

**BROKEN MIRRORS: IDENTITY, DUTY, AND BELONGING IN THE AGE OF THE
NEW *LA(TINX) MIGRA***

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ABSTRACT

BROKEN MIRRORS: IDENTITY, DUTY, AND BELONGING IN THE AGE OF THE NEW

LA(TINX) MIGRA

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From DuBois to Anzaldua, the racial and ethnic minority experience in the United States is a story of simultaneity — of multiple, overlapping identities and conflict. It is the struggle for belonging somewhere, while lacking full membership anywhere. In this dissertation, I examine the emergence of a disproportionately Latinx immigration law enforcement workforce as a metaphor for this experience. In electing to work in immigration law enforcement, Latinxs make a claim on belonging in the United States rooted in political (and national) obligation, and a symbolic relinquishment of ethnic group identity. This claim, however, imposes a cost: liminality — segmented membership both in an ethnic community within which they are seen as having turned their backs, and in an American mainstream where immutable ascriptive markers relegate them to a perpetual state of otherness.

By exploring how Latinx immigration agents deal with their cross-cutting identities and the tensions they engender, I address what it means to be caught between, yet immersed within, two distinct camps — the police and the policed, both problem and solution. Bringing together literature on social identity, race and ethnic politics, and bureaucracy, my work challenges traditional understandings not only of the role of social identities in the behavior of state agents, but the ways in which individuals balance, or accommodate multiple, overlapping, yet fundamentally contradictory social group memberships. The evidence presented herein — drawn from interviews with one-hundred Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents across Texas, Arizona, and California — reveals a much different image of the Latinx immigration

agent than extant scholarship suggests we should find, consciously aware of, and engaged in, the space between their overlapping identities. The stories they share make clear that liminality — intersectionality — beyond a mere theoretical construct, is a lived experience; it is an ongoing process that requires the conscious accommodation of internal contradictions, because the wholesale abandonment of one or more identities is a more difficult and costly exercise.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

David Cortez received his Ph.D. in Government from Cornell University. His research centers on ethnic and racial identity, with particular focus on intersectional and situational identity salience. Beginning in the Fall of 2017, he will be a post-doctoral research associate at the Institute for International and Regional Studies (PIIRS) at Princeton University. In the Fall of 2018, Cortez will be an Assistant Professor of Political Science and Latino Studies at the University of Notre Dame.

For my mother and father[†]

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In the summer before my final year at UPTA, I had the privilege of attending the APSA Ralph Bunche Summer Institute (RBSI) at Duke University. To this day, I count myself lucky to have had this opportunity. For her mentorship and support (and continued stewardship of a program integral to our discipline), I extend my most sincere thanks to Dr. Paula D. McClain. Additionally, I am indebted to the teaching assistants and staff at RBSI with whom I have created lasting friendships, including Rose Buckelew, Candis Watts Smith, Chris DeSante, Eugene Walton, Jessica Johnson Carew, and Dee Cross.

Transitioning to graduate school entailed moving away from the comfort of my home along the border to a small, unfamiliar town in central New York. I survived my time there because of the unconditional support of my advisor, mentor, and friend, Michael Jones-Correa. In my highest highs and lowest lows (of which there were many), Michael was there — a steady hand, and a model of what it means to be a true mentor and friend. I am forever grateful to he and Maria Davidis, and their family, for treating me, my wife, and dog as one in the same. For

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Finally, I want to thank my best friend and partner, Danielle Garza Cortez. When I say that I would not be where, much less who, I am without her, I mean this unequivocally. Ten

years ago, she told me that she refused to “date a bum”; hearing this, I promptly re-enrolled in college after a four-year hiatus, and stayed in school for ten more years. For all that she, and our daughter, Auri (my joy), have endured throughout these last few months (and years), I am indebted.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: NO ONE LATINX EXPERIENCE¹

It's part of his background, part of who he is today. As Arnoldo and I sat in a cluttered room in the back of his house, surrounded by cultural (and overtly political) art, he recalled — and appeared to *re-live* — the experience of crossing “illegally” into the United States thirty-six years ago. His mother, he explained, had left El Salvador for California five years earlier in the hopes of finding work and the means to support he and his family back home. By 1980, she had saved enough money working in “*las fabricas*” [the factories] to arrange for the family to be ‘brought’ to the United States, where, she believed, the family could have a better life.

Aboard a bus, Arnoldo, his grandmother, his “*nana*” [nanny], and five-year-old cousin left El Salvador. In recalling the trip, Arnoldo explained — to me and himself, in a way — that there must have been some kind of “plan of action” in place, because somewhere in Mexico, they were hosted and fed by a random family for nearly a week before continuing on to the United States border near *Tijuana*. As he sipped at his water, Arnoldo mimicked the smuggler’s direction to he and his family to sink down in their seats as the four-door sedan sped through the desert and approached the boundary. “OK, you guys are here — go ahead and cross over,” he recalled hearing, noting that the family still had to walk a distance and jump a fence before being in the United States.

It was dark by the time Arnoldo and his family were picked up near the border on the U.S. side. As their journey continued under the cover of night, a young Arnoldo — still hidden, slouched below the vehicle’s windows, and out of the view of motorists they passed on the

¹ All names have been changed to protect the identities of individuals who participated in this study; The term ‘Latinx’ is utilized here, and throughout this dissertation, in my commitment to observing gender-neutrality. Where the terms ‘Latina, Latino, Hispanic, etc.’ are found, these are references to, or direct quotations of, source material or study participants. It bears noting that none of the individuals who participated in this study expressed that they were gender non-conforming, or that they did not identify in gender-specific terms. The use of ‘Latinx’ herein is, thus, a matter of my own personal preference, and most importantly, should not be misconstrued as impugning the use of gendered terms.

highway — picked his head up above the seat for long enough to glimpse the lighted street signs of southern California. He recalled staring at them, and longing for the ability to speak English, to understand the signs that, for the moment, only served to dot the path to his mother, his new home, and new life.

• • •

It was a familiar sight growing up in El Paso, Hector explained as he sat up straight in his chair. Living as close to the *Rio Grande* as his family did, it was, quite frankly, difficult to miss. As a kid, he recalled watching immigrants crossing “illegally” into the United States and being chased down by border agents — by ‘*la migra*.’ While he conceded that it was difficult, at the time, to understand what was *really* happening in those situations, there is an image in his head today that still is tough to shake.

While driving down the border highway that runs parallel to the international boundary in El Paso, Hector’s mother screamed for his father to stop the car. “Go back, go back,” she pleaded. Through the window, he recalled, she was locked on to a border agent frantically grabbing at his gun as he ran after of a group of likely recent border-crossers. ‘She wanted to make sure the agent didn’t hurt them,’ he said as he shook his head, visibly bothered by the memory of his mother’s face paralyzed by fear. Still, though, all the family could do that day as the car continued down the highway was watch as the scene disappeared into the horizon.

What else could they *really* have done in that moment, Hector wondered aloud as he threw his shoulders up. As immigrants from Mexico themselves, Hector’s parents were not exactly well positioned to question, much less interfere with, the actions of border agents. As past experiences had shown, they, too, were subject to potential run-ins with ‘*la migra*,’ and were, thus, ultimately better off driving away.

• • •

Vanessa knows where she came from. While born and raised in the United States, she recalls fondly weekends spent visiting family in Mexico as a child. Like many other residents of southern Arizona, her grandparents' migration from Mexico to the U.S. effectively stretched the family into, and across, the two nations. Comparably less dramatic — and much less dangerous — than those of her grandparents, Vanessa's frequent border crossings were no less formative. It was in these moments that she became aware of the privilege that came from being born 'on *this* side' — a privilege her and her siblings were not allowed to ignore.

Leaning over the table and pointing her finger at me, Vanessa channeled her mother: "You take care of everybody else first before you take care of yourself." This, she explained, was the golden rule in her house growing up. While her mother certainly expected and encouraged Vanessa and her siblings to know their community, to know their culture, she demanded more of them still. She called on them to *serve* their community — a mission on which she led by example.

By day, Vanessa's mother worked a full-time job at a vocational training center. But in her off-hours, she dedicated herself to serving the local immigrant community. Stretching her arms out to gesture across the room, Vanessa described the look of her childhood living room and kitchen most afternoons, littered with stacks of paperwork, and busy with the voices of mothers, fathers, and their children seeking help to regularize their immigration status. Over the years, Vanessa watched — and where she could, assisted — her mother as she interviewed and counseled countless migrants who, like her own grandparents, had come to the United States in search of a better life.

Separated by state-lines and hundreds of miles, the three individuals presented here do not know one another; but they are strangers to no one. Outside of specific details, their stories — those of the immigrant, of the children (and grandchildren) of immigrants — are rather common. Each of these stories is a familiar reflection of the Latinx experience in the United

States. But for Arnoldo, Hector, and Vanessa, these stories intersect with another increasingly common experience in the Latinx community: all three of them are, today, immigration law enforcement agents.

The Changing Face of Immigration Law Enforcement: A New La(tinx) Migra

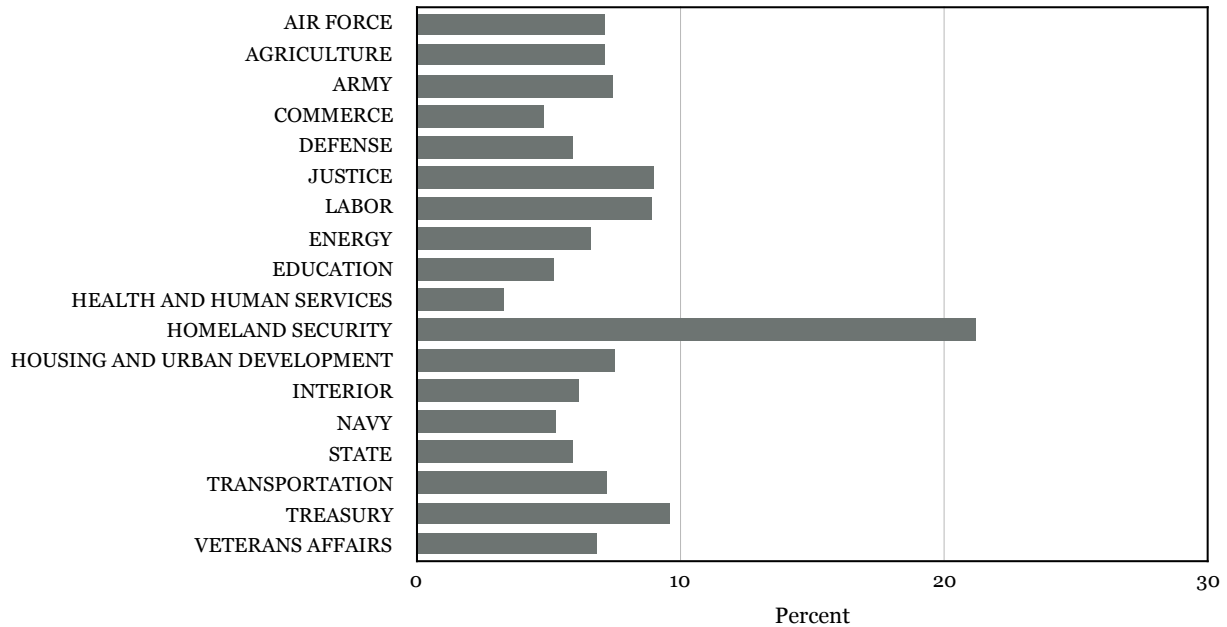
The face of immigration law enforcement has changed significantly over the last three decades. While scholars have noted formal policy changes in immigration law enforcement, including the rise of mass immigrant incarceration and detention (see e.g., Welch 2002; 2000), deportation (see e.g., Peutz and De Genova 2010; Kanstroom 2000), and enforcement partnerships between federal and local authorities (see e.g., Waslin 2010; Kretsedemas 2008; Wishnie 2004), one of the most striking changes has gone relatively unnoticed in academic circles: the literally changing face of immigration law enforcement agencies.

Today, more than any other period in history, the composition of the uniformed divisions of federal immigration law enforcement agencies — Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) — reflect the demographics of the populations they police.² Compared to all other state bureaucracies, in fact, immigration law enforcement agencies continue to drive advances in Latinx federal workforce participation. Today, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the agency that houses both CBP and ICE, leads all other public agencies with the greatest proportion (21.1%) of Latinx personnel (see Table I).³

² It should be noted that I do not overgeneralize lightly. While immigration enforcement agencies certainly are engaged in the prevention and deterrence of unauthorized border crossing by persons of all national origins, the degree to which such efforts target immigrants of Latin American descent cannot (and should not) be diminished. Scholars, including, but not limited to, Provine and Doty (2011) and Romero (2006), discuss the targeting of Latinx immigrants (and populations, regardless of legal status) as a continuing ‘racial project.’

³ Office of Personnel Management, 2013. “Twelfth Annual Report to the President on Hispanic Employment in the Federal Government.” It bears noting that while OPM annual reports on Hispanic employment in the Federal Government have not consistently recorded gains from one year to the next for DHS, the agency has, otherwise, consistently led all other public agencies in Hispanic employment (by proportion).

Table I: Latinx Federal Workforce Representation



Among uniformed ICE and CBP officers alone, Latinxs are overrepresented relative to their proportion of the overall federal workforce by more than two and a half (21.6%) and four times (49.9%), respectively.⁴ Once an exclusively white enterprise, viewed for much of the twentieth century in border communities as a foreign, occupying force, and referred to, pejoratively, as *‘la migra’* (see e.g., Lytle Hernandez 2010), the last thirty years have bore witness to the emergence of a much different immigration law enforcement workforce: a new *“La(tinx) Migra.”*

The response to the shift in the ethnic makeup of U.S. immigration agencies is striking. While few scholars have acknowledged, much less explored the implications of a disproportionately Latinx immigration law enforcement workforce⁵, response from the general

⁴ As of 2013, ‘Hispanics’ make up 8.3% of the total permanent federal workforce. Office of Personnel Management, 2013; Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2012. “Federal Law Enforcement Officers, 2008.” OPM data on Hispanic employment in public agencies (DHS) is from FY 2013. It should be noted that the percentages reported here from BJS precede the OPM figures. Given recent trends, however, it would appear unlikely that these sub-agency proportions have decreased in the years between 2008 and now.

⁵ Exceptions of note: Correa and Thomas 2015; Correa 2013; Garcia Hernandez 2012; Heyman 2002.

public has been pronounced and centered on what is perceived as an absolute certainty: immigration officers' ethnic identities *matter* (see e.g., Corchado 2015; Borden 2000; Valbrun 1998). Precisely how they matter, however, remains a major point of contention.

To some, the increasing proportion of Latinx immigration enforcement officers poses a threat to the legitimacy of the nation's immigration laws, and by extension, national security. Such notions are exemplified in statements like: "How many of them are illegal aliens [sic] themselves?"; "No wonder our borders are so porous"; and "*Bienvenidos* to the badged foxes guarding the chicken coop."⁶ The implication behind statements of this kind is that the ethnic identity of Latinx officers forestalls the evenhanded enforcement of immigration law. That is, the bonds of shared ethnicity are thought to subordinate organizational — and by the nature of the work, *national*) — identity, commitment, and duty.

Where some non-Latinx members of the public profile Latinx immigration officers as untrustworthy and disloyal, a parallel sentiment appears to be held within Latinx communities. That is, they view increasing proportions of Latinx immigration officers as a source of division and community disintegration. Latinx officers are seen as 'race-traitors' or '*vendidos*' ['sell-outs'] for joining 'the enemy,' for what is seen as turning their backs on their community (see e.g., Garcia-Hernandez 2012; Kopytoff 1996). The underlying assumption here is that for Latinx immigration officers ethnicity has been subordinated by organizational identity, or in simpler terms, the uniform (see e.g., Thomas and Correa 2015).⁷ From this perspective, the argument that immigration officers' ethnic identities matter is undergirded by the assumption, if not firm

⁶ Comments to Houston Chronicle article discussing the growing proportion of 'Hispanics' within Border Patrol (Pinkerton 2008). It should be noted that I do not take these quotes as representative of the attitudes of the general public — they are, after all, comments on a digital article, on Free Republic no less, and illustrate what we might call 'extreme' attitudes. However — and this is a big however — we should not be so quick to dismiss such attitudes as wholly isolated. For instance, in Wilson's early work on municipal police, he explores similar attitudes toward the rise of predominately Irish police forces. And beyond the preponderance of such attitudes in analogous cases, such comments exemplify broader notions concerning the assimilation of the Latinx population in the United States put forward by some of our discipline's most esteemed scholars (see e.g., Huntington 2004); see also, concept of 'Brown Run Border.'

⁷ Nearly identical to public claims concerning black and Latinx municipal police officers (see e.g., Weitzer and Tuch 2006).

belief, that ethnicity *should* matter. In other words, when Latinx immigration officers exercise their discretionary authority as agents of the state, they should do so with a sensitivity to their own personal connection to the immigrant experience, be it one, or two-plus generations removed⁸; with a sensitivity to the fact that outside of their uniforms, they are just as likely to be questioned about their citizenship status as the individuals they are charged with apprehending, detaining, and deporting.⁹

Broken Mirrors: Confronting (Liminal) Selves

*To live in the Borderlands means you...
[are] caught in the crossfire between two camps,
not knowing which side to turn to, run from.¹⁰*

Latinx immigration law enforcement officers occupy and experience a unique position in the socio-political landscape of the United States. Simultaneously scrutinized for being *too* Latinx, and not Latinx *enough*, they live under constant pressure to negotiate multiple overlapping, yet fundamentally contradictory, social group memberships. But to say that such pressures are, by definition, external, arising solely from particular (or peripheral) elements of the public, would oversimplify the dynamics at hand. Responses such as this are merely reflections of the dynamics inherent to liminality and intersectionality itself, reflections of an inner, more personal, war of belonging that marks the American Latinx (and minority) experience more generally.¹¹

Consider, for instance, the nature of Latinx immigration officers' overlapping identities, and the tensions they engender. As Latinxs, they are members of a distinct social group, a group

⁸ Latinx immigration officers, in many cases, describe being asked to consider such shared-experiences by the very people they apprehend, not merely immigrant rights activists, as is often alleged (see e.g., Kopytoff 1996; Cepeda 2012).

⁹ This is a key element to the unique nature of the case at hand. The 'perpetual foreignness' of Latinxs in the United States puts Latinx immigration officers in a vulnerable position wherein they are simultaneously part of a perceived, or ostensible, problem and part of the organized state response to that problem (Sampaio 2015).

¹⁰ Anzaldúa (2012 [1987]), 216.

¹¹ A perennial war reflected in Latinx cultural and folkloric writing, as well. See specifically, Paredes (1990).

whose growing numbers and political salience continue to be met with suspicion and fear on the part of native-born, non-Latinx populations.¹² As immigration law enforcement officers, they are members of organizations responsible for, depending on the agency: 1) preventing unauthorized entry into, and movement within, the territorial United States (CBP); and 2) apprehending and expelling from the country those territorially present without authorization (ICE) — tasks that have led to increased surveillance and policing of Latinx communities across the country (see e.g., Correa 2011; 2013; Golash-Boza 2011; Lytle Hernandez 2010; Parenti 2008 [1999]; Dunn 1996).¹³ As *both*, Latinx immigration officers are simultaneously the targets and coercive arms of the state. They are, to borrow again from Gloria Anzaldua, the living embodiment of the *frontera* [border]; they are the battleground, their ‘enemies’ are kin, and yet at home, they are strangers (2012 [1987], 216).

At this intersection, Latinx immigration agents confront an existential tension. In encounters with their “targets,” they find themselves looking into metaphorical ‘broken mirrors,’ where they are met by faces, voices, and stories that resemble those of their families — their mothers, their fathers, and in many cases, even their own. Here, they find themselves policing an act that — as illustrated by Arnoldo, Hector, and Vanessa — figures largely in their own narratives, that directly (or indirectly) made them who they are. In these moments, Latinx agents come face-to-face with their liminality, and are forced to make sense of multiple overlapping, fundamentally contradictory, identities — forced to make sense of the space between who they are and the uniforms they wear.

¹² According to the U.S. Census, Latinxs are responsible for more than half of total U.S. population growth between 2000 and 2010. Growing by forty-three percent over this ten-year period, Latinxs, regardless of race, constitute the fastest growing population in the United States; U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 1 & 2010 Census Summary File 1; Such demographic shifts have led to the contention that electoral viability has, or will, become increasingly contingent on the voting patterns of Latinxs across the country (see e.g., Kopicki and Irving 2012; Barreto and Segura 2012); In academic scholarship, politics and popular culture alike, Latinxs are characterized as a threat to traditional American identity and values (see e.g., Huntington 2004), as inherently prone to criminality (see e.g., Oliver 1996), and in spite of contrary evidence, predominately ‘illegal’ (Sampaio 2015; Barreto et al. 2012).

¹³ For official, as opposed to paraphrased, mission statements provided by the Department of Homeland Security, see the follow: <http://www.dhs.gov/mission>.

How Latinx immigration officers internalize and deal with these tensions is the central thrust of this dissertation. What does it mean to be, simultaneously, the police *and* the policed, both problem *and* solution? How do Latinx immigration officers make sense of, or balance their cross-cutting social identities and the pressures they imply?¹⁴ What does their experience tell us about the boundaries of group membership, more specifically, the contours and salience of Latinx identity? And what do their experiences suggest about the broader minority experience of assimilation in the United States? In the chapters that follow, I explore the boundaries, and coercive power, of identity, duty, and belonging in the age of the new *La(tinx) Migra*.

