legal system in general introduced get tough and just deserts sentencing philosophies and policies into America's prison systems. Participant Mr. Barrientos was part of this emerging sector of the local economy. Prior to returning the jaded 46-year-old avid

angler had lived in east Texas for 23 years of which twenty-one he worked, and continues to, as a correctional officer. When the call came out for volunteer transfers to relocate to the new facilities in Hidalgo County he stepped up. Sitting in his backyard swapping fish and hunting stories during a Dallas Cowboy football game he related how at the time he thought it would be a good opportunity to bring his wife and two daughters back home. His schoolteacher wife is also from the border region. Living in the central valley at the time of the interview the couple and their soon to be five children (two more since re-locating and expecting girl in early 2010), had been back in the south Texas border region since 2002...

SUB: Both my wife and I had over the years spoken to of moving back here at some point; the girls were growing and we had no immediate family there. We missed our families and thought it important for the girls to grow up among them. My wife especially felt that the girls should spend time with the grandparents and grow up knowing them. I tend to agree, as in general it has been good for everyone to be near our families again.

Mr. Barrientos/Huntsville, TX/ 4th generation

Although not unique among participants, this couple did stand out because of the number of young children they had (10, 8, 5, 3, and newborn). Other participants also had children, typically one or two tops, and in most instances, the conversations were channeled towards the subject of what they intended to culturally pass-on to their children. In other words, were they going to socialize their children towards a bi-national and ethnic sense of self, much like their own, or were they going to impress them towards what can most simply be described as an un-hyphenated American identity? One female participant expressed what sounded like the general-consensus among participants in this parental sub-category when the subject came up...

SUB: Things are not just that simple. Although we can try to speak it (Spanish) to them, at home, so that they can learn, it becomes almost impossible when everything and everyone else is speaking to them in English. Television and the videos they watch, their teachers and friends at school, everything and everyone else are in English. They do not get the kind of positive exposure to it that we did as reinforcement. I spent time with my grandparents who did not speak English as a child when my mother went to work and just naturally picked it up there. My child goes to day care, all in English, and my mother speaks English too so they do not actually have exposure to it as we did other than what we give them. When school begins, they will reinforce English even more.

INT: So does that mean that you are going to stop trying, or do you think you will insist?

SUB: We will insist. Right now, when they are still young we make it into a kind of game. Who is to say what will happen, as they get older. My eldest can understand but does

Mrs. Green/Austin/4th generation

Once again, allowing the flow of conversation to raise the question, the research takes the opportunity to introduce the next directed query. The conversations having drifted towards the issues related to their and their children's future and social place, equally for participants' with no children, the subject was proposed when opportunity in conversation arose. The generalized responses of participants are synthesized by paraphrasing the narratives with common insights and similar commentaries.

5.7 Post-experiential sense of self

Essentially this question lays at the crux of this exploratory research. What the investigation explores is if geographical and class mobility into culturally Anglo-white communities and immersion into the dominant mainstream society, alters their sense of self and social place? How do you self-identify after your experiences?

Conversations with Mr. Ricaby, interviews with him were multiple and this time we were traveling west into the brush lands to visit his ranch and count cactus, a euphemism

for drinking beer in his wife's opinion, through his narrative generalizes the insight that others expressed...

SUB: I was born and raised in the United States. The family history my father told tells me that we are from here. Growing up I went to school and was taught English and American history, not Mexican. Every morning in elementary school we would pledge allegiance to the United States flag...not even knowing what we were saying then but now do. I learned that I was an American. I speak Spanish and English because I live on the border to Mexico the same as it would be at any other border with a different language. Around here people can tell who is and who is not an immigrant usually by the way they speak or do not speak English. When I left, as far I was concerned I was an American citizen. I came back and I am still an American living on the border where I speak English and Spanish because that is what people do on the borders of two different countries. You speak two languages; you watch two ways of living come together into one. It is what it is.

INT: So do you make any distinction of who you are now after what you have experienced away from the valley?