Positioning the Project

The questions I raise here put me at odds, rather quickly, with extant scholarship not only within political science, but among some of our disciplinary neighbors; namely because of the central assumption the questions imply: that identity *matters*. As asked, in other words, they presume that Latinx immigration agents not only hold, but attach meaning and value to their ethnic identities, and that those identities come into conflict with, and possess the potential to shape, their decisions and behavior as agents of the state. On two separate fronts, however, extant scholarship suggests that these are faulty assumptions — that we should not expect ethnic or racial identity to play any role whatsoever in the decisions and behavior of state-agents, much less those of Latinx immigration agents.

Consider, for instance, scholars who have written specifically about Latinx immigration officers. These authors contend that Latinxs elect to work in immigration enforcement precisely

¹⁴ ‘Cross-cutting social identities’ can be thought of, loosely, as the overlap of rival social identity groups. When an individual, for instance, is both Latinx and an immigration law enforcement officer, the overlap between these two social group memberships creates an unavoidable tension. As described here, in the course of their duties, Latinx immigration officers are charged with surveilling and apprehending persons who are co-ethnic Latinxs. We can imagine other examples of cross-cutting identities: black and Latinx police officers who, as a matter of formal or informal policy, are tasked with policing more heavily minority communities; religious employees of Planned Parenthood, who while opposed to contraceptive use as a matter of religious group membership, are bound by their occupational commitment to provide people, particularly women, help with reproductive services.

because they lack an attachment to their ethnic identity, and beyond this, a relative distance from the immigrant experience precludes any kind of connection with, or empathy for the co-ethnic immigrants they encounter (see e.g., Heyman 2002; Garcia Hernandez 2012). The mere existence of Latinx immigration agents, in other words, is taken as *prima facie* evidence that ethnic (Latinx) identity is a negligible, if not wholly unimportant facet of Latinx agents' lives both in and out of the uniform. Scholars here suggest that Latinxs essentially self-select into immigration enforcement, because if ethnic identity mattered (and thus engendered conflict or tension with the uniform), then they would not have enlisted in the first place (see e.g., Heyman 2002; Garcia Hernandez 2012).

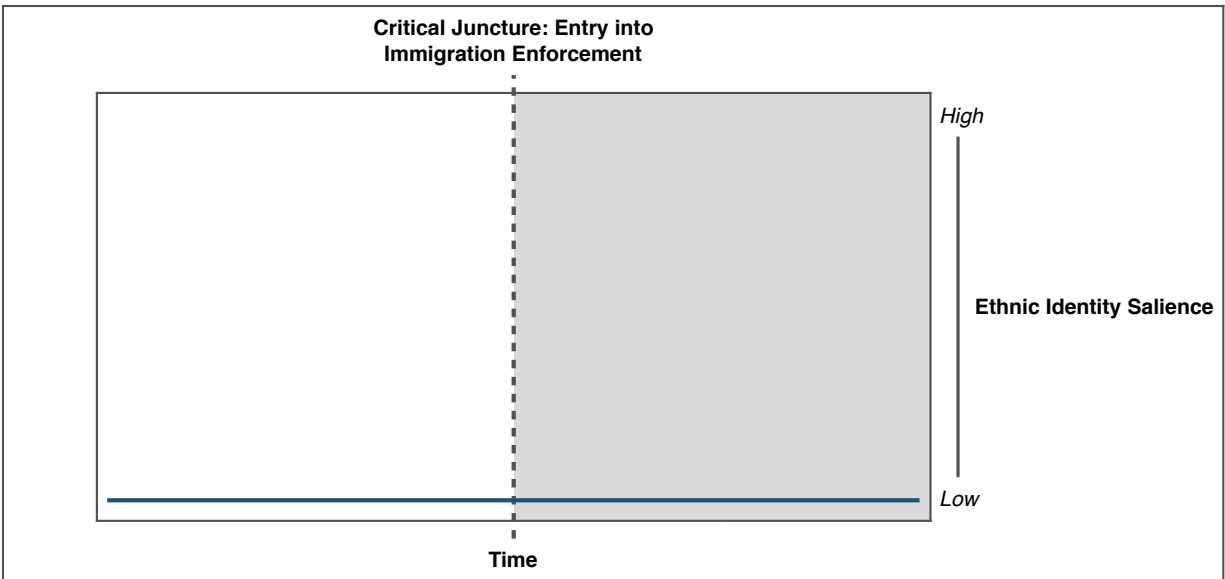
Bureaucracy scholars, on the other hand, contend that despite the presence of, or attachment to social identities like race or ethnicity among state-agents, those identities are ultimately subordinated by institutional norms, cultures, and socialization (see e.g., Lipsky 2010 [1980]; Wilson 1989). To these scholars, agents' ethnic or racial identities are irrelevant because institutional socialization and norms ensure that when an agent acts, they do so solely in the interest of the agency itself, even in the face of environmental and resource constraints (see e.g., Kaufman 2006 [1960]). The power of the institution, in other words, is seen as effectively suppressing the role of ethnic or racial identities. Even where scholars have questioned the role of identity in shaping the behavior of street-level bureaucrats — such as police officers, teachers, and welfare administrators — they conclude that agents' considerations of race and ethnicity, outside of broader institutional forces, are a much less effective predictor of agent behavior than the social constructions of target populations upon which those agents rely (see e.g., Schram et al. 2009; Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003; Schneider and Ingram 1993). The arguments put forward here by bureaucracy scholars comport with notions about police officers not being white, black, or brown, but *blue* — where the uniform supplants all other rival identities; it essentially becomes who they are (see e.g., Weitzer and Tuch 2006).

What I want to suggest here, however, is that both of these threads of inquiry, in relying on static, either-or conceptions of race and ethnicity, fundamentally misunderstand the nature of identity. They assume, in other words, that because ethnic identity doesn't appear to matter in a particular instance, such as the decision to enter immigration enforcement, that that identity *never* matters. They assume that when an agent adopts a uniform or institutional identity, that of the federal law enforcement officer, that this is the only identity that matters subsequently. Identity, however, does not function at this level of simplicity. The social identity theory literature (see e.g., Brewer 2009; Deaux 1991; Stryker 1987; Tajfel 1981; Mead 1934) and the race and ethnic politics literature (see e.g., Jimenez 2009; Barvosa 2008; Garcia-Bedolla 2005; Cohen 1999; Waters 1999; Jones-Correa 1998) reveal as much. Identity is complicated, and roundly acknowledged today as multiple, fluid, situational, and many times, contradictory.

Social identity theory, in fact, tells us that while static, either/or conceptions of identity are both theoretically and rhetorically convenient, they are poor representations of the realities of the social world, where individuals are constantly immersed in, and subject to multiple overlapping identities (see e.g., Kreiner et al. 2006; Brewer 1991; Tajfel 1981; Tajfel and Turner 1986). And rather than achieving complete overlap with an individual's self-concept — or their 'individuated self' — those identities jockey back and forth for marginal differences in salience given particular contexts (see e.g., Brewer 2009; 1991). By acknowledging this, the dynamic nature of identity, questions related to the role of social identity among state-agents — such as the role of ethnic identity among Latinx immigration law enforcement agents — not only become much more interesting, but they are imbued with new possibilities.

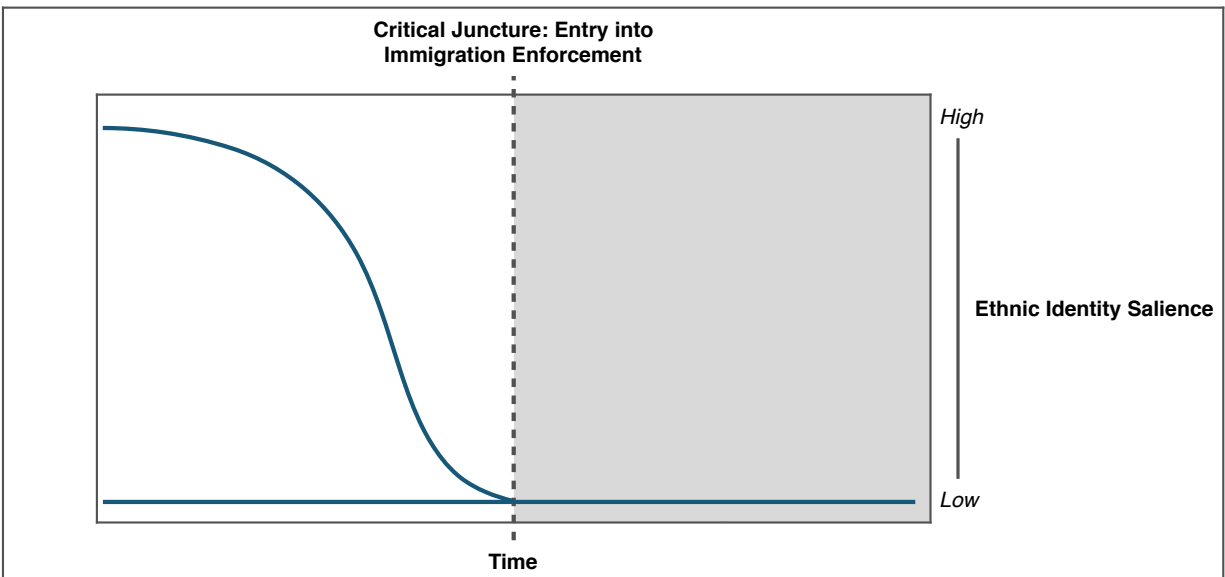
When we think about the salience of ethnic identity among Latinx agents over time (see Figure I), for instance, both before and after entry into immigration enforcement, the self-selection thesis and its adherents would maintain that ethnic identity salience remains low across the board; ethnic, Latinx, identity is not important to agents before they enter these agencies, and

Figure I. Salience of Ethnic Identity Among Latinx ICE Agents, Self-Selection



thus not important after. In a similar vein, bureaucracy scholars (see Figure II) suggest that regardless of high or low levels of ethnic identity salience prior to enlistment, the agency effectively suppresses the influence of these identities, and agents essentially become their uniforms.

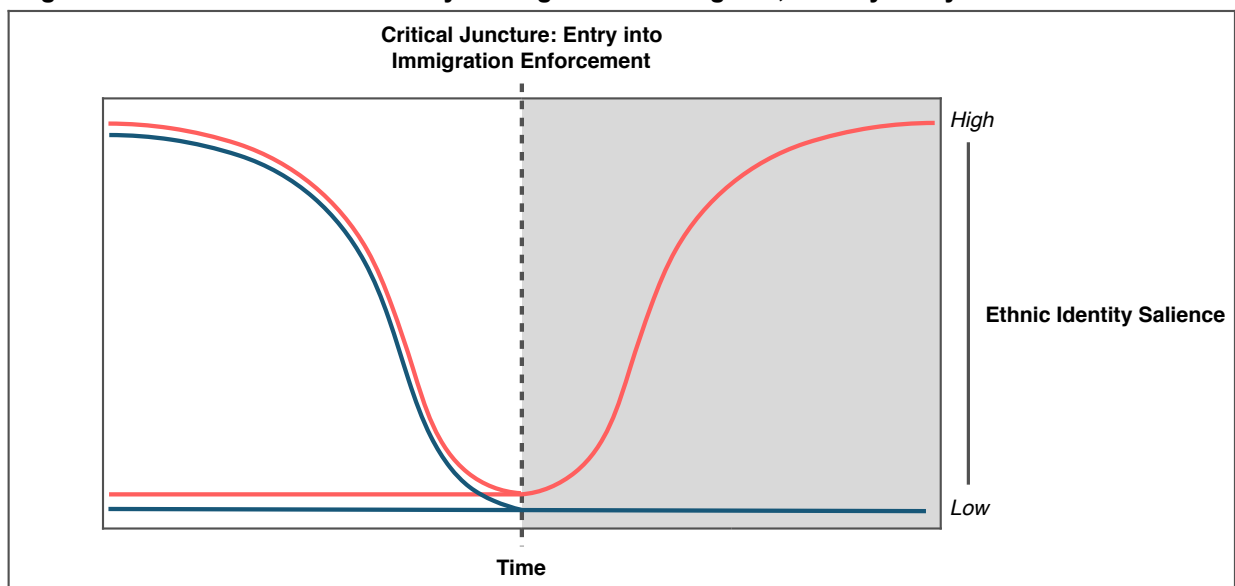
Figure II. Salience of Ethnic Identity Among Latinx ICE Agents, Power of Institution



An understanding of identity as dynamic in nature, however, suggests that these may not be the only patterns of identity salience that we can, or should expect.

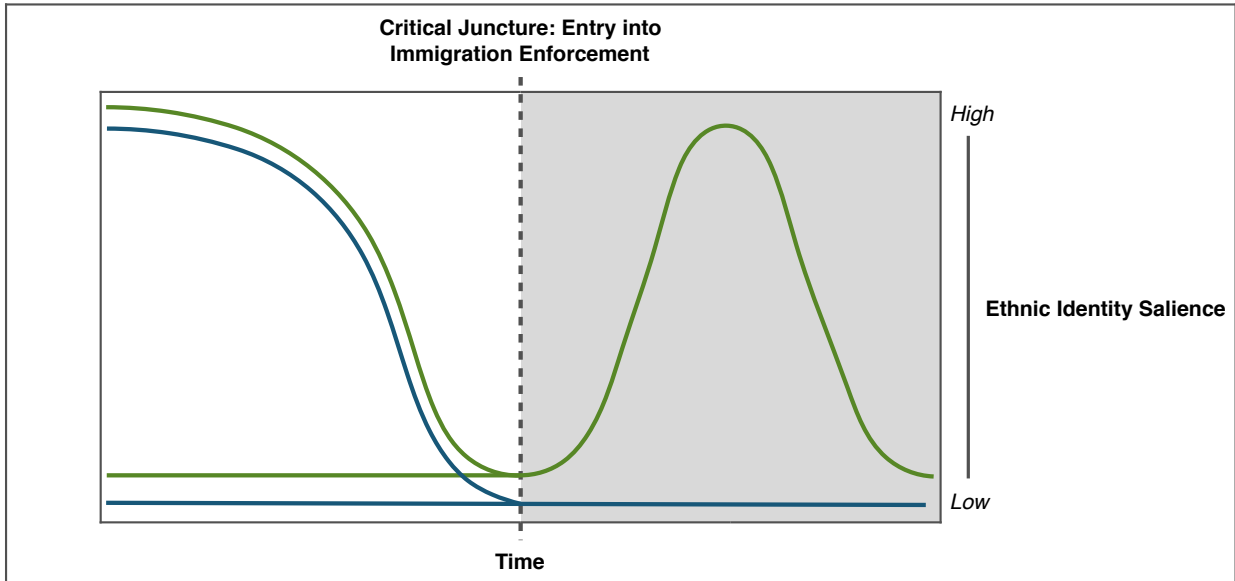
Perhaps Latinx agents' ethnic identities become activated in the course of their duties — in encounters with reflections of themselves in 'broken mirrors' — and those identities become and remain a fundamental part of how they view themselves and behave as agents of the state (see Figure III).

Figure III. Salience of Ethnic Identity Among Latinx ICE Agents, Identity as Dynamic and Situational



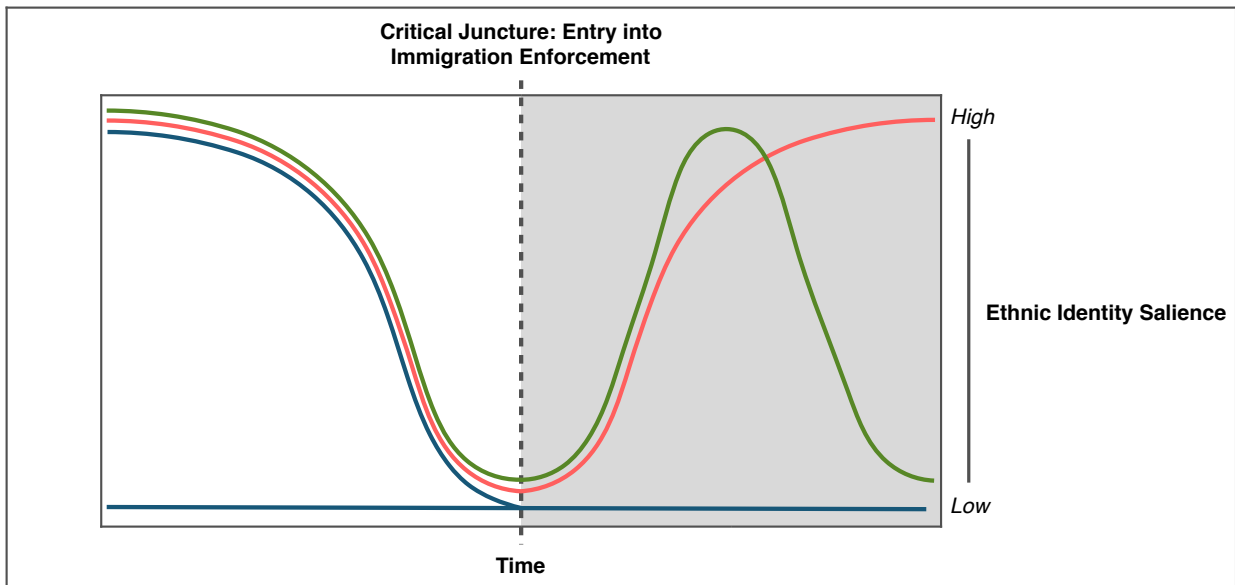
Perhaps in response to the activation of their ethnic identities, Latinx agents find ways to minimize the opportunities for that activation and thus the degree to which they experience identity conflict and tension (see Figure IV).

Figure IV. Salience of Ethnic Identity Among Latinx ICE Agents, Identity as Dynamic and Situational



Or perhaps they find some ground in-between. Regardless of the specific pattern, though, all of these dynamics (see Figure V) are missed when we rely on past assumptions about the nature of identity as static.

Figure V. Salience of Ethnic Identity Among Latinx ICE Agents, Identity Matters



By acknowledging identity as multiple, fluid, situational, and contradictory, we not only illuminate new possible answers to our questions, but we are better able to understand and describe the complex social world with which we're engaged.

Pursuant to this, I take seriously the dynamic nature of identity and, in this dissertation, bring together parallel, yet hitherto isolated, threads of inquiry in the study of social identity, race and ethnic politics, and bureaucracy, to explore (and address) the careful negotiation of liminal identities among Latinx immigration law enforcement agents. In the next chapter, I more fully unpack relevant extant scholarship, address the closest analogues to the current case, Latinx immigration agents, and their treatment in that scholarship, and develop the metaphor of the 'broken mirror' as a theoretical construct for understanding not only the persistence, but situational salience, of identity.

Data and Methodological Approach

To address the central questions of this dissertation, I employed a qualitative, ethnographic methodological approach. This was due, in part, to what I deemed as missteps in previous studies of this kind that attempted to quantify, and more importantly, dichotomize identity. Beyond this, however, I employed this approach because I also wanted a more contextualized understanding of how Latinx immigration agents understood and defined their identities than previous studies have been able to offer. This, I maintain, was key to getting at *how* and *why* Latinx officers made decisions in their capacity as state-agents, not merely the decisions they made.

To that end, I spent over a year in the field between November 2014 and December 2015 between Texas, Arizona, and California.¹⁵ During this period, utilizing multiple-entry snowball-sampling, I conducted qualitative interviews with one-hundred men and women employed by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) — with an over-sampling of Latinxs (see Table II). Averaging seventy-five minutes in length, all interviews were conducted face-to-face, primarily in agency field and sub-regional offices (e.g., in agents’ individual offices, conference rooms, or break rooms). In some instances, interviews were conducted in public spaces (e.g., bars, restaurants, or coffee shops), and a smaller proportion in individual agents’ homes.¹⁶

Table II: Demographics of Study Sample

RACE/ETHNICITY	NUMBER
Latinx	61
Non-Latinx White	31
Black	5
Asian	2
Middle Eastern/Arab	1
Total:	100

¹⁵ From the beginning, it became apparent that the undertaking for which I had planned and proposed to my dissertation committee would prove more difficult than expected. As others have noted (see e.g., Correa and Thomas 2015), building enough rapport not only for initial but continued access to federal law enforcement agent networks is a time-consuming, and risky task. As an outsider to the law enforcement community — an outsider with questions, at that — quite often it was clear that officers were reluctant to meet with me; this meant waiting for one, even two weeks on many occasions to hear back from officers after initial contact and recruitment. Throughout data collection, I was in a perpetual state of worry that leads/contacts provided by previous participants would run cold, by either slowing down or stalling out entirely. While these worries, on a few occasions, proved to be justified, the threat of such roadblocks significantly diminished over time.

¹⁶ As an adherent to the belief that ‘context-matters,’ I paid a great deal of attention to the differences between the responses of participants whose interviews were conducted in official office-settings versus those conducted in more relaxed environments. Never did it appear to change the way agents answered questions — of course this is difficult to substantiate given the counterfactual involved — because when agents were open, they were strangely open regardless of where the interview was being conducted. It should be noted that I did, however, quite often notice interviewer-effects as Latinx agents acknowledged *me* as a co-ethnic, and without prompting, would transition in and out of Spanish during our conversations. Analysis of these moments, and their implications is the subject of subsequent work.

Breaking with the example set by Herbert Kaufman in 1960, my discussions with agents were simply that — discussions. Interviews were open-ended and never became tense nor overtly (or combatively) political. Participants were recruited to the study with an invitation to share their stories, and my goal throughout the project was to provide them the space to do so.¹⁷ While discussions naturally assumed lives of their own, each interview covered set-topics, including agents' upbringings, their families' immigration histories, their time and roles within the agency, their attitudes toward current (and past) policies and enforcement priorities, their lives outside of work, their levels of community engagement, their political activity, knowledge and attitudes, as well as reactions they have received for working in immigration law enforcement. This semi-structuring of each of the interviews allowed for comparison across the sample.

Case Selection: Immigration and Customs Enforcement

Immigration law enforcement in the United States has become a behemoth over the last thirty years. In the aftermath of the terror attacks of September 11, 2001, undocumented immigration — already a source of moral panic — was thrust into national spotlight and framed as one of the nation's foremost “problems” (see e.g., Sampaio 2015). As a result, the industry grew exponentially (see e.g., Welch 2002; Correa 2013).¹⁸ The creation of the Department of Homeland Security in 2003, and the resulting reshuffling of law enforcement, immigration, and

¹⁷ This is to say that participants were recruited with a relatively uncontroversial, if not boring, script, inviting them to take part in a study about the experience of line-level immigration enforcement agents. While the script did mention an “increasingly diverse workforce,” no mention was made (during recruitment, that is) of where these advances were predominately centered. Moreover, Latinx agents were not given any kind of notice that they would be asked about their overlapping identities. They were, of course, made aware that they would be allowed to skip any questions they deemed inappropriate or did not feel comfortable answering.

¹⁸ Today, in addition to the military- and prison-industrial complex, the United States has birthed a parallel ‘immigration-industrial complex,’ to include immigration law enforcement agents, both federal and locally-deputized, immigrant detention facilities, both public and private (not to mention, family-sized), and law/border enforcement technology manufacturers (see Miller 2014; Welch 2002).

intelligence agencies under its umbrella, brought about significant changes in the structure and mandates of agencies like ICE and Border Patrol.

ICE, for instance, previously the enforcement operations wing of INS — which also housed a service wing, Citizenship and Immigration Services — became a standalone law enforcement agency; its mission: “To identify, arrest, and remove aliens who present a danger to national security or are a risk to public safety, as well as those who enter the United States illegally or otherwise undermine the integrity of our immigration laws and our border control efforts...[and uphold] America's immigration laws at, within and beyond our borders through efficient enforcement and removal operations.”¹⁹ In other words, while Border Patrol serves as a hard-shell along the territorial borders of the United States, ICE serves as a ‘mobile border,’ in effect, enforceable in any location within the interior of the country.²⁰

This is the primary reason that for this project I elected to focus on ICE agents, alone; not only is the agency smaller relative to Border Patrol — and thus, more manageable given the resources at my disposal — but the role of ICE in the immigration law enforcement machinery, interior enforcement, puts the agency in much more (and much different) contact with the Latinx community. That Latinxs make up such a sizable proportion of the ICE workforce is all the more puzzling — and raises many more questions — given that ICE, and not Border Patrol, is the agency responsible for neighborhood and worksite surveillance, raids, and arrests, and detention and deportations.²¹

Lastly, it should also be noted that study participants were recruited from one section of ICE, alone: the agency’s Enforcement and Removal Operations (ICE-ERO) division. While the distinction may appear inconsequential, as it is often neglected by members of the general public

¹⁹ Official mission statement provided by the Department of Homeland Security, see the following: <http://www.dhs.gov/mission>.

²⁰ See Bosniak (2006) for discussion of the ‘hard-shell’ of the territorial border, and a case for immigrant claims to belonging upon breaching that outer shell.

²¹ That said, the sampling method employed produced interesting results in that nineteen-percent of the sample were Border Patrol agents prior to becoming ICE agents.

who typically think of ICE as singular in both composition and purpose, the two divisions of ICE — ERO and Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) — are rather discrete. Most agency personnel, in fact, contend that HSI is poorly-positioned, and thus ineffectual, as a division of ICE, attributing such claims to differences in division-level mandates. Where ERO is primarily focused on immigration law enforcement — including apprehension, detention, and removal of migrants in the United States — HSI have a much broader range of law enforcement and investigatory priorities, ranging from counterfeit sports-team merchandise and antiquities to human- and sex-trafficking networks.

While the decision to recruit participants solely from ICE-ERO is, to a degree, self-explanatory — I am specifically interested in Latinxs working in immigration enforcement, proper, not merely law enforcement agencies tangentially-related to immigration²² — it bears noting that this, to be certain, is indeed where the more interesting story is taking place. The agency's disproportionately Latinx workforce is predominately centered in this division. With ICE at nearly 22% Latinx overall, ERO is clearly driving this trajectory, at 29.6% Latinx. Investigations, on the other hand, lags, at 18.5% Latinx.²³ In keeping with broader federal workforce trends, agencies specifically charged with immigration law enforcement appear to be driving *all* advances in Latinx federal workforce participation. To recruit outside of this population would obscure the dynamics at play at this increasingly common intersection, where agents are pulled (and pushed) by overlapping, yet fundamentally contradictory, identities.

Data Collection: Multiple-Entry Snowball-Sampling

Snowball-sampling comes with particular shortcomings, or pitfalls — most notably the risk of tapping, and becoming locked into, particular social networks (Biernacki and Waldorf

²² On this point, specifically, I take serious issue with the (otherwise laudable) work of Correa and Thomas (2015). Not only is their sample of Latinx immigration agents underwhelming in size — at six participants — these participants were also recruited outside of agencies we would (and I do here) characterize as immigration law enforcement entities.

²³ Internal agency numbers (as of December 2015) provided by a source at agency headquarters in Washington, DC.

1981). This was, however, the most appropriate sampling method given the parameters of my project — the most difficult to deal with, of course, being that I was attempting to access a “hidden” population (see e.g., Watters and Biernacki 1989). Over the course of my fieldwork, in fact, many participants expressed significant concerns about the possibility of their identities becoming public knowledge — citing worries of public backlash, and even extortion or retribution on the part of individuals they had previously removed from the country. Given these concerns, there was, in other words, no way that I could have randomly sampled this population.

To deal with the primary shortcoming associated with snowball sampling, however, to mitigate the biases that might result from tapping into particular networks, I utilized multiple entries in each location, not simply depending on single contacts in field sites. What this required, on many occasions, was on-site camping and intercept-recruitment²⁴ — tools in service of my primary goal in data collection: the initiation of as many discrete referral chains as possible. Ultimately, these approaches proved effective, as I was never provided with the same contact by more than one previous participant. It never appeared, in other words, that I was tapping, or locked into, the same social networks via multiple points of entry.

This, however, is not to say that the sample is without bias. In the section that follows, in fact, basic aggregate-level descriptive statistics reveal points of divergence between the resulting sample and the population from which it was drawn, the overall agency. And despite the fact that I would argue away these divergences as inconsequential, they still exist; they are artifacts of both an imperfect data collection process and an imperfect universe of data. Still, I maintain that the methodological approach employed was the best suited, and best available, given the parameters of, and resources allotted for, this project.

²⁴ Coffee and doughnuts seemed to help in many instances. The stereotype, in other words, holds.

The Sample

Despite the targeted sampling-method employed — and thus lack of true random-sampling — the resulting sample is fairly representative of the overall population of ICE-ERO agents (see Table III).²⁵

Table III: Representativeness of the Sample

	AGENCY (ERO)	SAMPLE
Age	44	41
Gender	22% Women	24% Women
Latinx	30%	61%
Education (BA+)	33%	52%
Tenure (yrs)	15	12
Veteran	39%	36%

Source: Internal agency figures (Dec. 2015)

The sample tracks slightly younger, with an average age of forty-one years compared to forty-four, and likely as a consequence, averages slightly shorter time in immigration enforcement.²⁶ In terms of gender diversity, the sample averages only marginally more diverse, with twenty-four percent of the sample being women. Both the sample and population here reflect a broader, longstanding trend in law enforcement professions still very much tied to a culture of patriarchy.

A major divergence between the population and sample emerged on the measure of ‘educational attainment.’ While thirty-three percent of the agency workforce boasts a Bachelor’s degree or higher, fifty-two percent of the sample report the same. Initially puzzling, cross-tabs provide interesting context to this figure. Breaking down this measure across the dichotomy of

²⁵ It bears noting that thirty-six (31 Latinx) of the participants were recruited and interviewed in Texas; twenty-nine (11 Latinx) in Arizona; thirty-four (19 Latinx) in California; and one in Washington, D.C.

²⁶ Age of participants ranges from twenty-three to sixty-five years; time in immigration enforcement ranges across the sample from one to twenty-eight years.

‘Latinx/non-Latinx’ reveals a rather familiar storyline. Where seventy-four percent of non-Latinxs in the sample hold college degrees or higher, only thirty-eight percent of Latinx agents are able to boast the same.²⁷ In terms of educational attainment, in other words, Latinx agents — much like the broader Latinx population of the United States — consistently lag behind their non-Latinx counterparts (see e.g., Cardenas and Kerby 2012). Also important to note about this divergence between population and sample is that a considerable amount of degree holders in the sample completed their education after enlisting in immigration enforcement (if not the military²⁸), suggesting the economic stability provided by federal workforce participation affords the time and resources for individuals to pursue higher education.²⁹

Lastly, and by design, the sample and population significantly differ in proportions of Latinx agents. While Latinxs make up roughly thirty percent of ICE-ERO, Latinxs are over-represented here, making up sixty-one percent of the sample. This divergence was, of course, sought after given the specific focus of the overall project, but also to ensure that comparable, representative numbers of Latinxs were recruited between field locations (see Table IV).

Table IV: Sample Representativeness, Latinx Proportions in Field Locations

	AGENCY (ERO)	SAMPLE
Arizona	31%	38%
California	42%	56%
Texas	69%	86%

Source: Internal agency figures (Dec. 2015)

²⁷ More than half (62% [38]) of the Latinxs in the sample do not hold a Bachelor’s degree or higher. Only 10 of the 39 (26%) non-Latinx agents lacked a college degree.

²⁸ This is, in fact, another point of similarity between population and sample, the sample tracks fairly close in terms of proportion of military veterans. Thirty-six percent of the sample report prior military service — most likely a consequence of fast-track employment procedures for veterans for positions in the federal government instituted during the George W. Bush administration. This, too, may be related to higher rates of educational attainment among study participants, as G.I. Bill benefits extend to educational opportunities.

²⁹ A dynamic explored more fully in *Chapter 3*.

Ultimately, the number of Latinx agents from each field site — while inflated — mirror the relative proportions of Latinx ICE-ERO agents in these locations. Stratified as such, the sample not only provides for a wider array of perspectives and experiences among Latinx agents, but by design, still includes the voices of non-Latinx agents. These narratives, I believe, are fundamental to understanding the position of Latinx agents both within the agency's ranks and within the broader U.S. population.³⁰

In the Crossfire Between Two Camps

From DuBois to Anzaldua, the racial and ethnic minority experience in the United States is a story of simultaneity — of multiple, overlapping identities and conflict.³¹ It is the struggle for belonging somewhere, while lacking full membership anywhere. In this dissertation, I examine the emergence of a disproportionately Latinx immigration law enforcement workforce as a metaphor for this experience. In electing to work in immigration law enforcement, Latinxs make a claim on belonging in the United States rooted in political (and national) obligation, and a *symbolic* relinquishment of ethnic group identity. This claim, however, imposes a cost: liminality — segmented membership both in an ethnic community within which they are seen as having turned their backs, and in an American mainstream where ascriptive markers relegate them to a perpetual state of otherness.

By exploring how Latinx immigration agents deal with their cross-cutting identities and the tensions they engender, I address what it means to be caught between, yet immersed within, two distinct camps — the police and the policed, both problem and solution. Bringing together literature on social identity, race and ethnic politics, and bureaucracy, my work challenges traditional understandings not only of the role of social identities in the behavior of state agents, but the ways in which individuals balance, or accommodate multiple, overlapping, yet

³⁰ An argument outlined in *Chapter 5*.

³¹ See Dubois 2003 [1903] and Anzaldua 2012 [1987].

fundamentally contradictory social group memberships. The evidence presented herein reveals a much different image of the Latinx immigration agent than extant scholarship suggests we should find, consciously aware of, and engaged in, the space between their overlapping identities. Their stories make clear that liminality — intersectionality — beyond a mere theoretical construct, is a lived experience; it is an ongoing process that requires the conscious accommodation of internal contradictions, because the wholesale abandonment of one or more identities is a more difficult and costly exercise. The dissertation proceeds as follows.

In *Chapter 2: The Broken Mirror and the Dynamic Nature of Identity*, I expand on the metaphor of the ‘broken mirror’ as the theoretical underpinning for the overall project. In so doing, I more fully unpack, and address the theoretical shortcomings of, previous scholarship related specifically to Latinxs in immigration enforcement, and more broadly, the role of social identity in shaping the decisions and behavior of state agents. Drawing on scholarship within race and ethnic (Latinx) politics and social identity theory, I present the argument for a understanding of identity as both persistent and dynamic in nature. The broken mirror — illustrated by encounters with clientele that reflect agents’ own identities and narratives — activates and makes salient agents’ ethnic identities and engenders tension with their institutional roles.

Chapter 3: Vendedos, Race-Traitors, or Worse: Explaining the Rise of the La(tinx) Migra addresses a question fundamental to the totality of the project: why do Latinxs elect to work in immigration enforcement? In this chapter, I directly address, and disentangle two distinct processes that have been conflated by previous scholarship pertaining to the emergence of a disproportionately Latinx immigration workforce: *why* and *how* Latinxs work in immigration enforcement. By addressing these questions separately, and beginning with *why* Latinxs elect to work in immigration enforcement, we are better prepared to address the question of *how*. Drawing on the narratives revealed during interviews with Latinx agents, and specific questions

related to what draws Latinxs to immigration work, this chapter provides empirical evidence that Latinxs unsystematically enter immigration enforcement, in service of self-interested rationales related to economic mobility more than considerations of ethnic identity.

Building on the previous chapter, *Chapter 4: Liminal Identity and the Latinx Immigration Enforcement Agent* takes seriously the unsystematic entry of Latinxs into immigration enforcement [the *why*] and addresses the question of *how* Latinxs work in immigration enforcement. Given the fact that Latinxs do not entirely self-select into this line of work because they lack an attachment to their ethnic identity or the immigrant experience, this chapter explores how Latinx agents balance their contradictory identities — ethnic/immigrant and national/institutional — and deal with the tensions engendered therein. Drawing again on interviews with Latinx agents across Texas, Arizona, and California, this chapter explores, and provides evidence of, the relevance of the ‘broken mirror’ metaphor and suggests that Latinx immigration agents experience and deal with the tensions of liminality on a daily basis — that liminality, intersectionality, beyond a mere theoretical construct, is a lived experience.

In *Chapter 5: Who Belongs? Latinx Immigration Enforcement Agents as the Palatable Minority*, I explore the entry of Latinxs into immigration enforcement as a claim on belonging in an American mainstream that still views them as foreign. Drawing on interviews with non-Latinx predominately Anglo agents, this chapter explores the perceptions non-Latinx agents hold of their Latinx counterparts. Characterizations of Latinxs agents as ‘model-minorities,’ who would never shirk their responsibilities as agents of state, and do not consider their own connection to ethnic identity or the immigrant experience, provide a sharp contrast to the stories shared by Latinx agents. This disjuncture, again, points to the situational nature of identity and reveals that Latinx agents remain guarded among their non-Latinx peers as a means of maintaining these perceptions. In so doing, Latinx agents’ claims on belonging remain unquestioned.

Closing the dissertation, in *Chapter 6: Conclusion: Caught Between (Yet Immersed Within) Two Camps*, I more fully explore the emergence of the new *La(tinx) Migra* as a metaphor for the minority experience in the United States: the search for belonging somewhere, while lacking full membership anywhere. In this chapter, I also offer some normative claims about the utility of descriptive representation in positions like immigration enforcement, where sympathetic agents find ways to minimize the activation of those tendencies, and about the utility of immigration enforcement agencies, at large.

CHAPTER 2

BROKEN MIRRORS AND THE DYNAMIC NATURE OF IDENTITY

On a late afternoon in March 2015, I was welcomed into one of ICE's detention facilities in central Texas. Stepping into a recently empty immigrant-holding cell, I was drawn to the distorted reflection of myself in a small mirror bolted to the cinderblock wall. Hidden behind the smudges of fingerprints and scratches on the plate of reflective plastic, a warped image of my face stared back at me. My mind, struggling to make sense of the distorted information it received, grasped at points of familiarity, and clung to corners of the image that appeared unskewed. Backing out of the cold air that hung still in the small room, I imagined how similar moments might strike the men and women who find themselves moving co-ethnic migrants in and out of those cells on a daily basis — confronted by the distorted, yet eerily familiar, reflections presented by broken mirrors, both literal and metaphorical.

• • •

How do Latinx immigration law enforcement agents internalize and deal with the tensions engendered by their overlapping, yet fundamentally contradictory, identities? The question that motivates this dissertation presumes, as fundamental truth, that identity matters. Acknowledging identity as multiple, fluid, situational, and many times, contradictory, it recognizes the Latinx immigration law enforcement agent, at bottom, as a puzzle, riddled with inherent, and unavoidable, internal contradiction. As ethnic, part of an ostensible 'problem,' and as state-agent, the organized state 'solution,' they are, at once, both essential and unwelcome in a country they serve and call home. In this liminal space, the Latinx agent confronts an existential tension, and simultaneously negotiates the boundaries of belonging for themselves *and* the co-ethnic migrants on whom they exercise the coercive powers of the state.

In this chapter, I explore and discuss the positionality of Latinx immigration agents, from the contexts that inform the core operational assumptions of the project to the treatments offered by extant scholarship on this and other comparable intersections. In so doing, I present an argument for a dynamic understanding of identity rooted in the integration of parallel, yet heretofore isolated, threads of inquiry in bureaucracy, social identity, and race and ethnic politics. Drawing on this argument, I develop and operationalize the metaphor of a ‘broken mirror’ as a theoretical construct for understanding the persistence and situational salience of identity.

On the Roots of Contradiction

To characterize ‘Latinx’ and ‘immigration agent’ as contradictory identities is to understand the historical development of U.S. immigration law enforcement agencies not only as linked, but as emerging in response to that of the Latinx community. It is to understand that in a relationship marred by narratives of violence and intimidation, these agencies, known colloquially as ‘*la migra*,’ have played the role of chief antagonist — never solely policing migration, but indiscriminately blanketing Latinx communities across the country in a shroud of surveillance, police-power, and battlefield technology (see e.g., Sampaio 2015; Correa 2011; 2013; Golash-Boza 2011; Lytle Hernandez 2010; Parenti 2008 [1999]; Dunn 1996).³² From the inception of the Border Patrol in 1924, the Latinx community, to include undocumented immigrants, legal residents, and citizens alike, has been the target of an organized state solution to an ostensible problem: the presence of non-white peoples of Latin American, primarily Mexican-descent, on United States territory (Lytle Hernandez 2010). Throughout the 1930s, and again in the 1950s, *la migra* made an indelible mark on the Latinx community — and the nation

³² Author’s field notes: “I’m astonished by how much the drive from one end of the Rio Grande Valley to another feels like driving in a war zone. Perhaps that’s too strong a phrasing — war-zone — but there is an overwhelming sense that law enforcement entities (Border Patrol and DPS, especially) are on HIGH ALERT. During a hundred mile stretch, I counted at least 65 law enforcement vehicles — I lost count! And in the skies, dirigible drones hovering over the lands south of the highway. Who are we fighting here? This is not the *frontera* I grew up in” (7 March 2015).

— as millions of Latinxs, regardless of citizenship status, were rounded up in raids and, without due process, expelled from the United States (see e.g., Correa 2013; 2011; Nevins 2010 [2001]; Calavita 2010 [1992]).

This kind of blanket enforcement, and the horror stories it attends, is not merely a relic of early twentieth century biases. Contemporary examples of abuse and dragnet operations by both ICE and Border Patrol, in fact, abound in the form of continued nationwide-sweep operations (see e.g., Constable 2016; Tanfani 2015; Nevins 2010 [2001]), neighborhood patrols (see e.g., Minnis 2016; Abowd 2014), and ubiquitous racial profiling of brown-skinned peoples across the country (see e.g., Garcia Hernandez 2012; Lytle Hernandez 2010).³³ The state's enforcement actions within, and against, Latinx communities have been so aggressive that scholars have characterized these efforts as an ongoing 'racial project,' designed not only to tie Latinx identity to criminality, but violently relegate Latinxs — and the communities in which they live — to a permanent subclass in a perpetual state of 'otherness,' devoid of social, political, and economic power (see e.g., Sampaio 2015; Correa 2011; Provine and Doty 2011; Lytle Hernandez 2010; Romero 2006; Omi and Winant 1994).

The Latinx community and *la migra*, in short, share a not only long, but mutually constitutive, history. Paths intertwined, the size and strength of both have depended largely on that of the other. Emerging in response to a growing non-white population, the nation's immigration law enforcement machinery found in the Latinx community its *raison d'être*. In turn, the Latinx community has been, and continues to be, most literally shaped by the coercive, and punitive, actions of that machinery — the community's boundaries and make-up subject, and

³³ The 1975 Brignoni-Ponce decision bestowed wide-reaching discretionary authority to immigration enforcement officers, making 'Mexican-appearance' a relevant factor in the decision to make an immigration stop. This decision, in essence, made 'driving-while-Mexican' in the borderlands an act worthy of law enforcement suspicion. For fuller discussion of the effects of this landmark decision in immigration enforcement, see Garcia Hernandez 2012; Lytle Hernandez 2010; Johnson 2010.

bound, to those agencies' operative-policies.³⁴ They are, in other words, each other's mirrored opposite, where overlap between the two is seen as unnatural, if not an outright betrayal of both self and group.