SUB: No. I still consider myself an American just like when I enlisted and left. What was understandably not surprising overall is that white Americans do not make that distinction as easily as we do. People not from the valley look at a person, they see them brown and right away they think that you are an immigrant because you do not look like your typical 'American'...in other words if you do not look white people right away think that chances are you may not be from here. Of course, once you take the time to explain who and where you are from and convince them of your citizen status then you are ok. Most often people do not get the opportunity or take the time to get to know you and disprove any pre-conceived notions they may have about who you are because of the way you look.

5.8 Discussion

A virtual impossibility, describing the diversity of experiences from the collective narratives leaves much to be explored. Reduced to generalizations most often the narratives and insights herein suggested the recognition that how others defined them was beyond their control. Although some of the subjects at times did sense some of form of occasional differentiation, it did not amount to exclusions. Overall, their

concern was seemed more focused on if people were going to treat them with respect and dignity. In addition, explanations inferred a self-defining insistence of themselves as simply “American” despite any external ascriptions they may have sensed.

Suggesting that, as does the assimilation literature that for individuals a national identity supersedes the internalization of ethnic ascriptions as a sense of inclusion develops and as structural integration progresses towards mainstream middle-class values and identity (Gans 2007).

Inclusively noted by the same literature is that despite the generational acculturation that Mexican Americans recognizably experience it may not necessarily amount to full social cultural assimilation as race-cycle models predict but rather as ethnic retention theories alternatively propose (Gans 2007). Lacking the confirming data what is interpretively inferred from a grounded standpoint is that ethnocentric suspicions and racialized ascriptions serve to construct and create the symbolic contexts of inclusion/exclusion for Mexican Americans while they were living in Anglo dominant.

Referring to the conversations with participants who expressed common insight regarding themselves as Mexican Americans and their social place in the United States, most self-referenced as simply American in the context of conflating national and cultural identity. Mike Featherstone (1990) in his descriptions of modern culture refers to the emergence of cultural nationalism as defined by a shared and inherited culture. Multiple participants through their narrative self-descriptions elaborated on their sense of American cultural identity. For them Mexican American is defined as an American of Mexican descent. Taking into consideration that most are born from post-immigrant

generations, the description references cultural orientations and national identity. In their view they are United States citizens with Mexican and American cultural backgrounds that reflect a mixture of cultural rituals and practices.

In addition to institutional forces micro level dynamics also have an influence on the acculturating pace of individuals as reflected by some of the biographical narratives. Teskie and Nelson (1976) in their study of Mexican American assimilation and integration found that early socialization patterns in integrated social networks and a lack of attachment to a Mexican identity make it more likely that assimilation into the American cultural system and identity will occur. In most instances, post immigration generational acculturation had progressed to the point where cultural and familial references had shifted away from nationalistic attachments and the land of their ancestors. Similar to Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou's segmented model descriptions (1993), adopting non-marginal social cultural orientations can create a sense of inclusive place, whether it is real or imagined. The citizen ideologies and working class values of their parents in most cases had oriented their inclusive sense of self and place towards an identity based on citizenship and patriotism. Such attitudes could also be construed to suggest the internalization of dominant perspectives. In essence, the whole of their socializing experiences within U.S. institutions and education have re-enforced and impressed an American identity (Telles and Ortiz 2008).

Collectively what stood out from the biographies' is the sense of satisfaction the majority of participants found in their integrated lives. Not out of a developed sense of racialized or universal inclusion or exclusion, but primarily out of their own

accomplishments and the success they had created for themselves. All most without exception participants expressed a sense of goal achievement in terms of what they had set out to do for themselves. Thus, suggesting that their sense of inclusion is reflected by the adoption of middle-class cultural values that revolve around individualism.