Mamas, don't let your *mijos* [sons] grow up to be *la migra*,
Don't let 'em search cars or chase us with trucks,
Let 'em be doctors and lawyers and such.
Mamas, don't let your *mijos* [sons] grow up to be *la migra*,
Because they're taught that this land is no one else's home,
Even for *gente* [people] they love.³⁵

There is, currently, no broader public opinion data on Latinxs' attitudes toward immigration law enforcement, or the importance of group cohesion, but we get hints of such attitudes in popular culture sources. This excerpt, for instance, adapted from the song popularized by Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson in 1978, and performed by Austin, Texas, band, *Sonoita*, illustrates this deep, yet interlocking, cleavage. Written as a response to the emergence of the new *La(tinx) Migra*, as a (half-jest) plea to Latinx mothers to keep their sons from 'growing up to be *la migra*,' the adaptation is a callback to the longstanding cultural significance and informal rules of group cohesion in the Latinx community — especially where the relationship between that community and *la migra*, as well as other manifestations of institutionalized-threat, is concerned (i.e., the Texas Rangers of the early twentieth century, the LAPD of the 1940s). The importance of these informal rules — of group identity, but most importantly, loyalty — cannot be overstated. Across generations, cultural and folkloric art has reflected the steep costs associated with breaching group boundaries and joining 'the enemy.'

³⁴ Scholars have long pointed to the use of deportation as a means of removing from the country Latinx 'rabble-rousers,' from those attempting to organize the community for labor and civil rights, to individuals who questioned working conditions or wages (see e.g., Buff 2008; Larralde 2004; Lazo 1991).

³⁵ Song adapted by Chris Ledesma and performed by self-described *pocha/o* punk, Austin, TX, band, *Sonoita*; "*Sonoita* sings of the struggles and resistance of the brown-bodied, immigrants and our changing cities to bring rhythm and movement to the community" (<https://www.facebook.com/sonoitason/home>).

In his seminal, quasi-autobiographic novel, *George Washington Gomez*, Americo Paredes (1990) tells the story of a band of Mexican *sediciosos* [rebels] in the south Texas borderlands. In encountering an Anglo man, assumed to be a spy for the *rinches* [slang for ‘Texas Rangers’], traveling late at night through the *chaparral* [brush] with a brown-skinned, Mexican counterpart, the most zealous of the group shoots the Anglo without a second thought. Turning to the Mexican man who shrieks in fear, the rebels pause to ponder a more painful punishment, as his crime — working with ‘the enemy,’ and turning his back on his people — is seen as the ultimate betrayal. The punishment he receives is a reflection of the significance of group identity and cohesion; allowed to go free — because killing a fellow *Mexicano* would violate the ideals of group loyalty — he is forced to live with the shame of having betrayed not only his people, but himself.

While this short story consumes but a page of the novel, a mere part of early character development, its theme is carried through to the end of the titular character’s story. Within the narrative that sees George — known to family and friends as ‘*Gualinto*’³⁶ — raised in a traditionally-Mexican home in a part of the country that is, in many ways both physically, emotionally, and culturally, stretched across into Mexico, Paredes wrestles with soft-colonialism, the push and pull of assimilation, and the pressures of ethnic group identity and loyalty. The closing pages find George returning home from ‘up north’ as a man. In a tense conversation with his uncle, and surrogate father, it is revealed that his trip home is not at all a personal visit, but work. An intelligence officer for the U.S. military, he has been sent to the border to spy, and report back to superiors, on a new generation of ‘agitators’ and ‘*sediciosos*’ — members of the Mexican-American community organizing for political power. His uncle, stunned by his nephew’s revelation, musters in the end a single thought, riddled with shame for the boy he

³⁶ An adaptation of his middle name, ‘Washington,’ born of the heavy tongue associated with English words not easily translated to Spanish.

helped raise to be — as his deceased father had hoped — a ‘leader of his people,’ but who instead turned his back on them. The novel closes on this final exchange:

‘I’ll tell you,’ his uncle said. ‘This is one of those times when I wish I believed in another life, in a life after death.’

‘It is?’

‘Yes. Then I could look forward to seeing your father in purgatory or limbo or wherever it is that Mexican yokels go. We could sit down and have a good long talk about you.’

George smiled. ‘I didn’t know you had a sense of humor,’ he said.

‘I don’t,’ his uncle said.

Paredes is not alone in addressing the cultural significance of group loyalty among Latinxs. In his one-act play, *Los Vendidos* [‘the sell-outs’ or ‘the sold ones’], Chicano playwright, Luis Valdez, explores on multiple levels the notion of ‘Mexicans for sale.’³⁷ Set in “Honest Sancho’s Used Mexican Lot and Mexican Curio Shop,” the performance features shop owner and salesman, “Honest Sancho,” his four Mexican “models” — “the farmworker,” “the *pachuco*,” “the *revolucionario*,” and “the Mexican-American” — and a secretary, “Miss Jimenez,” on a mission from the governor’s office to find a “Mexican-type” for the capitol (Valdez 1990, 40-41).

In the hopes of making a sale, Honest Sancho reveals to Miss Jimenez the special functions of each model, exclaiming, “Just snap your fingers, [they’ll] do anything you want” (50). Passing on the first three models because the farmworker does not speak English, the *pachuco* is violent, and a thief to boot, and the *revolucionario* was not ‘made in America,’ the secretary ultimately opts for the Mexican-American. For fifteen thousand dollars, she purchases the palatable Mexican *vendido* she had set out to find, fully acculturated and replete with derogatory statements about “the problems of the Mexican” (49). As she attempts to move him

³⁷ First performed in 1967 at a Brown Beret junta, Elysian Park, East Los Angeles.

out of the store, however, the Mexican-American model begins to malfunction, shouting in Spanish about revolution, and activating and rallying the other three models to his cause. In unison, the four models lurch towards Miss Jimenez as she runs out through the door — without her money, without her Mexican. As the dust settles, Sancho freezes in place while the four Mexican models begin conversing amongst themselves, revealing the entire sales-pitch as a performance, a money-making scheme, a scam. Picking up the true robot, Sancho, the four exit the stage laughing at the fact that their ruse was a success, the secretary was oblivious to their act.

There is much at work in this short play. On multiple levels, Valdez keys in on intra- and inter-group dynamics within the Latinx community, and the perception of those willing to sell out, or turn their backs on, the community. Literally for sale, each of the models is a '*vendido*' [a sell-out], acting on the finger-snaps of the highest bidder. The farmworker reveals, as he yells '*huelga, huelga,*' that he can strike — but with another snap, he can just as easily sell out his community and scab, exclaiming '*me vendo barato*' [I sell for cheap] (43). The *pachuco*, the so-called 'urban model,' exemplifies the stereotypical Mexican gang-member only to reveal that, as a *vendido*, he makes a great scapegoat and training dummy for the LAPD (45-46). The *revolucionario*, donning his stereotypical sombrero and bandolier, is the epitome of romance and zeal — but perfectly willing to sell himself, and his people's history of revolution, for television commercials as the cartoon snack-chip mascot, the 'Frito Bandito' (47).

Beneath these stories, however, is another pointed critique. For Valdez, it is Miss Jimenez who is the true sell-out. She has removed herself so far from her culture that she is incapable of recognizing that she is being played for a fool, sold a false bill of goods by a caricature, a snake-oil salesman. Valdez reveals that Miss Jimenez — who early on corrects Sancho's Spanish pronunciation of her name to a more clunky, English pronunciation — has sold-out to the degree that she is unable to recognize the four models presented to her as

outrageous stereotypes. She believes the four models represent ‘real Mexicans.’ Exploited by both her employer and the community she left behind, Miss Jimenez is a cautionary tale, a reminder of the price to be paid for abandoning — for selling-out — the group, for forgetting who you are and where you come from.

Between the terror wrought by immigration enforcement agencies on the Latinx community — both historical and contemporary — and high premium placed on Latinx group cohesion, it is difficult to characterize the relationship between Latinxs and *la migra* as anything but inherently antagonistic, and rooted in contradiction. Yet within these contexts, the last thirty years have bore witness to the emergence of a unique intersectional experience: that of the Latinx immigration law enforcement agent. Historically used to justify the creation of predominately-white immigration enforcement agencies, Latinxs now disproportionately fill their ranks.³⁸ As products of their own history of migration, these agents police the very act that birthed them, apprehending, detaining, and deporting reflections of themselves in migrants with whom they share ascriptive traits, language, and culture. To explain *why* Latinxs work in immigration enforcement, and *how* they navigate the tensions engendered by their overlapping, contradictory identities, however, extant scholarship has produced limited answers.

Explaining the Latinx Immigration Law Enforcement Agent

Given the inherent contradictions involved, how do we explain the emergence (and persistence) of a disproportionately Latinx immigration enforcement workforce? To this question, extant scholarship, where Latinx immigration agents are of specific concern, *and* where they are not, offers a simple answer: ethnic, Latinx, identity is irrelevant. To understand the Latinx immigration agent, scholars contend that we must look at them as they see themselves:

³⁸ See e.g., 1924 Report to the Secretary of Labor from the Commissioner General of Immigration, W.W. Husband, p 17.

not as ‘Latinx,’ but as ‘citizen’ (Heyman 2002), ‘insider’ (Garcia Hernandez 2012), ‘soldier’ (Correa and Thomas 2015), and ‘state-agent’ (Lipsky 2010 [1980]; Wilson 1989). The implication of such arguments is that Latinx immigration agents experience no tension in their overlapping identities, because relevant cleavages — or, identities that supersede ethnic identity (e.g., ‘citizen,’ ‘insider,’ ‘soldier,’ ‘state-agent’) — are in no way incompatible with agents’ institutional roles. The resulting image of the Latinx immigration agent presented, while ascriptively ethnic, or Latinx, remains far removed from that frame of reference, ultimately unburdened by the tensions it might engender.

Latinxs in Immigration Enforcement

In the most widely-known study of Latinx immigration officers to date, anthropologist Josiah M. Heyman suggests that there is no inherent tension for Latinxs who work in immigration enforcement. Drawing on observations of, and interviews with, thirty-three ‘Mexican-American’ Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) agents, Heyman proffers this claim by stating bluntly: “[immigration] officers of Mexican ancestry do not identify with Mexican and other Latin American immigrants” (2002, 479).³⁹ For Latinx immigration enforcement officers, he contends, being a ‘citizen,’ as opposed to a ‘Latinx/Mexican-American/Mexican,’ is the most relevant mode of identification. Citizenship, he argues, is “powerful,” and the rights and privileges that it bestows effectively divide Latinx immigration officers from their co-ethnic clientele (480).

Situating his argument in a historical narrative of Mexican-Americans’ struggle for substantive citizenship — for social, economic, and political power and privilege — Heyman maintains that with the attainment of discernible rights and benefits, including higher-level labor market opportunities, comes a distance between the life-worlds and experiences of Latinx

³⁹ The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) was the agency that, prior to the Homeland Security Act (2003), housed Border Patrol, an enforcement and detention service [now ICE, for all intents and purposes], and USCIS.

immigration officers and the co-ethnic migrants with whom they come into contact. The relative distance between the content of citizen and non-citizen thus shapes the relationship between citizen-state-agent and non-citizen. The result, Heyman claims, is a lack of connection between Latinx immigration officer and Latinx immigrant — a dearth of empathy manifest in sterile, routinized interactions between the state and (non)subject.

While laudable for its depth of data collection and analysis, Heyman's contribution to the study of Latinx immigration officers suffers from a significant logical incongruence, laid bare in his assessment of *why* Latinxs enter immigration enforcement. The primary issue here is that one of his corollary arguments — that Latinxs unsystematically enter the service, without regard for ethnic identity or particular attitudes toward undocumented immigration — is difficult to square with his central thesis (see Heyman 2002, 487).

Citizens' rights and benefits shape their experiences and contemporary life-worlds. Lived contexts and formal ideologies affect interior motivations, involving understandings of others and emotional states toward them. Citizenship privileges render the imagination less able to envision other, unprivileged ways of life and hence less likely to empathize with them (480).

Notwithstanding the debatable nature of privilege in Latinx border communities, Heyman wants to argue that it is the content of citizenship — duties, rights, and benefits — that leaves Latinx immigration officers unequipped to empathize with non-citizens, regardless of shared ethnic identity.⁴⁰ Given their relative privilege as citizens, their identification with co-ethnic migrants and the broader immigrant experience is, in essence, non-existent. At the same time, however, Heyman wants to say that these attitudes are not present when Latinxs take jobs in immigration enforcement — a particularly difficult claim to sustain.

⁴⁰ But what if those privileges aren't necessarily felt or perceived? Recognition of privilege seems necessary in order to shake loose an understanding of what it means to be 'unprivileged.' If anything, when immigration officers in my sample discuss taking the job, they express thankfulness that the job came along and that they could get out of, or improve their prior situations (i.e., joblessness, single-parenting, struggling to make ends meet) — an explanation Heyman seems to agree exists but rejects nonetheless; never do they suggest or imply that they expected that they were owed a job like this because they were citizens.

Citizenship, as described by Heyman, with all its privilege and benefits — an experience that is arguably missing in the Latinx community — does not begin for Latinxs when they become immigration officers, it necessarily precedes the job application.⁴¹ Pursuant to Heyman's argument, we can only (read, must) assume that Latinxs elect to work for immigration enforcement agencies because: 1) they feel entitled to such positions given their privilege as citizens; 2) they lack empathy for non-citizens; 3) they lack any kind of identification with (or understanding of) the immigrant experience; and 4) in the interest of protecting against the distribution of rights and benefits to non-citizens, they are immigration-restrictionists. Heyman, in fact, supports this logical extension when he states that Mexican-Americans in El Paso — not exclusively immigration enforcement officers — expressed significant support for 'Operation Blockade,' a local immigration enforcement effort by Border Patrol.⁴² This, for Heyman, suggests not only that Latinx immigration officers hold restrictionist immigration attitudes, but the broader Latinx community does as well.⁴³ Such attitudes, it would appear, necessarily come from substantive citizenship that is unbound from specific occupational status.

Despite its internal contradiction, Heyman's work, long the only significant empirical study of Latinxs in immigration enforcement, has gone relatively unchallenged. Likely due to the fact that his argument, quite simply, makes intuitive sense — Latinxs who work in immigration enforcement must not see, or consider, themselves in ethnic terms, as 'Latinxs' —

⁴¹ Even if this weren't the case, and Latinx immigration officers do not, in fact, recognize their relative privilege as citizens until after they have accepted positions within an immigration enforcement agency, this would not explain the variation in levels of identification with (or understanding of) the immigrant experience, nor the prevalence of immigration attitudes we might characterize as 'liberal,' within the sample of Latinx immigration enforcement agents presented here.

⁴² This point, too, is debatable: Heyman may be too quick to associate support for Operation Blockade with restrictionist attitudes. Research shows that support for the operation was most likely due to its peripheral effects, chief of which was moving immigration agents out of the community and locking them to the border (see e.g., Lytle Hernandez 2010; Dunn 2009).

⁴³ He substantiates this argument with (second-hand) survey data from border residents and in his own sample, finds 85% of the Mexican-American immigration officers in his study — twenty-eight of thirty-three, total — hold restrictionist immigration attitudes of one kind or another.

scholars across multiple disciplines, in the years since its publication, have only bolstered his conclusion by offering similar, parallel arguments.

In his broad critique of the historically abusive treatment of Mexican immigrants and residents of the border region at the hands of immigration enforcement agencies, predominately focused on the expansive use of state-sanctioned racial profiling, legal scholar Cesar Cuauhtémoc Garcia Hernandez (2012) similarly points to the inherent contradiction of Latinx immigration agents. This contradiction, he explains, is rooted in the fact that the brown faces of Latinx immigration enforcement officers put those agents in just as much a risk of being targeted by Border Patrol and ICE as any other Latinx in the borderlands — the recognition of which, it stands to reason, *should* preclude their membership in such agencies.⁴⁴ Drawing on the work of Americo Paredes (1990) and Paulo Freire (2000 [1970]), however, Garcia Hernandez offers the following explanation for the emergence of a disproportionately Latinx immigration enforcement workforce: Latinxs who work in immigration enforcement do so because — consciously or otherwise — they have adopted the biases and ideology of ‘the oppressor.’

The Latinx immigration agent, in other words, sees himself not as ‘Latinx,’ but as ‘insider,’ situated above, and distinct from, the co-ethnic migrants he encounters, more closely aligned with, and party to, the ‘oppressive’ power structure for which he exercises — *and* from which he derives — his coercive authority. From this position, Garcia Hernandez suggests, the Latinx agent poses a greater threat to the Latinx community than any other potential ‘enemy,’ because “the most profound form that oppression takes occurs only when the *oppressed* internalize the cultural values and perspective of the *oppressor*” (190). In this particular case, the

⁴⁴ Explaining why Latinxs come to work in immigration enforcement is not Garcia Hernandez’s central focus. In a previous article (2010), however, he delves a bit deeper into changing demographics of immigration enforcement agencies. While not asserting that economic considerations are the sole reason for Latinxs entering immigration enforcement, he does lay out a case under which such an argument could be made. Given the average economic/occupational prospects for people in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, where Garcia Hernandez was raised, he contends turning down the opportunity to make the kind of money (and benefits) that ICE and Border Patrol offer is difficult. Why he, in his 2012 article, abandons this explanation is not wholly unbelievable — that people assume Latinxs are biased or racist against their own people (the self-hating Latinx argument) is clear — but he ultimately leaves the question of *why* Latinxs enter these positions open to further discussion.

Latinx immigration agent, having internalized and adopted the racial stereotypes and biases that led to past abuses of Latinxs by *la migra*, takes ownership of, and brings new life to, an ongoing ‘war’ on immigration concentrated in Latinx communities across the country.

While rhetorically strong, the argument put forward by Garcia Hernandez is just that — an argument. Lacking empirical data, or evidence to back up his claim, his thesis remains unsubstantiated, insofar as the data collected by Heyman (2002) does not paint an identical picture. As such, a number of questions remain. It is, for instance, not entirely clear whether Garcia Hernandez believes that the adoption of biases by Latinx agents precede or follow from entrance into agencies such as ICE or Border Patrol. It is also unclear where Garcia Hernandez, like Heyman (2002), sees the role of citizenship, in shaping the positionality of Latinx agents. Notwithstanding its lack of empirical evidence — perhaps a natural result of professional or disciplinary norms — the essay is useful in assessing the trajectory of in-kind studies of Latinx immigration agents.

Consider, for instance, a recent article by sociologists Jennifer Correa and James Thomas (2015). In this piece, the authors focus on the lived experiences of Mexican-American immigration officers — ‘brown bodies’ charged by the state with policing other ‘brown bodies’ — and how internalized racial ideologies shape the embodiment and enactment of state power in interactions between those officers and the Mexican-American community of the lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas. Utilizing a case-study approach, Correa and Thomas immersed themselves in the world of the agents, participating in ride-alongs, informal conversations, and in-depth ethnographic interviews with six agents representing four distinct agencies currently engaged in immigration enforcement of some kind or another: the Border Patrol, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), and the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) Narcotics Division.

Clearly distinguishing — unlike previous studies — between *why* Latinxs work in immigration enforcement in such large proportions and *how* such officers rationalize their work, the authors present another argument for thinking of Latinx immigration agents outside of their ethnic, Latinx, identity. While they see the rise of a disproportionately Latinx immigration enforcement workforce, or *why* Latinxs work in immigration, as fundamentally tied to identity — the likely consequence of an executive order signed by President George W. Bush mandating the hiring of more Latinxs to the federal workforce⁴⁵ — the authors describe *how* Latinxs work in immigration as effectively removed from such considerations. Due to a number of factors, including a disassociation with, and repudiation of, ethnic identity given a conflation of ‘Mexican-ness’ with criminality, anxiety over terrorism and the potential for terrorists to cross what is seen as a permeable border, and the internalization of institutional forces and histories of violence, Latinx agents do not see themselves as ‘Latinxs,’ but as ‘soldiers,’ whose sole purpose is defense of the nation. The influence, and importance, of ethnic identity to the Latinx immigration agent is, thus — as previous studies have asserted (see e.g., Heyman 2002; Garcia Hernandez 2012) — negligible.

In a post-9/11 homeland security state, Correa and Thomas (2015) present a most timely and intuitive argument. More clearly distinguishing between *why* and *how* Latinxs work in immigration enforcement than previous studies, their work is laudable. The test of their theory is, however, less rigorous than we might expect, or hope for. The centerpiece of their study — a set of interviews with six law enforcement officers — significantly constrains the generalizability of their conclusion.

The stories shared by the officers interviewed by Correa and Thomas are illuminating; but this evidence is underwhelming not only in size, but in their representativeness of the population with which we (and in-kind studies) are concerned. Correa and Thomas would

⁴⁵ While this certainly may have been a contributing factor, it is an incomplete explanation given that rising proportions of Latinxs in immigration enforcement preceded this action.

contend that they are covering a wide array of law enforcement officers charged with the enforcement of immigration law, but this would be too generous a characterization. Their survey, quite simply, does not directly involve the relationship between Latinxs and the agencies which constitute *‘la migra.’* I concede the point that “the War on Terror incentivized collaboration between federal and local law enforcement agencies to control and manage the U.S.-Mexico border, [transforming] local agents into proxy immigration officers,” but at root, Texas DPS officers, and local representatives of the DEA, are not truly immigration agents (Correa and Thomas 2015, 240). Simply put, the mandates of DEA and DPS are not solely focused on immigration law enforcement; officers in these agencies, in other words, do not necessarily *have* to deal with immigration, unlike their counterparts in Border Patrol and ICE. That Latinxs enter general law enforcement agencies, such as DEA or the state police, does not raise the same kinds of questions or contradictions that are generally raised by their entrance into agencies that strictly enforce immigration law.

Limited as they are, studies that directly address Latinx immigration enforcement agents are not unique in the conclusions they draw. To large extent, in fact, the claims proffered by scholars like Heyman (2002), Garcia Hernandez (2012), and Correa and Thomas (2015) parallel established theories on street-level bureaucrats within political science. Here, too, scholars maintain that social identities, such as race and ethnicity, are irrelevant to the behavior of individuals who see themselves not as white, black, or Latinx, but as ‘state-agent.’ The power of the institution, these scholars contend, renders all extra-institutional social identities irrelevant, leaving behind only those bestowed by, or derived from, the institution itself.

Uniform Identities: The Power of the Institution

Conventional thinking about the role of identity in high socialization venues, such as law enforcement, the military, and other street-level bureaucratic agencies, holds that social or ‘extra-institutional’ identities, such as race and ethnicity, have little influence on the behavior of

individual agents (see e.g., Lipsky 2010 [1980]; Kaufman 2006 [1960]; Wilson 1989). Institutions of this kind, in fact, measure success by the degree to which they can erase individual social identities, and whip their officials into uniformity. In doing so, the goal is to ensure that individual agents always act professionally, even when operating in isolation with broad discretionary authority (Kaufman 2006 [1960]).

Consider, for instance, the recent U.S. Army slogan: “An Army of One.” This slogan epitomizes the dedication of the military to maintaining a singularly cohesive fighting force by subordinating individuals’ racial and ethnic, gender, and religious identities to ‘the uniform.’ In so doing, the Army ensures that rather than a mere collection of individual soldiers, it is an indivisible entity, an ‘Army of one.’ As such, when scholars discuss how military servicemen, and other analogous agents of the state, or ‘street-level bureaucrats,’ behave⁴⁶ — most often reduced to, and measured in discretionary decision-making⁴⁷ — they take this erasing of identity as a given and significantly downplay, if not altogether ignore the role of identities other than those arising out of institutional membership.

To understand how state-agents, or ‘street-level bureaucrats,’ behave, Lipsky (2010 [1980]) suggests we need only consider the conditions under which such actors perform their work. Confronted by what he terms the central dilemma of public service, street-level bureaucrats perform their duties under constant, and contradictory environmental pressures. While many are motivated by the desire to do good, and to provide responsive and appropriate

⁴⁶ Michael Lipsky, who can be credited for this terminology, describes ‘street-level bureaucrats’ as “public workers who interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs, and who have substantial discretion in the execution of their work” (2010 [1980], 3). They are, for all intents and purposes, the front-lines of citizen-state interaction and policy delivery.

⁴⁷ Scholars reduce agent behavior to discretionary decisions, and necessarily conflate identity with behavior, because it is in these decisions that agents are able to exercise (to an extent) free-will by shirking, meeting minimum standards/expectations, or ‘going above and beyond’ in terms of their duties. It bears noting that while this is how behavior is measured/discerned, it is only half of a process that I am interested in here. While results (outcomes) are important, I am primarily interested in how agents come to such decisions (e.g., the considerations brought to bear on a decision; the rationale behind action *or* inaction; and the tension born of decisions-made); these, however, are the terms that the extant scholarship has established and, as such, I engage with them. The methodological approach I undertook here does, however, allow me to probe beyond the realm of outcomes unlike previous studies to the thought-processes that result in discretionary decisions and actions.

services to the public, doing so is often a futile exercise, as they are faced with countervailing conditions.⁴⁸ In other words, their commitment to public service is limited by five significant constraints: 1) resources are chronically inadequate to the tasks workers are expected to perform; 2) the demand for services tends to increase to meet supply; 3) goal expectations for the agencies in which they work tend to be ambiguous, vague, or conflicting; 4) performance in relation to goal achievement tends to be difficult if not impossible to measure; and 5) clients are often involuntary, meaning they do not serve as primary decision-making reference groups (27-28). Ultimately, Lipsky contends, agents meld the exercise of their discretion with the routines and characterizations of clientele (see e.g., Schram et al. 2009; Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003; Schneider and Ingram 1993) agents develop in order to cope with contradictory, but distinctly institutional pressures (2010 [1980], 85).

Like Lipsky, Wilson contends that the behavior of state agents is most often determined by context: the situations they encounter, prior experiences (specifically within bureaucratic contexts), beliefs about professional norms, expectations of peers, and the influence of organized interests. The foundational goals of the organization are only one, sometimes minor influence on their behavior. In combination, Wilson asserts, these factors create an organizational culture: “a distinctive way of viewing and reacting to the bureaucratic world” (27). He contends that organizational culture, in essence, serves to whip individual agents into near-uniformity, “[shaping] whatever discretionary authority operators may have” (1989, 27).

Common among conventional theories of state-agent behavior and discretionary decision-making, in other words, is a commitment to parsimony; decisions are made within, and are *alone* subject to the institutional context in which street-level bureaucrats operate. As such, the decisions of state-agents are seen as only significantly shaped by pressures associated with

⁴⁸ Lipsky, as it happens, is really describing the pressures faced by a distinct type of bureaucratic agency, namely one that provides social services to involuntary clientele, or as termed in other writing, ‘service bureaucracies.’ Jones-Correa (2005), for instance, points out that the desire to ‘do good’ among street-level bureaucrats varies between agency types, particularly service versus regulatory bureaucracies.

their roles as institutional actors, where the homogenizing force of professionalization eliminates any personal predispositions that might emerge from agents' extra-institutional lives (Kaufman 2006 [1960]). For Lipsky (2010 [1980]), personal identities and predispositions are bracketed as agent behavior is primarily shaped by institution-specific limitations and resource constraints. Likewise, Wilson (1989) suggests that organizational culture, and a sense of agency mission, simply edges-out extra-institutional, or social identity considerations in the exercise of discretionary authority.

Applying these theories to the Latinx immigration agent, we can readily assume — as scholars have previously — that ethnic identity is a wholly unimportant facet of agents' lives both in and out of the uniform. Compared to previous studies, however, scholars here suggest that it is the uniform, the institutional role, itself, and the identities derived therein (e.g., 'immigration agent,' 'federal agent,' 'law enforcement officer'), that supplant, or suppress the influence of, social identities like race and ethnicity. In adopting an institutional identity, the Latinx immigration agent is figuratively scrubbed of extra-institutional, ascriptive markers and sympathies, and becomes (one with) 'the uniform' — a not uncommon finding among studies of relevant analogues grounded in these foundational works.

Exceptions to the Rule: Sometimes Identity Matters

That traditional bureaucracy scholars have dismissed the role of extra-institutional identities in shaping the behavior of street-level bureaucrats does not mean that scholars who have studied employees in public agencies have not considered questions of identity. On the contrary, within political science and across its disciplinary neighbors, scholars have acknowledged that identity may, in fact, play a role in the interactions between state-agents and

their clientele.⁴⁹ But in being tied to the assumptions inherent to traditional scholarship on bureaucracy (e.g., Lipsky 2010 [1980]; Wilson 1989), these works often fail to fully assess the role that identity plays in the worlds such individuals actually experience.

Since the publication of the seminal works on street-level bureaucracy in the 1980s, scholars have expanded on the theories proposed by Lipsky and Wilson and built massive fields of inquiry concerning the behavior of state-agents, including welfare case-workers (see e.g., Schram et al. 2009; Brodtkin 1997), school teachers, and police officers (see e.g., Weitzer and Tuch 2006; Alpert et al. 2005; Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003; Riksheim and Chermak 1993).⁵⁰ And while much of this work acknowledges a role for identity in the interactions between state-agent and client, these analyses are often hamstrung by assumptions arising from traditional scholarship; that is, agent identity is taken as given, rooted in the institution, and client identity is the independent variable of immediate interest. The majority of these works, in fact, are framed as little more than examples of Lipsky's 'coping mechanisms' at work, wherein the discretionary decisions of street-level bureaucrats are thought determined by socially-constructed profiles, or characterizations, of client groups — *including* those arising from ethnic and racial biases (see e.g., Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003; Schram et al. 2009; Sandfort 2000).

Where such studies have challenged traditional scholarship by focusing on how agents' social identities — specifically race and ethnicity — shape discretionary decision-making,

⁴⁹ We might even argue that the work of scholars like Heyman (2002), Garcia Hernandez (2012), and Correa and Thomas (2012) begins with the premise that identity does, or should, matter. The questions (and puzzles) that initiate their research stem from the expectation that ethnic identity should preclude the emergence of a disproportionately Latinx immigration law enforcement workforce.

⁵⁰ It bears noting that one of the most relevant analogues to Latinxs in immigration enforcement is that of black municipal police officers. Much like the current case, the relationship between black men and women in the United States and the police is buried under the weight of a history of past, and ongoing, violence and intimidation. The criminalization, and imprisonment, of young black men, specifically, has garnered significant attention as an ongoing 'racial project,' famously characterized by Michele Alexander (2010) as the 'new Jim Crow.' That black men and women become police officers in the face of such a relationship has raised similar questions to those I raise here: how do black police officers balance two distinct, if not contradictory identities? Does ethnic/racial identity matter to black (and brown) police officers? And if so, how does it matter? The difference here, however, is that the job, 'municipal police officer,' (arguably) does not solely exist as a response to black 'here-ness,' or 'black-ness' altogether — as it does in the case of 'immigration law enforcement officer.' In other words, there is *some* plausible deniability in becoming a police officer and not being entirely party to a system of racial subjugation, harassment and abuse.

reliance on haphazard operationalizations of identity have led to more questions than answers. Attempts to assess the statistical effects of agent race or ethnicity on a particular set of outcomes, for instance, complex social identities are often crudely reduced to dichotomous dummy-variables such that they are amenable for use in quantitative data analyses (see e.g. Schram et al. 2009; Alpert et al. 2005; Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003; Riksheim and Chermak 1993).⁵¹ Treatments of this kind, however, provide little in the way of explanation for resulting findings — especially where exceptional cases are concerned, wherein, for instance, a welfare case-manager’s racial or ethnic identity only *sometimes* appears to determine their decision to sanction a client (see e.g., Coleman Selden 1998; Schram et al. 2009), and police officer race or ethnicity only *sometimes* matters in the decision to stop or arrest subjects (see e.g., Riksheim and Chermak 1993; Alpert et al. 2005). With scant understanding of the relevance of such results to an overall pattern, scholars, in many cases, resort to labeling these findings as mere exceptions to the ‘rule’ outlined by traditional scholarship, where agents, in essence, become their uniforms — where “[i]t is the color of the uniform, not skin color, that determines police behavior, [and] cops are ‘blue,’ not black or white” (Weitzer 2000, 318; Weitzer and Tuch 2006).

A Common Problem

The cross-section of scholarship covered herein share a common problem. From studies specifically related to Latinxs in immigration enforcement to the wider array concerning analogous street-level bureaucrats, each suffers a fundamentally flawed understanding of the nature of identity. While laid bare most clearly in the contradictory findings of studies that attempt to dichotomously quantify identity in either-or terms (e.g., ‘Latinx/Non-Latinx’), *all* depend on an assumption without which their conclusions would be unsound — an assumption of identity as static in nature.

⁵¹ A significant difference between the current study and a majority of those discussed here is in the answers sought. Where previous studies have been primarily focused on ‘decisions ultimately made,’ I am much more interested in *how* decisions are made, *how* identity figures into the decision-making process.

For Heyman (2002), Garcia Hernandez (2012), and Correa and Thomas (2015), ethnic identity ceases to be a relevant analytical frame for Latinx immigration agents because that identity has given way to others deemed more pertinent (e.g., ‘citizen,’ ‘insider,’ or ‘soldier’). For Lipsky (2010 [1980]) and Wilson (1989), and others that followed (e.g., Weitzer and Tuch 2006; Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003), Latinx immigration agents shed their extra-institutional identities and predispositions upon assuming institutional identities (e.g., ‘state-agent’). Both sets of claims, however, rely on a view of the Latinx immigration agent as existing within a vacuum, ignoring the realities of the social world. That agents are individuals who leave work at the end of every day and interact with friends, family, and community members, that they *maintain* memberships in various social identity groups — including, and especially those targeted by the agencies they represent — never enters, in any meaningful way, the calculus of extant scholarship. As a consequence, scholars fail to recognize that individuals, regardless of prioritized identities (e.g., ‘citizen,’ ‘insider,’ ‘soldier’), and/or institutional roles (e.g., ‘state-agent’), remain subject to situational pressures arising from multiple, overlapping, potentially contradictory, identities that extend beyond the confines of their uniforms (see e.g., Kreiner et al. 2006). To avoid similar missteps, the current study takes seriously, and draws on, the broad wealth of scholarship in the study of social identity.

Identity: Multiple, Dynamic, and Influential

It is now commonly accepted that identities are both multitudinous and situational; they are contextually-contingent and subject to activation and deactivation in any situation (see e.g., Brewer 2009; Deaux 1991; Stryker 1987; Tajfel 1981; Mead 1934).⁵² Social identity theory holds that at the individual level, identity is comprised of two distinct parts (consider, for example, two concentric circles): *personal* and *social* identity (Brewer 1991; Tajfel 1981; Tajfel and Turner 1986). Personal identity comprises the “individuated self — those characteristics that

⁵² For parallels and extensions of this field of inquiry within the study of race and ethnic politics, see Jimenez 2009; Garcia-Bedolla 2005; Waters 1999; Jones-Correa 1998; Okamura 1981; Patterson 1975.

differentiate one individual from others” (Brewer 1991, 476). Social identity, on the other hand, refers to “categorizations of the self into more inclusive social units that depersonalize the self-concept”; or categorizations such as race, ethnicity, gender, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, occupation, and so forth (476).⁵³ The degree to which personal and social identities overlap, then, can be thought of as the ‘salience’ of a particular social identity or group membership at a given moment in time (Kreiner et al. 2006; Tajfel 1981).⁵⁴ Such overlap, or identity salience, however, is variable and contingent on specific factors.

Tajfel contends that three factors are central to social identity salience: 1) the clarity of an individual’s awareness of their group membership; 2) the extent of an individual’s positive or negative evaluations of membership in a particular group; and 3) the extent of an individual’s emotional investment in said awareness and evaluations (1981, 239). As such, we might expect *low* identity salience for an individual who: 1) lacks awareness of their membership in a group; or 2) despite their awareness of membership in a particular group, feel that this membership reflects poorly on them; or 3) despite awareness and evaluation of a group membership, they are ambivalent about said membership — they may, for instance, be assigned group membership

⁵³ To be clear, individuals may attribute different levels of ‘worth,’ so to speak, to their multiple social identity memberships (Stryker 1987). This may, in fact, be attributable to the fact that social identities, while generally treated as interchangeable, include a number of different identity categories, including social roles (i.e., parent, teacher), demographic characteristics (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender), and organizational memberships (i.e., university professor, law enforcement officer). Additionally, Deaux (1991), per Tajfel (1981), finds empirical evidence to suggest that an individual’s level of attachment to particular social identities may be contingent on their evaluation of membership on two dimensions: 1) whether membership is voluntary or involuntary; and 2) whether membership in said group is seen as desirable or undesirable. Moving forward, these dimensional analyses provide a framework for thinking about ethnic versus organizational memberships among Latinx immigration officers.

⁵⁴ It bears noting that others have described the dynamics of social identification in slightly different ways. Brewer (2009), for instance, draws distinctions between two types of social identity: *role* and *group* identities. Both types are forms of social identity membership. The first, *role identity*, is described as an ‘I’ identity, as it functions as an individualized sense of group membership (2009, 154). Within the framework presented here, we can imagine role identity as describing a degree of social/personal identity overlap that is short of one-hundred percent, wherein an individual still maintains a sense of individuality despite recognizing membership in a social identity group. The second type, on the other hand, *group identity*, is characterized as a ‘we’ identity, as self-interest comes to encompass more than the individual, “[expanding] to incorporate group interests” (2009, 154; Brewer 1991). In the framework established here, we can imagine this as full overlap between personal and social identities (or high social identity salience). It is in the increased salience of group identity that in-group/out-group boundaries are more firmly delineated (and policed). While this description differs from that outlined here, I do not find them in conflict with one another, merely different analyses of complex cognitive processes.

ascriptively, but personally reject that membership. Contrarily, we could expect *high* identity salience for an individual who: 1) is aware of their social group membership; 2) holds positive evaluations of that membership; and 3) actively claims that membership.

The more salient a social identity, the more likely an individual is to *act* as a member of the group from which the identity is derived (Deaux 1991; Tajfel 1981). If, for instance, an individual's partisan identity is salient in a given situation, they can be expected to act as a partisan (see e.g., Green et al. 2004). When bureaucracy scholars, such as Lipsky, Kaufman, and Wilson, suggest that the development of organizational cultures and commitments (read, identities) lead state agents to act in the best interests of their organizations, and when scholars like Heyman (2002) and Correa and Thomas (2015) argue that Latinx immigration agents act not as Latinxs, but as 'citizens' and 'soldiers,' they are — while not using the same terminology — making arguments that are essentially grounded in social identity theory.⁵⁵ However, they still assume that the salience of relevant identification is static, rather than dynamic, and that rival identities — including, for instance, ethnic, Latinx identities — are not in constant competition with one another, each vying for greater influence over an individual's personal identity. In so doing, scholars fail to consider the possibility that street-level bureaucrats may not always be

⁵⁵ That individuals identify in terms of their occupations or vocations, and that such affiliations become social identities all their own is, in fact, well documented (Trice 1993; Deaux 1991; Barley 1989; Pavalko 1988).

acting solely as agents of the state, or representatives of a particular agency, but as members of a distinct social identity group, or some combination of one or more relevant identities.⁵⁶

Bridging the Gap

Engaging the complicated dynamics of identity in the study of state-agents is fundamental to understanding not only how they behave in their interactions with citizens and non-citizens — a stated goal of street-level bureaucracy studies (see e.g., Lipsky 2010 [1980]; Simon 1947) — but also how identity functions in these contexts, including whether the variable salience of multiple identities has the potential to shape policy implementation, frame interactions between the state and the public, and ultimately affect perceptions of government among citizens and non-citizens alike. And while much of the scholarship surrounding street-level bureaucrats, including that specifically concerned with Latinx immigration agents, has failed to fully incorporate social identity theory as an analytical frame, the field is not without exceptions.

Sociologist Celeste Watkins-Hayes, for instance, in *The New Welfare Bureaucrats* (2009), provides a timely study that acknowledges the role of identity in front-line social service

⁵⁶ When we talk about ‘acting as’ a member of a particular social identity group, however, we raise questions about how ‘appropriate’ in-group behavior is ‘policed,’ so to speak. In other words, from where does one learn *how* to act as a member of the group? The examples highlighted here — acting as either a partisan or bureaucrat — are, in a sense, easily explained in that appropriate in-group behavior is often explicitly delineated by institutions, be they a particular government agency or a national political party. In other words, the rules and regulations that regulate the behavior of welfare administrators come from the institution itself. In other cases, we may see professional associations (e.g., police, firefighter, or teachers’ associations) establishing guidelines for appropriate behavior of their membership. But not all social identity groups are tied to central institutions. Consider, for instance, the key social identity group of interest here: Latinxs. It goes without saying that there exists no Latinx ‘board of directors’ or ‘tribal council’ to establish the rules of *being* Latinx. But this is not to say that individuals, if not localized communities, do not have their own ideas about what constitutes appropriate (and inappropriate) in-group behavior. While some may hew to particular expectations in the name of sheer social desirability, others may have deeply held ideas about: 1) the boundaries of group membership — who belongs and who doesn’t; and 2) the kinds of behavior that membership in the group demands. In other words, what is deemed appropriate behavior may, and very often *does*, vary from one person to the next. That such variance is relegated alone to social groups without central institutions, however, is a claim I find difficult to substantiate — regardless of where guidelines come from (community, institution, or otherwise), individuals may simply assign different levels of importance to some behaviors over others. While this, no doubt, makes for a complex investigation, it is my hope that this dissertation will contribute to an ongoing, and as of yet inconclusive conversation about not only the bounds of Latinx identity, but what it means to be a member of said social identity group.

provision. Her work challenges structural and institutional accounts of bureaucratic decision-making, and pulls street-level bureaucrats out of the vacuum of previous scholarship. Like the current study, she contends that, in order to understand how bureaucratic actors make decisions, not only must we acknowledge the unique, and often overlapping, social spaces they occupy, but also understand how such actors make sense of, or ‘deal with’ multiple identities. Focusing on front-line welfare administrators, Watkins-Hayes finds that bureaucratic actors do not simply adopt institutional identities as prescribed by agency leadership, or professional associations (see e.g., Kaufman 2006 [1960]; Wilson 1989), but also forge their own ‘professional identities,’ informed both by considerations of agency and professional goals *and* social identity memberships and experiences (2009, 11). While some bureaucratic actors, she explains, seek to ‘divorce’ social identities, such as race, ethnicity, and class, from their work, others relish the opportunity to ‘connect,’ so to speak, with minority clientele on the basis of common, or shared group memberships.

A number of the black and Latinx case-managers studied, in fact, engaged in what Watkins-Hayes refers to as ‘street-level activism’: “[t]hey leverage racial, and at times gender, commonality to communicate the social goals and political motives of welfare policy and attempt to use occupational authority and social status to articulate why minority clients should adopt a certain set of behaviors” (16-17). In this activism, state-agents exercise not only their discretionary authority, but their extra-institutional social identities — in many cases correcting what is seen as in-group deviance. With respect to the shortcomings of previous treatments of state-agent behavior I described in preceding sections, Watkins-Hayes’ (2009) contribution is the closest we have come to understanding how social identities shape the behavior of analogous street-level bureaucrats. This contribution, however, is not without its own problems.