All most without exception, both military and civilian participants spoke of recurring conversations where they explained their selves to the people they met and interacted with at work and among the community. Symbolically, the images and stereotypes associated with the social construction of Mexican American identities emerge out of immigrant history despite their being native born citizens. Popular media, both positive and negative, depictions also provide a fertile ground for the generalized development of racialized stereotypes and differentiated inclusion on the basis of class and national identity (Davilla 2008; Kahn 2001). On the one hand, the recurring pattern of having to describe and explain where, how, and when, did your family become Americans interpretively suggests that social identities and a sense of social place are contingent on individual cognitive references and attributions the dominant group ascribe to ethnics. Barring close and extended interactions, characterizations that substantiate otherness are pastiches of stereotyped post-emotional references and indirect mediated sources of information (Baudrillard 2002; Mestrovic 1997). From a critical subaltern point of assessment, the cognitive materials used for constructing social ascriptions are considered as unreliable and seriously limited. After all, explaining our families' immigrant journey and conversion into an American is the story of all citizens.

Regardless of integrative trajectory, the collective narratives suggest that interactions within integrated modern institutions and professional environments have created a situation where both minority and dominant group members were capable of moving beyond racialized boundaries and recognizing common class, organizational, and cultural values that can promote social cohesion and produce a sense of inclusion (Featherstone 1990; Kahn 2001). Retrospectively the narratives illustrate that at least in professional settings participants felt integrated and accepted with the Anglo dominant mainstream in the communities they settled into. No participant described episodes of community or extreme individual intolerance as a reason for returning. Among subject participants there was a minority of consensus that disagreeable people, racists and any other kind, reflect diversity too and come from all sorts of backgrounds, and can be encountered anywhere. With the benefit of hindsight, aside from having to explain their nationality and legitimate right to American citizenship, most felt they were accepted and integrated into their respective communities in a positive way.

Ultimately, what must be acknowledged is that no matter what can be constructed or conspicuously cultivated under social cultural, institutional, and geographical influences, the social place of Mexican Americans in the larger scheme will remain contingent on the ascriptions of mainstream society. As suggested by the retrospective narratives of participants such, ideological constructs can be altered through integrative exposure in diverse environments where racialized myths can be dispelled and the common values of citizenship can be re-affirmed.

6. CONCLUSION

As globalization, modernity's vehicle of diffusion, expands into underdeveloped regions, it will continue to inspire change and encounter physical borders and social boundaries. In a modern era marked by human diversity, boundaries go beyond physical barriers and extend into the non-material social aspects of human identity and sense of place. As social observers, our obligation to humanity is to expand the horizons of scientific thought and knowledge by connecting structure, history, and action. As such, humanity's capacity for intellectual development is only restricted by the boundaries of imagination, our capacity to provide answers to what is unassumingly experienced, and which will hopefully lead to more questions and not epistemological dismissal.

Borderland studies generally focused on the demarcations that separate nations. Understandably, any place where distinct set of ideas contact there is an expectation of cooperation and conflict as processes of accommodation and symbiotic adaptations unfurl. Dominating the social structural processes and historical events in the Lower Rio Grande Valley has been the regions modern development. Critical interpretations of mainstream explanations reveal how profit oriented extractive economic exploitation has influenced State decisions more so than local interests and/or considerations (Browne et al. 1994; Johnson, 2003; Lorey 1999; Young 2004). In addition, the irrational (e.g., fear, greed, envy) and subjective biases of western ethnocentrism historically translated into discriminations have compromised modernity's systemic objectivity as an organizational system for technical advancement, as an ideological source of human liberalism, and the equitable distribution of advantages (Featherstone 1990; Kahn 2001). Distinguished by

physical demarcations, bi-cultural character, and predominate minority population the region and its people remain on the borderland frontiers of modern inclusion, cultural emergence, and racial re-definitions.

Under-structuring western expansionism and hegemony is what social philosopher Charles Mills (1997) discusses as an epistemology that all non-Europeans are racial inferiors and constitute culturally primitive societies. These ideologies have been historically bolstered by faulty eugenic science, cultural myths, and racialized ideologies of superiority. Knowledge sets that continue to be intellectually diffused globally in the 21st century by established assimilation and race-cycle theories that reaffirm the ideological boundaries of exclusion for American and European whites. Singularly, or in conjunction, applied throughout history and conceptually amendable overtime, these foundations continue to constitute the shifting basis for post-colonial minority exclusions in westernized countries (Featherstone 1995; Kahn 2001). From a parallel perspective, conventional thought tends to downplay and ignore how irrational and counter-productive exclusionary factors like racism and ethnocentrism compromise the objectivity and stability of a modern system of human development.

Fundamentally these studies began with the critical point that centrist perspectives of marginalized populations are outsider based and provide limited direct insight into processes attached to non-white present-day mainstream integration (Estes et al. 2000; Gans 1997). In addition, interpretations of empirical observations inescapably are prejudiced by the investigators subjective basis of epistemological understanding. Their findings, commonly generalized to the aggregate level, lack practical description of the

relation between macro and micro influences. Furthermore, investigations often focus on marginalized immigrant sub-groups and harvest data to illustrate the grounds for exclusion by highlighting differences and ignoring similarities. From a critical perspective, by focusing on marginalized groups mainstream inquiries fail to consider the experiences of integrated citizen minorities beyond their own epistemological expectations for assimilation.

In response, data collection for this research was accomplished through an ethnography that investigated integration through the narratives of native-born citizen minorities. Through an embedded approach, where both subjects and investigator are living the experiences under study, direct insight has been gained through what D. Soyini Madison refers to as an advantage of subjective position in ethnographic studies. Such methods provide voices to diverse groups whose little explored experiences are subsumed under race and assimilation paradigms of integration. The focus on a successful minority sub-group allows research to contextualize and describe the macro-structural and micro-cultural affects that influence individual decisions and behaviors of a structurally integrated citizen minority. Their achievements have provided optimum conditions for integration; human investment, residential migration, class mobility, without the cultural abandonment projected by race-cycle and assimilation model generalizations.

Since the early twentieth century canonical explanations of integration from central theorists Robert Parks, Milton Gordon, Lloyd Warner and Leo Srole, have privileged race-cycle models of minority integration and assimilation. Centered as they were on

the experiences of immigrant white ethnics those studies subsumed the experiences of colonial native-born ethnics and dismissed their marginalization as resulting from inherent cultural retention that indefinitely retarded progressive assimilation. Such references refocused the cause of marginalization away from racists' ideologies, institutionalized barriers to human capital development, and towards racialized cultural distinctions promulgated by ethnic retention.

Critically de-centered analyses of early 21st century integration theories note that cultural and structural explanations continue to describe the social marginalization of ethnic minorities' on the grounds of ethnic retention. Furthermore, centered descriptions continue to discuss integration within the experiences of immigrants and their descendants. The persistent marginalization of native-born colonial citizens is framed as part of their indefinite process of immigrant incorporation.

Contemporary cultural explanations serve to reinforce a group's marginal status and socially re-affirm the idea that exclusion is the result of individual choices to assimilate into native-born marginal cultures (Alba and Nee 2000; Estes et al. 2000; Portes and Rumbaut 1996). Modernity's and the west's cultural self-alignment with civilization and human progress has produced a politics of race and culture that frames all other forms as static, oppressive to self-determination and an obstruction to integration. Nevertheless, remaining central to explanations of non-assimilation and marginalization is the attribution that individual decisions, not structural racism and cultural prejudices, are the source of modern disparities.

Alternatively, structural approaches re-formulate assimilation theory to suggest that human-capital dependent integration and class-based adaptation has promoted the emergence of a dual-axis process of structural integration and cultural accommodation. In the multidimensional context of re-modified assimilation and segmented theories, integration can be described not only by vertical class mobility but also by horizontal accommodation within acculturated currents flowing parallel to the central mainstream. Upwardly mobile and capital bearing individuals could theoretically navigate in the direction of central cultural flows and access institutions that lead to structural economic inclusion, residential mobility, and cultural adaptations (Fernandez 2007; Zelinski 2001).

Instead, as suggested by the experiences of this group, ethnics are creating their own cultural sense and functional social place outside predictive processes of race-cycle integration. Localized descriptions such as this one allow us to explore the diversity of integration at the micro insider level of analysis as a means of gaining a broader understanding of accommodations in other locales undergoing similar social, demographic, and structural changes.