While Watkins-Hayes brilliantly analyzes the complex identity work conducted by minority welfare administrators, she still paints an incomplete picture. When Watkins-Hayes

(like Lipsky) describes the construction, and subsequent effects, of professional identities among street-level bureaucrats, she does so in a single narrow context, that of the ‘service-bureaucracy.’ In so doing, she assumes a fair amount of risk; namely in that her findings may, in part, be artifacts of the professional norms associated with service-bureaucracies themselves (i.e., the norm of service). Jones-Correa (2005) illustrates, for example, that differences in the professional norms of regulatory-bureaucracies lead to disparate patterns of engagement between state-agents and their clientele. As such, we must question whether the incorporation of social identity memberships into black and Latinx bureaucrats’ professional identities would look the same across agency type. Do, for instance, black and Latinx police, or immigration law enforcement officers, who are bound not to serve, but *police* the behaviors of, their clientele forge and exercise professional identities in ways identical, or at least similar, to those of ‘the new welfare bureaucrats’? To what degree is the ultimate shape of a minority bureaucrat’s professional identity dictated by the professional norms associated with bureaucracy type? Answering these questions requires that we address the identity work of street-level actors within regulatory-bureaucracies; this study does so by focusing on the emergence of a disproportionately Latinx immigration law enforcement workforce.

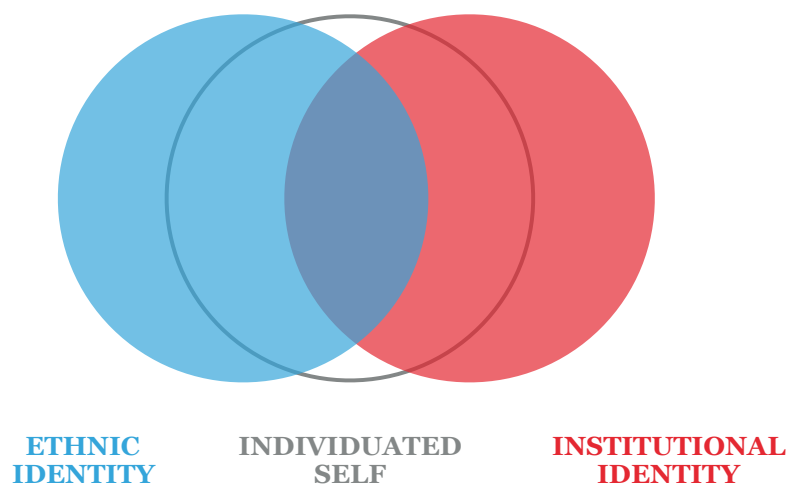
On the Intersection of Multiple Identities: Both Latinx and Immigration Agent

How do Latinx immigration law enforcement agents internalize and deal with the tensions engendered by their overlapping, yet fundamentally contradictory, identities? To address the central motivating question of this dissertation requires that we take seriously both the multiplicity and variable salience of social identities; it requires recognition of the fact that the world the Latinx immigration agent confronts is fundamentally shaped by the intersection of, at the very least, two overlapping, inherently contradictory identities. And thus, to understand

more fully the potential dynamics at play, I begin by placing the Latinx immigration agent within the framework of social identity theory.

While they may be members of, or identify with, many other social groups, Latinx immigration enforcement officers — willingly or otherwise — belong to two distinct groups: 1) an ethnic-minority group, as Latinxs; and 2) an occupational group, as immigration law enforcement officers. Drawing from social identity theory, we can expect both of these social identity groups to overlap with individuals' personal identities, as illustrated in Figure VI.

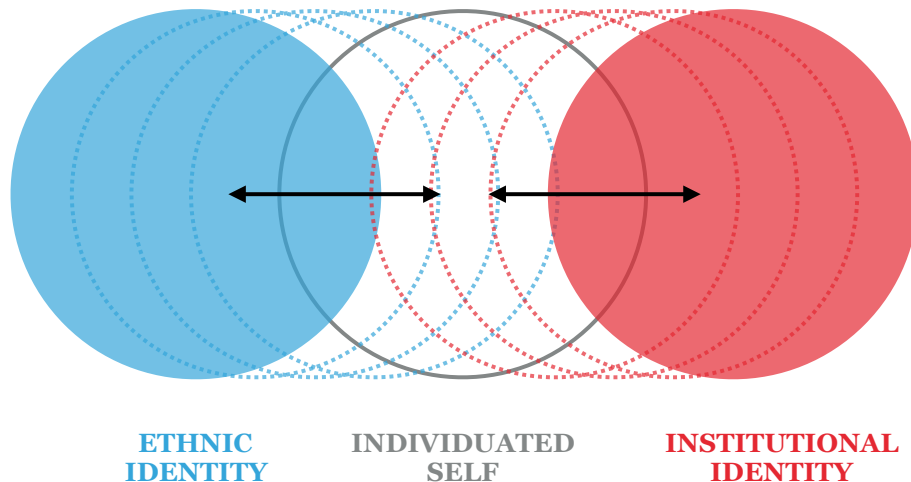
Figure VI: Social Identity Theory, Ethnic and Institutional Identities



In this figure, both occupational (institutional) and ethnic identities symmetrically overlap with an individual's personal identity. While we might describe this as an equilibrium, such a state does not necessarily describe the real world. In reality, social identities fluctuate, producing greater or lesser overlap with individuals' personal identities, or, as described earlier, greater or lesser salience (see e.g., Kreiner et al. 2006; Tajfel 1981). This suggests that real world identity

negotiations look more like Figure VII, where particular social identities are activated, become more salient, and in the process, edge-out other rival social identities.

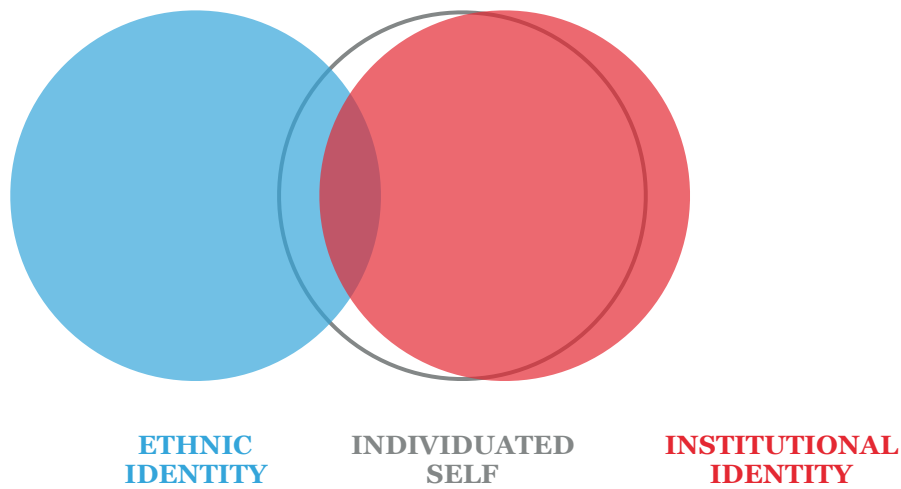
Figure VII: Social Identity Theory, Situational Identity



As discussed previously, bureaucracy scholars (see e.g., Wilson 1989; Kaufman 2006 [1960]) have long contended, using different terminology, that such fluctuations do, indeed, take place. But such interpretations have remained one-sided. Wilson and Kaufman, for example, believe that, given the dominance of organizational culture and socialization, when street-level agents act, or exercise their discretionary authority, they do so in a way that resembles Figure VIII.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ The argument can be made that this is, essentially, the same argument made by scholars like Heyman (2002), Garcia Hernandez (2012), and Correa and Thomas (2015). In their claims that Latinxs who work in immigration enforcement are more likely to consider themselves as ‘citizen,’ ‘insider,’ and ‘soldier,’ than ‘Latinx,’ the relevant cleavages discussed are all artifacts of the adoption of their institutional identity, immigration enforcement officer. That is, these are cleavages that arise from their position opposite co-ethnic migrants, each perfectly mirroring the divide between immigration officer and immigrant (e.g., ‘citizen and non-citizen,’ ‘insider and outsider,’ and ‘soldier and enemy’).

Figure VIII: Social Identity Theory, Institutional Identity Salience

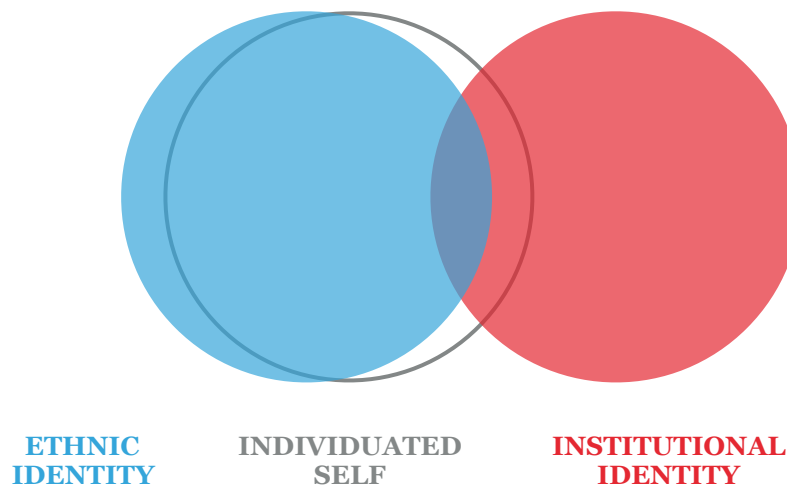


In this figure, institutional identity overlaps with an individual’s personal identity more than any other rival social identity. This greater salience, in turn, can be expected to lead state agents to act as institutional actors. Such a situation would be one in which immigration enforcement officers behave ‘by the book,’ so to speak, committed to the agency’s goal of “deporting *all* deportable aliens.”⁵⁸

However, we should not expect occupational, or institutional, identities to always assume greater salience than other social identities. What if, for instance, the very nature of agents’ institutional duties directly implicates membership in other social groups or, in other words, activates and makes salient rival social identities (e.g., ethnic, Latinx identity)? In such cases, cross-cutting identities can produce different patterns of identity salience. Consider, for instance, the dynamics portrayed in Figure IX.

⁵⁸ U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. 2010. “Strategic Plan, FY 2010-2014.”

Figure IX: Social Identity Theory, Ethnic Identity Salience



In this figure, it is ethnic, not institutional, identity that is most salient, effectively subordinating the influence of occupational identity. If a Latinx immigration law enforcement officer's ethnic identity reaches this level of salience, we might not expect them to act as institutional actors, but as ethnics (e.g., sensitive to the plight of their clientele, and more likely to blur the lines between regulation and service). For the most part, bureaucracy scholars — excepting Watkins-Hayes (2009) — have dismissed such possibilities.

It bears noting that the figures and identity fluctuations discussed in this section represent idealized conditions. In Figures VIII and IX, ethnic and institutional social identities achieve near-complete overlap with individuals' personal identities. In reality, however, we might expect varying degrees of overlap, where rival social identities enjoy relatively comparable degrees of overlap and jockey for marginal influence. These fluctuations, though, are often enough to reveal the situational, or conditional, salience of social identities (see e.g., Deaux 1991; Tajfel 1981); and the emergence of any variation in extra-institutional identity salience would only strengthen the critiques of the extant scholarship outlined herein.

Aside from these abstract, idealized possibilities, a central question still remains: why should we expect Latinx identity to, in fact, be a readily available identity, or frame of reference, to be made salient for Latinx agents? Is not their membership in such agencies, alone, *prima facie* evidence that ethnic identity is — as scholars have argued (see e.g., Heyman 2002; Garcia Hernandez 2012; Correa and Thomas 2015) — an unimportant mode of identification for Latinxs who elect to work in immigration? In the section that follows, I draw on scholarship from the study of race and ethnic politics and the metaphor of a ‘broken mirror’ to develop a theoretical construct for thinking about the persistence, and situational salience, of identity.

On A Theoretical Argument for Situational Identity Salience

Despite widespread acknowledgement of identity as dynamic within the field, scholarship in race and ethnic politics suggests that there may still be reason to doubt the activation of ethnic identity among Latinx immigration agents. Granting the multiplicity and fluidity of identity, scholars here would not disagree that Latinxs who work in immigration law enforcement are *capable* of holding and maintaining multiple overlapping — inherently contradictory — identities (e.g., Barvosa 2009; Anzaldúa 2012 [1987]); but they would question the activation of agents’ Latinx identities in encounters with apparently co-ethnic clientele (e.g., Garcia Bedolla 2005; Waters 1999; Cohen 1999). This, they would argue, is because missing from the criteria for identity salience as theorized by Tajfel (1981)⁵⁹ is the positive recognition of shared group membership — the acknowledgement, in other words, of co-ethnic migrants *as* co-ethnics. Thus, while Latinx immigration agents may see themselves, in conjunction with a number of other identities, as ‘Latinx,’ they still may not (or may not want to) recognize their clientele as part of the same.

Drawing on Tajfel (1981), for instance, Garcia-Bedolla (2005) contends that Latinxs may selectively dissociate themselves from elements within the broader ethnic group that they see as

⁵⁹ And see e.g., Barth (1969).

inherently stigmatizing. Maintaining their own sense of, and attachment to, their ethnic identity, they re-draw the boundaries of the group as they see it at the expense of its most marginal parts (i.e., undocumented immigrants). By characterizing the migrants with whom they come into contact as inherently prone to criminality, or lacking in respect for legal conventions or sovereign international boundaries, Latinx immigration agents, Garcia Bedolla would argue, remove shared-ethnicity from the equation — effectively eliminating the likelihood of ethnic identity activation among those agents in routine encounters.

Cohen (1999) finds similar dynamics in the black community's response — or lack thereof — to the AIDS epidemic of the 1990s. In this response, affluent, and more self-righteous, members of the black community distanced themselves from elements of the community characterized as 'deviant,' further marginalizing already marginalized, intersectional members of the group. To explain these dynamics, Cohen presents a taxonomy of marginalization, including two types — advanced and secondary — she might similarly apply to the case of the Latinx immigration agent. The first type, 'advanced marginalization,' she explains, is a pattern of exclusion that "not only allows for limited mobility on the part of some marginal group members, but also transfers much of the direct management of other, less privileged marginal group members to individuals who share the same group identity" (27). The second type, 'secondary marginalization,' is the replication of "rhetorics of blame and punishment [directed] at the most vulnerable and stigmatized in [the community]" (27). Mirrored in the arguments proffered by Garcia Hernandez (2012), the patterns presented by Cohen suggest a clear line of separation between the Latinx immigration agent who, as a consequence of his institutional identity, sees himself as an 'insider,' and the co-ethnic migrants he encounters; a dividing line enforced to the benefit of the former and detriment of the latter.

In another pivotal study, one of the strongest arguments for an understanding of identity as dynamic and situational in nature, Waters (1999) simultaneously presents a case for why we

should not expect the activation of ethnic identity among Latinx immigration agents. Writing on West Indian immigrants to the United States, she reveals how second generation immigrants utilize the selective activation of ethnic identity, or code-switching, to avoid stigmatization. To situate themselves as distinct from the non-immigrant black community in the United States, and from associated racial stereotypes, Waters' subjects played up their ethnic identities. At other times, however, these same subjects played down ascriptive ethnic markers (i.e., accents) to avoid anti-immigrant ire, and position themselves as part of the non-immigrant black community. Applying these patterns to the current case, we would expect Latinx immigration agents to downplay their ethnic identity as to situate themselves as distinct from undocumented immigrants who, while sharing agents' ethnic identities, suffer some of the most extreme stigmatization (see e.g., Sampaio 2015; Abrego 2014; Jones-Correa and de Graauw 2013; Kanstroom 2000).

Taken together, the arguments put forward by seminal scholarship in race and ethnic politics suggests that despite the persistence — or availability — of ethnic, Latinx, identity among Latinx immigration agents, we should not expect the activation of that identity in the course of agents' institutional duties. Paralleling, to an extent, the claims put forward by Heyman (2002), these authors would contend that Latinx immigration agents, quite simply, do not acknowledge the immigrants they encounter on a daily basis as members of any group to which they see themselves a part. Consequently, the identities that predominate in such encounters would revolve only around those cleavages, and resulting identities, accentuated by agents' institutional roles (i.e., 'citizen,' 'insider,' 'soldier,' 'state-agent,' 'law enforcement officer') and the relative positioning of their clientele (i.e., 'non-citizen,' 'outsider,' 'enemy,' 'subject,' 'criminal').

Missing from these analyses, however, is an element key to the case of Latinx immigration agents: in both charge and execution, agents' institutional roles are fundamentally

linked to, if not dependent on, their ethnic identities. On a daily basis, in fact, the duties prescribed by agents' institutional roles call on Latinx agents not only to access, but exercise, their ethnic identity. In tandem with the tools provided to them as law enforcement officers (e.g., legal arrest powers, restraints, firearms), the Latinx agent deploys a set of tools to which their non-Latinx counterparts do not have native access; a toolkit rooted in, and specific to, who they are as Latinxs. 'Rolling out,' so to speak, language and unique knowledge of community customs and history in fulfillment of institutional duties (and goals), the Latinx agent effectively solidifies the link between their ethnic and institutional identities — a link agencies like Border Patrol and ICE, contrary to conventional theories (e.g., Kaufman 2006 [1960]; Wilson 1989), both encourage and enjoy.

Beyond its immediate, instrumental benefit — the absence of barriers to communication between agent and migrant — the Latinx agent's ethnic identity is an invaluable asset to agencies like Border Patrol and ICE. Once viewed, and appropriately characterized, as foreign, occupying forces in otherwise ethnically-homogenous borderland communities, the immigration law enforcement agencies of today, no longer the exclusive domain of white men, have a vested interest in maintaining *now* disproportionately Latinx workforces (see e.g., Lytle Hernandez 2010). This is due, in no small part, to the fact that in their changing demographics, agencies like Border Patrol and ICE have gained significant operational advantages.

Insofar as past incarnations of *la migra* existed as predominately white institutions, their constitutive parts were not inconspicuous in the majority-Latinx communities they targeted. Scenes of white immigration agents chasing after 'brown' community members — citizen and migrant alike — in fact, did nothing more than reinforce those communities' characterizations of agencies like Border Patrol and, at the time, INS, as foreign and hostile. Both agents, and agency, were, in other words, hyper-visible — their movements, but more importantly, aggressive acts of violence, on full display. The changing face of immigration law enforcement,

however, has significantly shifted these dynamics, allowing *la migra* to become, figuratively, invisible — submerged in the very communities they target.⁶⁰ Behind the ethnic identities of Latinx agents, immigration law enforcement agencies meld into the community to resemble all other bureaucratic organizations (and institutions); they become merely another facet of the community.

Integral to individual agent *and* agency, agents' ethnic, Latinx, identities are, in other words, ever-present and ever-active — both implicated by, and indivisible from, their institutional roles. From this position, regardless of the stigmatization of undocumented Latinx immigrants, ethnic identity subordinates relevant institutional identities and cleavages (i.e., 'citizen/non-citizen,' 'insider/outsider,' 'soldier/enemy,' 'law enforcement officer/criminal') only insofar as agents see their own existence as tied to both the migration process and the state's organized response; or, in seeing *themselves* in their clientele. Nowhere is this more likely to happen than in routine encounters with migrant clientele, where in coming face to face with stigmatized co-ethnics, Latinx agents confront reflections of themselves in metaphorical 'broken mirrors.'

Broken Mirrors, Both Literal and Metaphorical

When we look at ourselves in mirrors, we are looking at only representations of our true selves — images that no one else sees, and forms that don't truly exist.⁶¹ Yet we recognize ourselves in the glass. Even when a mirror is broken, cracked and splintered, the overall image distorted, we recognize ourselves in the pieces because we long for the image to make sense.⁶² Amidst the spiderwebbed glass, we want to find ourselves, intact. And we do. In the smallest pieces of splintered glass, our mirror images — *we* — persist, and demand our eyes' focus. Confronted by the disfunction of the broken mirror, we look for order,

⁶⁰ For concept of the 'submerged state,' see Mettler (2011).

⁶¹ Akin to Plato's 'Theory of Forms,' they merely approximate our true selves.

⁶² See e.g., Winter 2015; Cardiff University 2015; Johns Hopkins University 2007.

for reflections that jump out of the smallest of unbroken pieces where we recognize ourselves.⁶³

In interactions with co-ethnic migrants, the Latinx immigration agent comes face to face with a ‘broken mirror.’ Splintered by the myriad cleavages that separate co-ethnic agent from migrant, they confront in it a distorted, yet unavoidably familiar reflection of themselves. Filtered through the fragments of broken glass, the familiar faces, voices, and stories of co-ethnic migrants threaten the rigidity of those cracks — blurring the lines of existing cleavages to reveal an image of ethnic, Latinx, identity intact.

Consider, again, the identity dynamics represented in Figure VIII. In this snapshot, it is the Latinx agent’s institutional identity that assumes the greatest salience, effectively edging-out the influence of ethnic identity. Scholars discussed herein (e.g., Garcia Bedolla 2005; Cohen 1999, Waters 1999; and to an extent Heyman 2002; Garcia Hernandez 2012; Correa and Thomas 2015) might describe this scenario as the Latinx immigration agent’s primary ‘state of nature’; or, at the very least, the most likely positioning of his overlapping identities. Rather than acknowledging the migrants with whom they come into contact as co-ethnics, scholars suggest, Latinx agents see themselves as removed — if not needing to be removed (see e.g., Zhou and Lee 2007) — from those individuals based on a multitude of different cleavages. Thinking of such interactions as taking place in mirrors — where co-ethnic migrant and agent meet through, if not in, a plane of glass — each cleavage would be represented by a crack in the glass that obscures the mirror’s ‘reflection,’ or rather, the bond that links one side to the other: ethnic, Latinx, identity.