As a way to deviate from ethnocentric and racialized narratives of exclusion, we instead looked at modern structural and systemic forms of inclusion. In what can most easily be described as a unconventional approach to study, if you want to understand the center you must also look at the margins and the borders that separate them. Ideological constitutes of those borders and how they have been breached, reveals the functional means for modern integration outside of established conceptually narrow linear models.

Overall, what the voices assert is that institutional integration and human capital investment were essential to their individual success and structural inclusions.

Taken as a whole, generalized descriptions of structural assimilation in most instances do not ground their theoretical contentions with realistic processes of integration and/or marginalization. Structural exclusions are generally seen as resulting from individual incongruity with modern systemic needs. Cultural explanations frame non-western ethnic societies as irrational, dysfunctional, and thus unable to adopt mainstream values and ideologies. From these, constricted perspectives marginalization results from individual choices whose results are incompatible with modern civilization. Fundamentally, structural cultural explanations hold that all non-western societies are mired by ethnic traditions considered irreconcilable with modern structures (e.g., western civilization) and human (e.g., civilizing) development (Eisenstadt 1974; Featherstone 1995; Kahn 2001).

The interpretive findings of subject narratives and biographies revolving around the four experiential questions suggest that participants left to pursue opportunities they felt were not locally available in the region. Institutional access provided a means for earning professional credentials and human capital necessary for structural mobility. Cultural orientations align individuals with mainstream values and society. Institutional success provided a means of class and residential mobility that characterizes contemporary processes of middle-class integration.

Participants experienced no major difficulties acclimating into their respective communities and felt they had been accepted and treated fairly by Anglo Americans. In

both military and civilian experiences, establishing primary group associations in integrated environments was facilitated by frequent small group interactions over extended periods. Either in the service or occupational environments, institutional integration, whether forced by law or not, provided the opportunity where racial and cultural myths and stereotypes could be replaced with humanistic associations. Extended interactions provided opportunity to remove social cultural boundaries and recognize mutually common values and beliefs between mainstream whites and native-born ethnic minorities.

Sensing no hostility, most had not entertained any real intention of returning until family and opportunities drew them willingly. Development and demographic changes have created professional opportunities to ease the return transition so that the quality of life and lifestyle was not compromised. A rare minority have been able to cultivate a trans-regional and bi-national occupational niche that demonstrates the full potential for bi-cultural professionals in a modern global economy. Post data collection updates from participants informed that a minority had decided to migrate out of the region again. Still a rare sub-minority among this group of professional Mexican Americans, they represent the idealized optimum in terms of exploiting bi-national, bi-regional, and bi-cultural opportunities that modern society has created.

The sheer process of modern diversity implies that prospects for social homogeneity and universal culture are unrealistic as western models of assimilation predicted. Further study is required to fully unravel the complex interactions theoretically discussed and circumstantially contextualized here as a matter of explanatory alternative.

Nevertheless, the discussion provides an unconventional interpretation of native-born structural and cultural integration and accommodation.

Where once common history and heritage were localized fountains of culture and identity, globalization and the dis-embedding nature of modernity allows individuals to construct their own sense of cultural self from the multiplicity of options available. Borderlands are where institutional and social boundaries contact, conflict, combine, and create new cultural forms. Local forms of contemporary minority adaptation produce variations outside of theoretical canons and racialized stereotypes involved in the reproduction of established hegemony. These zones of marginalization need to be understood within their own contexts relative to structure to better comprehend the dynamics of social adaptation and change now that processes of linear assimilation are no longer prevalent or universally functional. Moreover, just as the site of interactions can alter external ascriptions, the elements of identity and cultural orientations can also be adapted to create new grounds for introspective assessments of social place and individuation. The narratives and experiences of subject participants serve to illustrate the functional aspects of structure and the role that hegemonic boundaries of race, ethnicity, and class, continue to play in processes of differentiation and integration in modern society.

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