What I suggest here, however, is that in encounters with broken mirrors, Latinx agents still find glimmers of that bond. Despite the splinters created by rival identities (i.e., ‘citizen,’ ‘insider,’ ‘soldier,’ ‘state-agent,’ ‘law enforcement officer,’ ‘legal immigrant’), the familiar faces, voices, and stories of co-ethnic migrants — represented by the unbroken pieces of glass where

⁶³ Author’s field notes, 6 December 2016.

agents' reflections persist — beg the Latinx agent to see themselves in the glass, in their clientele. Where this happens (where they do recognize themselves), the cracks of dividing cleavages are smoothed out to reveal not only the inherent link between co-ethnic agent and migrant as Latinxs, but the contradictions, and tensions, inherent to the intersection they occupy — born primarily of the fact that in policing migration, the Latinx agent polices a process central to their own existence. In the wake of fading cracks in the glass, the agent finds themselves staring into their own reflection, forced to confront, and make sense of, their dual role in the historically antagonistic, yet mutually constitutive, relationship between *la migra* and the Latinx community. Here, the instrumental activation of Latinx agents' ethnic identities is personalized, effectively sealing the empathy gap theorized by previous scholarship (e.g., Heyman 2002), and increasing the salience of those identities such that, in those moments, they supersede all others.

Driven by the data collected for this project — interviews with, and observations of, one-hundred Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents — the three chapters that follow present an unparalleled glimpse into the daily lives of Latinx immigration agents. Building on, and contributing to, ongoing conversations in the scholarship covered herein, each chapter, in addressing distinct questions, advances the central argument of this dissertation — that despite the adoption of uniform, institutional identities, Latinx immigration agents' ethnic identities remain persistent, situational, frames through which they see themselves and behave in their roles as agents of the state. Departing from previous in-kind studies, the current dispenses with past assumptions about the nature of identity as static and, by disentangling *why* and *how* Latinxs work in immigration enforcement (and the different contexts they encounter therein), addresses how the salience of agents' overlapping, yet fundamentally contradictory, identities vary over time and place.

The next chapter, *Chapter 3: Vendidos, Race-Traitors, or Worse: Explaining the Rise of the La(tinx) Migra*, for instance, explores *why*, despite the inherent contradictions involved, Latinxs enter immigration law enforcement agencies. What role, if any, does ethnic identity play at the time of entry into, or the decision to enter, immigration enforcement? The chapter that follows, *Chapter 4: Liminal Identity and the Latinx Immigration Enforcement Agent*, moves beyond the critical juncture of agents' entry into immigration enforcement to address the role of ethnic, Latinx, identity in agents' encounters with co-ethnic clientele. Here, I ask how the tensions inherent to Latinx agents' overlapping identities manifest when they are confronted by reflections of themselves in metaphorical broken mirrors. The final substantive chapter, *Chapter 5: Who Belongs? Latinx Immigration Enforcement Agents as the Palatable Minority*, explores another moment key to understanding the situational salience of Latinx agents' ethnic identities — interactions with non-Latinx counterparts. The goal of this chapter is to assess how (if at all) encounters with non-Latinx agents are shaped by Latinx agents' ethnic identities, and their shared group membership with stigmatized clientele. Together, the chapters that follow represent not only a commitment to a dynamic understanding of identity, but the depth of analyses required by those who subscribe to such a commitment, and address this, and other analogous intersections.

CHAPTER 3

VENDIDOS, RACE-TRAITORS, OR WORSE: EXPLAINING THE RISE OF THE LA(TINX)

MIGRA

Scholars in recent years have proffered several explanations for the existence of Latinx immigration enforcement agents. Driven by the puzzle of why Latinxs would elect to work for agencies that have, and continue to systematically target the ethnic communities to which they belong, each of these studies have emerged from a central premise: identity matters — or, at the very least, it *should* matter.⁶⁴ The development of a disproportionately Latinx immigration law enforcement workforce is, after all, only inherently puzzling insofar as we expect identity (in this case, ethnic, Latinx, identity) to shape individuals' decisions and behavior — including, but not limited solely to, the decision to enter immigration law enforcement.

From this position, it is not difficult to understand why scholars here have, while disagreeing on specifics, arrived at the central conclusions they have: that ethnic identity is an irrelevant, wholly ascriptive and superficial, mode of identification for those Latinxs who enter immigration enforcement (see e.g., Correa and Thomas 2015; Garcia Hernandez 2012; Heyman 2002). Such conclusions are merely logical extensions of their opening premises, where if ethnic identity matters, Latinxs are not expected to enter positions in immigration law enforcement. Given to this proposition, the existence of Latinx immigration agents necessarily becomes *prima facie* evidence that, to those agents, ethnic identity, indeed, does not matter. Where scholars have found any additional evidence to support (and accept) the null, they have done so with little protestation⁶⁵; and as a consequence, a simple, yet elegant, catch-all explanation for the rise of a

⁶⁴ Most likely derived from the question: ‘*doesn't* it matter?’

⁶⁵ For instance: Latinx immigration officers, bestowed with the rights and privileges of citizens, are too far removed from the immigrant experience to have empathy for, or perceive a co-ethnic bond with Latinx immigrants (Heyman 2002); Latinx immigration officers, due to internalized racist stereotypes and biases, deny a co-ethnic bond with Latinx immigrants who are often seen as criminals or deviants (Correa and Thomas 2015; Garcia Hernandez 2012); and Latinx immigration officers simply are, to a great degree, immigration restrictionists (Heyman 2002).

new ‘*La(tinx) Migra*’ has emerged. Lacking an attachment to ethnic, Latinx, identity — or denying that identity altogether — Latinxs must, quite simply, self-select into immigration law enforcement.

Intuitive, and logically-consistent, what we might term the ‘self-selection thesis’ has enjoyed considerable deference among scholars concerned with this, and other analogous intersections.⁶⁶ But widespread popularity notwithstanding, this explanation, put forward most prominently by anthropologist, Josiah Heyman (2002), suffers, still, a significant flaw. To hold true, it depends, absolutely, on a now widely-disputed assumption⁶⁷ — that identity is, by its very nature, both reliably and undeniably, static. Dismissing a wealth of evidence to suggest otherwise⁶⁸, the self-selection thesis presumes that anywhere identity does not *appear* to matter — be it in the Latinx agent’s affirmative decision to enter immigration enforcement, or that agent’s prioritization of other identities derived from their institutional membership (i.e., ‘citizen,’ ‘insider,’ ‘soldier,’ ‘state-agent,’ ‘law enforcement officer’) in the exercise of their discretionary authority⁶⁹ — this is evidence ethnic, Latinx, identity *never* matters. Informed (or unshackled, rather) by this assumption, scholars have, not surprisingly, taken considerable latitudes.

By no means exclusive to such studies, adherence to a view of identity as unchangingly static — where it either always *is* or always *is not* — has been a proven asset to scholars concerned specifically with Latinx immigration agents (see e.g., Heyman 2002; Garcia Hernandez 2012; Correa and Thomas 2015).⁷⁰ Unburdened by the idea that context — time and

⁶⁶ For broader discussion, see previous chapter.

⁶⁷ See Social Identity Theory literature (e.g., Brewer 2009; Deaux 1991; Stryker 1987; Tajfel 1981; Mead 1934), or selections in Race and Ethnic Politics literature (e.g., Jimenez 2009; Garcia-Bedolla 2005; Waters 1999; Cohen 1999; Jones-Correa 1998; Okamura 1981; Patterson 1975).

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ See e.g., Heyman 2002; Garcia Hernandez 2012; Correa and Thomas 2015; Lipsky 2010 [1980]; Wilson 1989.

⁷⁰ As discussed in the previous chapter, the assumption of identity as static in nature is a broader issue within (and without) the discipline. A large swath of studies, including, and branching from, Lipsky (2010 [1980]) and Wilson (1989), have — to their detriment — relied on such assumptions.

place, among other relevant facets — has the potential to shape identity salience among their subjects (Brewer 2009; Deaux 1991; Stryker 1987; Tajfel 1981), scholars here have enjoyed the freedom to, if not simply gloss over or conflate, altogether absolve themselves of the need to distinguish clearly between, and explain definitively, two distinct processes⁷¹: *why* and *how* Latinxs work in immigration law enforcement.⁷² In exchange for conclusions uncomplicated by caveats, and hewing to disciplinary norms of parsimony, in other words, scholars like Heyman (2002) have traded away the opportunity for a more complete assessment of the Latinx immigration agent — one that moves beyond the self-selection thesis, and takes seriously the dynamic nature, and situational salience, of agents' multiple overlapping identities.

Despite the treatments offered by previous scholarship, the distinction between *why* and *how* Latinxs work in immigration law enforcement is not inconsequential. While they are, without question, inherently linked, they constitute, still, two separate processes — or 'moments' — imbued with, and subject to, their own specific (identity-shaping) meanings, context, and perhaps most importantly, determinants. Disentangled and acknowledged as such, they present a significant challenge to scholars who have, to this point, purported to describe (much less explain) '*the*' Latinx immigration agent. Lacking, above all else, a systematic exploration of the precise motivations, or constellation thereof, that push and pull Latinxs toward careers in immigration law enforcement, such assertions, at best, can only be described as dubious (e.g., Heyman 2002; Correa and Thomas 2015; Garcia Hernandez 2012).

Departing with such studies, this dissertation draws a clear distinction between, and thus addresses separately, *why* and *how* Latinxs work in immigration enforcement. This approach is motivated by the contention that it is impossible to fully address *how* Latinxs work in immigration enforcement without first understanding *why* they enter those agencies to begin

⁷¹ And, at least, two different places, or 'moments,' in which ethnic identity might assume greater or lesser salience among Latinxs.

⁷² The distinction here being the difference between the decision to enter immigration enforcement agencies and the work, itself.

with. Dependent on a complete picture of the diverse cross-section of individuals who elect (and go on) to work in immigration enforcement for both internal and external validity, understanding *how* is contingent entirely on first understanding *why*. Accordingly, in this chapter, I address the question of why, despite inherent contradictions, Latinxs elect to work in immigration law enforcement, and thus, explain the emergence of a disproportionately-Latinx immigration law enforcement workforce.

Beginning with an explication of the development of immigration law enforcement agencies, such as the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), Border Patrol, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)⁷³, from once exclusively-white to now disproportionately-Latinx institutions, this chapter proceeds primarily as a theoretical and empirical challenge to the self-selection thesis. Contrary to explanations offered by extant scholarship, I argue here that more than a story about ethnic identity or particular attitudes about undocumented immigration, *why* Latinxs work in immigration enforcement is a story of individual-level economic (and existential) necessity, and on a broader scale, racially- and ethnically-stratified structural inequality. Granting identity — here specifically ethnic, Latinx, identity — as dynamic and situational in nature, I view the affirmative decision to enter immigration law enforcement not as evidence of ethnic identity as theretofore and subsequently irrelevant (see e.g., Heyman 2002; Correa and Thomas 2015; Garcia Hernandez 2012), but merely irrelevant, or rather only minimally-salient, in *that* particular process, or moment in time.⁷⁴ Still, however, in deference to previous scholarship, in this chapter I draw on interview data collected for this project — specifically those of the sixty-one Latinx ICE agents in the sample — to provide a test of the self-selection thesis as proffered by Heyman (2002). In the course of refuting the self-selection thesis, this test simultaneously lends support to, if not

⁷³ Contextualized by excerpts from reports to Secretaries of Labor from Immigration Commissioners General over the course of the early 20th century.

⁷⁴ Second (if not further down the scale of relevance) to dwindling economic circumstances and limited employment opportunities.

confirms, the argument put forward herein; what results is a much different picture of the Latinx immigration law enforcement agent than past studies have ventured to entertain — that of the self-interested, rational actor in search of economic stability and mobility, and more broadly, survival, irrespective of ethnic identity affect and attachment.

Making La Migra Latinx: A Story of Existential Dependence

Before placing his boat in the water [the Mexican immigrant] carefully spies out this side, and probably calls to some ‘píasano’ [sic] on this side if one is in sight, and ascertains that no ‘gringo’ officers are in that vicinity.⁷⁵ *Any Mexican resident on this side* will cheerfully abandon his work and spend a day if necessary watching for officers, to aid this boatman, *with whom he is always in sympathy*, and also for the reason that this kind of work does not call for much effort [emphasis added].⁷⁶

The immigration patrol force, it is true, is but in its infancy; but fortunately it has attracted to it *men of the highest type*, many of whom served as officers in our Army and Navy in the late World War. Through their courage, resourcefulness, and devotion to duty they have rendered it possible to perfect an organization that compares favorably with any law-enforcement body in the country. Theirs is by no means a peaceful occupation, for *they are called upon to deal with a lawless element* [emphasis added].⁷⁷

From its inception in the early 20th century, the state’s immigration law enforcement machinery has been defined by boundaries literal and metaphorical. Established, in part, toward the enforcement — in times and places more rigidly than others — of a literal international boundary, immigration enforcement agencies also, for much of their history, served as a metaphor for that boundary. As exclusively-white institutions, they constituted a reflection, or manifestation, of ‘the color line’ — of the construct of whiteness and American citizenship and

⁷⁵ The author here, no doubt, means to write ‘*paisano*,’ meaning (outside of class connotations), “countryman.”

⁷⁶ 1924 Report to the Secretary of Labor from the Commissioner General of Immigration, W.W. Husband, p 17.

⁷⁷ 1925 Report to the Secretary of Labor from the Commissioner General of Immigration, Harry E. Hull, p 15.

belonging as synonymous in nature.⁷⁸ The excerpts above, for instance, drawn from early official intra-agency communications, illustrate that the endeavor in which the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), from its nascency, understood itself as engaged, revolved around more than mere migration control.⁷⁹ Rather, the men of the nation's preeminent immigration law enforcement agency — 'courageous' men of "the highest type," or read simply, *white* — saw themselves as front-line soldiers in a war of racialized virtue; their enemy in this war, the purportedly "lawless," and notoriously unscrupulous, "Mexican" on both sides of the border.⁸⁰

Despite the racial stratification and antagonism that defined immigration enforcement agencies through much of their early history, Border Patrol and ICE are, today, two of the most diverse agencies in the federal government; Latinxs make up nearly twenty-two percent of ICE personnel nationwide, and nearly fifty-percent of that of Border Patrol.⁸¹ In short, the 'color-line' that once served to separate 'immigration agent' from 'immigrant' — *and* broader Latinx ('Mexican') community — has lost its rigidity, and given way to a new, disproportionately-Latinx immigration law enforcement workforce, a new *La(tinx) Migra*. To understand this transformation, the systematic shift in the demographic composition of U.S. immigration law enforcement agencies, however, is to recognize the very existence of those agencies, in *both* iterations — exclusively-white and disproportionately-Latinx — as integrally linked to the Latinx community; it is to acknowledge that there has never been a time, in the nearly one-

⁷⁸ While hard numbers are difficult to come by, historians — most notably Lytle Hernandez (2010) and Metz (1989) — contend that U.S. immigration law enforcement agencies have always had among their ranks a small number of Latinxs. However, given the negligibility of such alleged cases [discussed further in the paragraphs that follow], I think it fair to refer to those agencies as racially- and ethnically-homogenous.

⁷⁹ Prior to the Homeland Security Act of 2002, which mandated the separation of the INS into three separate agencies, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), and Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the INS was the home of all federal immigration law enforcement (and service). As noted in other sections of this dissertation, the splitting of the INS effectively singularized the mandates of the resulting agencies, turning ICE, and to an extent, CBP, into strictly enforcement (or punitive) arms of the state.

⁸⁰ Also impliedly lazy: "this kind of work does not call for much effort."

⁸¹ Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2012. "Federal Law Enforcement Officers, 2008"; To be clear, ICE, today, is the successor to the Immigration and Naturalization Service's Detention and Deportation division — distinct, in both mission and mandate, of Border Patrol.

hundred years since the creation of the Border Patrol in 1924, that such agencies have not relied for their very survival on Latinxs, citizens or not.

A Growing, Yet Consistently Exclusive Enterprise

Like analogous agents of coercive state power (i.e., military service personnel, municipal police officers⁸²), the archetypal ‘immigration law enforcement agent’ was constructed socially in a mythic, paradoxical imagination; here, as much as he is a pillar, an institution even — the epitome of strength and unimpeachable character — his safety and very existence ostensibly hang by a thread.⁸³ A survey of annual INS field reports dating back to the agency’s inception (to include the excerpts that precede this section), in fact, reveals a longstanding, concerted effort on the part of agency officials to not only aggrandize, but simultaneously infantilize, front-line

⁸² See e.g., Skolnick (1966).

⁸³ The use of the words ‘he’ and ‘his’ here is no accident. Like the foundational construction of ‘citizen,’ the immigration law enforcement agent was constructed, from its inception, as male; While women were excluded from the service prior to 1975 (“Our Newest Border Patrol Agents.” 1976. *I&N Reporter* Summer 25 (1): 10; Lytle Hernandez 2010, 226), the agency did not fail to acknowledge — however patronizingly — the role of women in its mission. Addressing the INS workforce in print in 1958, U.S. Attorney Laughlin E. Waters paused to recognize, but also send a message to, the wives of Border Patrol agents, who he described quite simply as “the ladies”: “You, yourselves, know better than I can voice the demands that are made upon your husbands in this important work. These are also demands upon the family. The long and irregular hours, the uncertainty that attends the working of an important case, the inconvenience and trouble of removing from one post to another, the inward despair of entering into a new home and community that is in marked contrast with that which you once knew; and the dislocation of your children’s schooling are but a few of the problems that go with the profession which your husband has chosen. You women must be equal to these demands. No matter how good the equipment, how thorough the training or how fine the organization of which your husband is a member, unless you can share in full measure the high sense of devotion and dedication that is his, you will be failing him and he cannot then do other than fail in his work. There is no substitute for a tender, loving, devoted and, particularly, an understanding wife” (Waters, Laughlin E. 1958. “Recent Developments in Law Enforcement.” *I&N Reporter* 6 (4): 50-51).

personnel.⁸⁴ In this narrative, agency officials found both an effective rationalization for state-violence *and* a compelling justification for the expansion of immigration law enforcement bureaucracies and powers vested therein. The discursive construction of the immigration enforcement agent as heroic — ‘the best among us’ — yet at the same time, fragile, in effect, *created* (if not ‘conjured’), and significantly inflated, his opposition; but moreover, it implied that to defeat this menacing and uniquely-ethnic enemy, the agent and the agency needed more⁸⁵ — *more* resources, *more* reinforcements, *more* authority. With little protestation, they received all three (see e.g., Lytle Hernandez 2010).

The Immigration Service might well be termed our first line of defense in time of peace, and too much credit can not be given the small army of men who, not infrequently at grave risk, protect our frontiers from the invasion of undesirable aliens.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ For instance: “This work of the mounted or patrol inspectors is attended by considerable hardship and much danger, as it is often necessary for them to remain on duty long hours without opportunity for rest or sleep; in inclement weather, and the smugglers, who very frequently transport intoxicating liquor or narcotic drugs with the aliens are desperate characters. They go armed and shoot at the command to halt in the name of the law, preferring to commit murder rather than be apprehended and face the probability of serving a prison sentence. Previous annual reports have related the details of the killing and wounding of immigration officers by smugglers” (Husband 1924, 19); “Before closing this subject, I wish to pay tribute to those brave men of the border patrol who have made the supreme sacrifice in the line of duty. These heroes have died less gloriously, perhaps, but no less honorably than those who have given their lives on the battlefields for their country. The bureau’s files are replete with stories of courage, devotion to duty, and sacrifice rivaling anything afforded by fiction” (Hull 1927, 18); Anna Sampaio (2015) offers a similar characterization of the discursive construction of the contemporary “Homeland Security state,” in which a distinct group (immigrants/Latinxs/Muslims) are constructed as a threat, and other “legitimate” citizens are ‘feminized’ and thus framed in need of paternalistic state protection.

⁸⁵ Such claims were not merely implied, but often made explicitly clear. For instance: “As the efforts to thwart the purpose of the immigration laws are constantly increasing, it has become more and more apparent that the immigration patrol force must extend its operations, and consequently constant efforts have been made to increase the number of officers identified with it. [...] By this it is not meant that the situation is out of control at the present time. On the contrary, the immigration border patrol force has been so well organized and the officers identified with it so zealous in the performance of their duties that, notwithstanding the fact that a greater number of aliens are seeking unlawful entry, it is confidently believed that fewer of them are succeeding than in former years. The force must be increased, however, in proportion to the efforts made by aliens, organizations, and individuals to circumvent the law” (Hull 1926, 16-17).

⁸⁶ 1925 Report to the Secretary of Labor from the Commissioner General of Immigration, Harry E. Hull, p 29.

On the premise of an ‘invading,’ and racialized as ‘Mexican,’ enemy threat, the service — in personnel, resources, and authority — grew exponentially throughout the twentieth century.⁸⁷ In twenty-five years, the Border Patrol went from a modest force of four-hundred fifty men to slightly more than one-thousand field agents⁸⁸; appropriations for the field service in that same time period increased from \$3.8 million to \$27.5 million.⁸⁹ By the fiftieth anniversary of the Border Patrol in 1974, the agency had grown by close to four-hundred percent, boasting a field service of 1,770 agents, and backed by an INS budget of \$149 million, significantly larger than that with which it began five decades prior.⁹⁰ All of this growth, however, was self-reifying, because by the 1970s, the demographics of the service exhibited little in the way of change relative to its original iteration; and for all intents and purposes, immigration law enforcement remained, not inconspicuously it bears noting, an exclusively-white enterprise.

A visitor who looks in upon [a class at the Border Patrol training school] — upon *men of uniform appearance* seriously intent upon a common and noble purpose — may think of the forty-four Border Patrol officers who have given their lives in line of duty. These young officers also know that they must support a noble tradition. They will remember Parker, ambushed in the Huachucas; Kelsay, killed at a flash of a smuggler’s gun in the night at Laredo; Henderson who burned his autogyro; Box whose

⁸⁷ Note that the INS was not, by any means, solely concerned with Mexican migration (or Mexican-Americans, for that matter); nor is that meant to be implied herein. However, to claim that this was not a primary objective — a special-project, as it were — of the agency, would be short-sighted. Consider the distinction drawn by the agency between the U.S.-Mexico and U.S.-Canada borders: “On the Canadian border, the Immigration Service finds itself confronted with troubles hardly less than those which prevail on the Rio Grande. The principal difference [above the levels of resources and manpower allocated] is in the races concerned” (1924 Report to the Secretary of Labor from the Commissioner General of Immigration, W.W. Husband, p. 61).

⁸⁸ 1949 Report to the Secretary of Labor from the Commissioner General of Immigration, Watson B. Miller, p 37.

⁸⁹ Husband (1924), 67; Miller (1949), 61; Despite the growth of the agency by this point, the narrative that drove this expansion was pursued persistently; stopping the ‘illegal entrant’ at the U.S.-Mexico border — characterized as the “most serious problem confronting the Border Patrol” — required *more*. In the face of claims from government officials that “the immigration laws [could not] satisfactorily be enforced at the Mexican border, regardless of the personnel and essential equipment that may, within reason, be provided,” career agents maintained that the primary issue was an ostensible dearth of resources afforded to the service. More personnel, more equipment, they argued, “would enable the service to have effective control of the situation” (Eckerson, Helen F., and Nick D. Collaer. 1949. “Border Patrol.” *Monthly Review* November VII (5): 63.)

⁹⁰ “The First Fifty Years.” 1974. *I and N Reporter* 23 (1): 17; United States. Bureau of the Budget and United States. Office of Management and Budget. “Fiscal Year 1976,” *Budget of the United States Government* (February 3, 1975), 150.

plane crashed into shapeless metal at El Paso; Clarke, with a knife driven through his heart [by a Mexican].⁹¹ These student officers learn that they live and work for more than a job. Meaning is given to the motto of the Border Patrol — “Honor First” [emphasis added].⁹²

While some contend that Latinxs held positions in immigration law enforcement throughout the agency’s first fifty years (see e.g., Lytle Hernandez 2010, 227), scant evidence exists to substantiate such claims. Lytle Hernandez, for instance, appears to rely for her assertion that Latinxs have “consistently” made up a “small fraction” of the Border Patrol workforce on a single, fleeting declaration from the INS in a publication touting, specifically, their minority recruitment and employment; it read: “over the years, employment of minorities in INS has been sporadic.”⁹³ Prior to this statement in 1977, however, an outside observer would be hard-pressed — barring a single exception — to find any evidence whatsoever of the existence of Latinx, much less ‘minority,’ immigration agents.⁹⁴

In official agency publications spanning the years between 1924 and 1976, there is not a single reference to a Latinx employee of the INS. Such reports, rather, are littered with excerpts resembling the preceding, where, while seldom as forthcoming about the “uniform appearance” of agents, the workforce is represented in all stories mundane, fantastical, and tragic, by white

⁹¹ Excerpt on Agent Clarke: “On December 18, 1950, Patrol Inspector Richard D. Clarke was stabbed to death by an alien who had been taken into custody at El Paso, Texas. [The alien, Eulalio Cordero] was being transported in a patrol car when he suddenly seized a knife, which had been previously taken from him, and stabbed in the heart Inspector Clarke, killing him instantly. ... When Inspector Clarke was originally interviewed for possible employment by the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the examiner gave an enthusiastic appraisal of him, ‘probably the best young prospect out of a dozen examined,’ he wrote, and stated further that ‘he could be developed into an outstanding officer’” (“Patrol Inspector Richard D. Clarke Murdered.” 1951. *Monthly Review* January VIII (7): 94).

⁹² Carter, Harlon B. 1951. “The Border Patrol Training School.” *Monthly Review* June VIII (12): 166.

⁹³ “Minorities and Women in INS.” 1977. *INS Reporter* 26 (1): 2; This report also includes numbers that, as discussed below, are (thus far) difficult to verify.

⁹⁴ In search of any sign of Latinx agents prior to (as well as after) the passage of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972, I spent weeks pouring through more than two hundred agency reports and publications spanning the years between 1924 and 1986. I was particularly interested in the stories of noteworthy, or heroic, agents (or even the most mundane of agent accomplishments) relayed in these reports; I wanted to know if any of those accounts concerned agents of Latinx (or Hispanic) descent. In no more than a handful of reports, I came across ‘questionable’ names — names I thought might be of Spanish-origin. Upon further exploration — a review of the genealogy of those names — all of those cases were ultimately of Italian-origin; The single exception came the year prior (1976), discussed in the succeeding section.

men. When, for instance, the agency's bulletin, the *I&N Reporter*, in 1955 reported the establishment of a training program to qualify line-level personnel for supervisory positions, the agency appeared — or was, at least, presented — as ethnically and racially homogenous.⁹⁵ Pictured (and mentioned by name) in the publication were one-hundred thirty-eight graduates of the first three training classes completed between January 10 and July 1, 1955, and not a single agent held a Spanish surname.⁹⁶ This, however, was not a pattern isolated alone to the turbulent years surrounding the infamous, and racially-tinged, 'Operation Wetback.'⁹⁷

As the INS celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the Border Patrol in the Summer of 1974, the *Reporter* featured a fifty-year retrospective of the service. Broken into relevant time-periods (e.g., 'the early years,' 'the depression years,' 'the World War II years,' etc.), the article was an exercise in self-aggrandizement, filled with countless stories of courageous agents who exhibited unparalleled bravery in the face of the ostensibly-significant threat posed by 'craven' border Mexicans.⁹⁸ Here, too, like all previous editions of the service's flagship publication, all of the agents featured held non-Spanish surnames. If, as scholars have suggested, Latinxs consistently have played a role in the work of the INS, the agency did little to advertise this fact. In stories of service, and in some cases, ultimate sacrifice, immigration law enforcement was, through much of the twentieth century, presented as a white, male domain, in which Latinxs played no role but that of antagonist — a 'villain' on whom the agency could justify its continued existence and expansion.

⁹⁵ Regarding the *INS Reporter* (also called, at times, *I&N Reporter* or *I and N Reporter*): "The Immigration and Naturalization Service Reporter is a bulletin of information concerning topics related to immigration and nationality in the United States. Among items appearing regularly are changes in the laws and regulations, digests of important administrative and relevant court decisions, and reports of research and statistical analyses. Information regarding publications in this field is also included from time to time" ("The I&N Reporter." 1954. *I&N Reporter* 2 (3): i).

⁹⁶ Bookford, Herman L. 1955. "Officer Training School." *I&N Reporter* IV (2): 19.

⁹⁷ Initiated in 1954, 'Operation Wetback' was a large-scale sweep operation conducted by the INS in conjunction with regional authorities that resulted in the apprehension and deportation of more than one-million Latinxs — including citizens — across the country. It is remembered today for the agency's brutal and indiscriminate mistreatment of Latinx migrants, residents, and citizens (see e.g., Calavita 2010 [1992]).

⁹⁸ "The U.S. Border Patrol 50th Anniversary." 1974. *I and N Reporter* 23 (1): 1-20.

A New Era of Immigration Law Enforcement

By 1976, however, the INS appeared determined to signal that significant change was underway at the agency. That summer, the *I&N Reporter* acknowledged for the first time (even the idea of) “agents of Hispanic ethnic origin.”⁹⁹ In a short article proclaiming the dawning of a “new era” for the Border Patrol, marked, specifically, by the first admission of women to the agency’s workforce, the bulletin reported boastfully that among the two-hundred twenty-three new agency recruits in 1975, eighty-eight were ‘Hispanic.’ This, according to the article, was the result of the agency’s ‘continued’ efforts to recruit “members of the minorities” (10). A sharp departure from the image of the service presented consistently for fifty years prior — as a uniformly-white institution, and bulwark against the persistent threat posed by ‘Mexicans,’ irrespective of citizenship status — statements like this, made for the first time in the latter half of the 1970s, marked the beginning of an unmistakable narrative shift for the INS: the agency not only (contemporaneously speaking) *now* admitted Latinxs, but it always had.

With the *I&N Reporter* — already an instrumental part of the discursive construction of the agency’s lore — the INS worked to rewrite its history. The previous excerpts describing the “new” era, alone, are a prime example of this revision. In this instance, the admission of ‘Hispanic’ agents to the service is not presented as a new development, but rather part of an ongoing project; the high number of ‘Hispanic’ agents netted in 1975, the article implies, is, simply, a testament to the agency’s longstanding efforts at minority inclusion. The following year, the *Reporter* (1977) helped continue this narrative, stating (as noted previously) that minorities had *always* held positions in the INS ‘sporadically.’ While the agency had theretofore provided zero evidence to support such a claim — in fact, offering only the opposite prior to

⁹⁹ “Our Newest Border Patrol Agents.” 1976. *I and N Reporter* 25 (1): 10-11.

1976¹⁰⁰ — this moment appeared to be different. Committed to the ‘new era’ narrative, this statement was followed by the first glimpse of the agency’s workforce (see Table V) as anything but white.¹⁰¹

TABLE V: INS MINORITY EMPLOYMENT COMPARISON, 1975-1977

	BLACK	%	LATINX	%	ASIAN-AMERICAN	%	NATIVE-AMERICAN	%	TOTAL MINORITY EMPLOYMENT	%
1977	1,310	12.6	1,429	13.8	255	2.4	36	0.3	3,030	29.2
1976	1,210	12.5	1,180	12.2	225	2.3	27	0.3	2,642	27.3
1975	1,018	11.4	952	10.6	229	2.6	25	0.3	2,224	24.8

Source: “Minorities and Women in INS.” 1977. *INS Reporter* 26 (1): 5.

Despite years of absolute silence with regards to the presence, or existence, of minority personnel, the *Reporter*, in 1977, revealed a much different image of the INS than that so carefully cultivated over preceding decades. While still difficult to determine from these figures, alone, the extent to which Latinxs always comprised part of the agency’s workforce, they nonetheless reveal that by 1975, Latinxs played a not insignificant role in the INS. Table V, compiled from figures provided in the publication, illustrates that by 1975, Latinxs constituted 10.6 percent of the total INS workforce¹⁰²; by 1977, that figure rose to 13.8 percent, surpassing the proportion of the workforce by then comprised by African Americans (12.6 percent) to become the highest-represented minority group in the agency. Beyond this, however, 1977 marked another pivotal moment in the evolution of immigration law enforcement from exclusively-white to disproportionately-Latinx.

¹⁰⁰ The agency was, early on, very open about their mistrust of Mexicans, regardless of their place of residence and birth: “The Mexican Government must necessarily take cognizance of the entire ‘Mexican’ population in the United States, because, in so far as this population remains a distinct group, it will retain some identity with the original homeland” (Davis, Kingsley, and Clarence Senior. 1949. “Immigration from the Western Hemisphere” *Monthly Review* September VII (3): 36).

¹⁰¹ 1977, 5.

¹⁰² To be clear, these figures include all INS employees, from Border Patrol agents to detention and deportation officers (equivalent to ICE agents, post 2003) and citizenship service personnel (equivalent to USCIS, post 2003).

With respect to charting a new course, 1977 was, for lack of a better term, a banner-year for the INS. In April, President Carter nominated the first Latinx Commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization, Leonel J. Castillo. Born in Galveston, Texas, Castillo was a former Houston city official and director of community relations for the Catholic Diocese of Galveston.¹⁰³ While he only served as INS commissioner for two years, Castillo was instrumental to the development of the *La(tinx) Migra* as it exists today. In his role as chief immigration officer, he was a symbol of the agency's narrative shift and 'new era,' and opened the doors of agency leadership to the Latinxs who would follow in his wake¹⁰⁴; and sure enough, as the proportion of Latinxs in the service expanded in the 1980s, the next high-profile Latinx immigration agent accordingly rose to prominence.

At the end of 1984, INS Commissioner, Alan C. Nelson, touted the success of the agency's 'Hispanic Employment Program.' Expounding on praise for the program from the Office of Personnel Management, Nelson explained that the program helped propel the INS — like the DHS, today — ahead of all other federal agencies in terms of Latinx personnel, with twenty-percent of the workforce comprised by persons of "Hispanic origin."¹⁰⁵ While the majority of Latinx personnel, the agency reported, were concentrated in lower-level positions (i.e., Border Patrol agents, immigration inspectors, and examiners), that same year, the next high-profile, and perhaps most well-known, Latinx in the history of immigration law enforcement, Silvestre Reyes, made his way into agency leadership.

In 1984, (later-Congressman) Silvestre Reyes was named the first Latinx Border Patrol Sector Chief in McAllen, Texas. Born in 1944, in Cantuillo, Texas, just outside of El Paso,

¹⁰³ "Meet Leonel J. Castillo, Our New Commissioner." 1977. *INS Reporter* 26 (1): 1.

¹⁰⁴ Mindiola, Tatcho. 2016. "Castillo, Leonel Jabier." *Handbook of Texas Online* (accessed April 20, 2017) <<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fcacu>>.

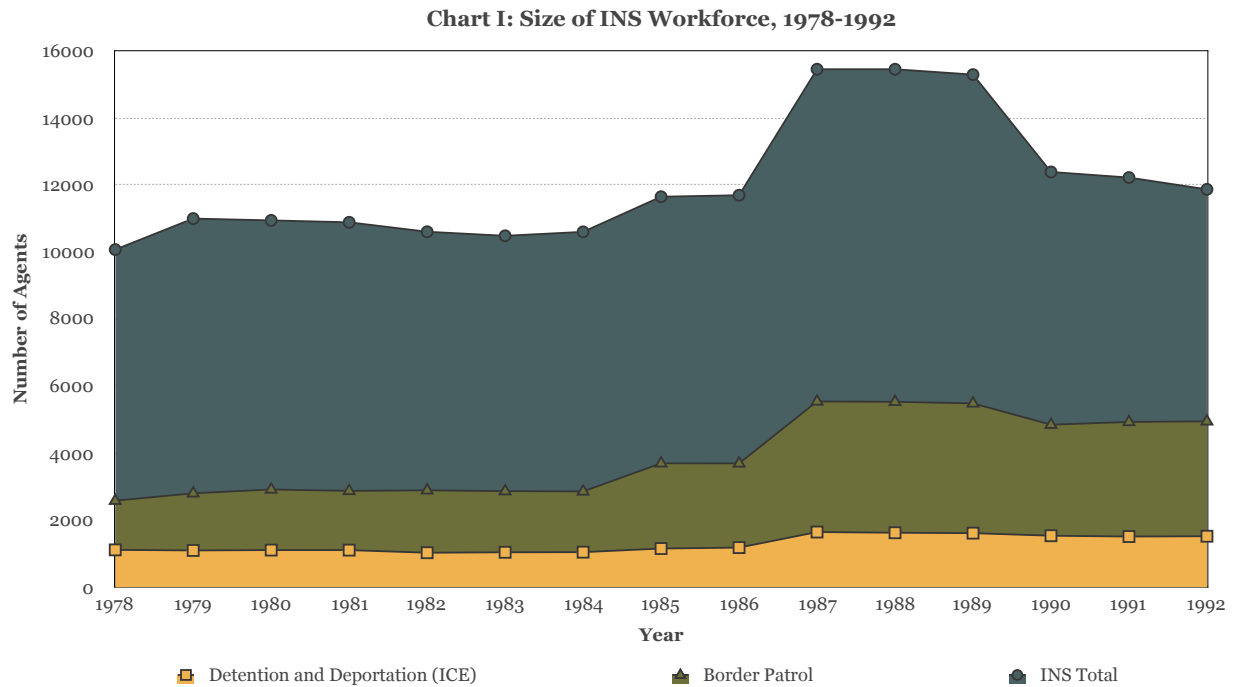
¹⁰⁵ Nelson, Alan C. 1984. "Commissioner's Report: Accomplishing Priorities." *INS Reporter* Fall/Winter 1984-1985: 1-2; Between 1984 and 1985, the number of Latinx Border Patrol agents, alone, grew by nearly 56 percent — from 612 Latinx agents to 954 ("Management and Support Operations." 1985. *INS Reporter* Fall/Winter 1985-1986: 35-42.)

Reyes was, from a young age, intimately familiar with immigration law enforcement. As has been well-documented, his job as a child on his family's farm was that of 'lookout,' where, at the first sight of *la migra*, or sign of an impending raid, he was to sound the alarm across the property.¹⁰⁶ As El Paso Sector Chief in 1993 — again, the first Latinx to hold this position — Reyes deployed single-handedly a similar strategy on the border as part of the (at the time, controversial) 'Operation Blockade.' In this operation — mimicked in other sectors thereafter — agents were positioned along the border to form a near-literal wall to prevent, or at the very least, deter, unauthorized crossings (Dunn 2009). Today, Reyes's tenure as El Paso Sector Chief is seen as a significant turning point in immigration law enforcement¹⁰⁷; not alone due to the relevant tactical changes made under his direction, but to the fact that Reyes also marked, and in a sense, embodied, the significant demographic changes underway within the agency, itself — changes undergirded by a continually- and rapidly-expanding workforce (Maril 2004, 168).

The period between 1985 and 1995 — the year Silvestre Reyes retired from the Border Patrol to pursue public office — was, again, a time of significant growth for the INS. The passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, which mandated a fifty-percent expansion of the field service (Dunn 1996, 49), brought about a sharp increase in agency personnel over the latter half of the 1980s (see Chart I). From 1986 to 1987, the total INS workforce grew by more than thirty-percent (from 11,694 to 15,453), with the Border Patrol, as prescribed by the bill, growing by fifty-percent (from 3,693 agents to 5,541), and the 'Detention

¹⁰⁶ Several authors have noted this story (see e.g., Lytle Hernandez 2010, 227; Miller 2014, 58); Dunn (2009, 53) received the story first-hand, but notes that it is a story the former-Congressman has been known to share quite frequently.

¹⁰⁷ Dunn (2009), in fact, describes Operation Blockade as the "operation that remade immigration enforcement." As discussed later, however, this was a major turning point for relations between immigration law enforcement and the Latinx community.

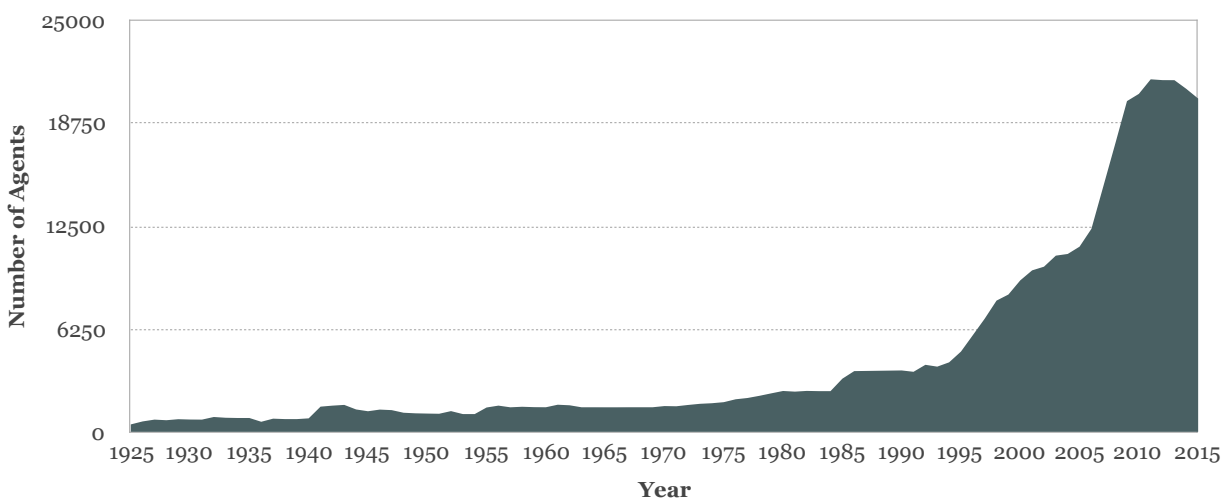


and Deportation’ division — what we now know as ICE¹⁰⁸ — growing by nearly forty-percent (from 1,180 agents to 1,644).¹⁰⁹ While Chart I suggests that these increases were short-lived — with the rate of personnel growth slowing, or ‘leveling-out,’ between 1987 and 1989, and the overall agency contracting to some degree at the beginning of the 1990s — such fluctuations maintained an upward trend.

¹⁰⁸ And specifically, we would think of this division as ICE-ERO.

¹⁰⁹ Sourcing here is the same as Chart I: House Committee on Appropriations 1978-1993 via Dunn (1996).

Chart II: Size of Border Patrol Force, 1925-2015



Source: United States Border Patrol. 2016. "Border Patrol Agent Nationwide Staffing by Fiscal Year."

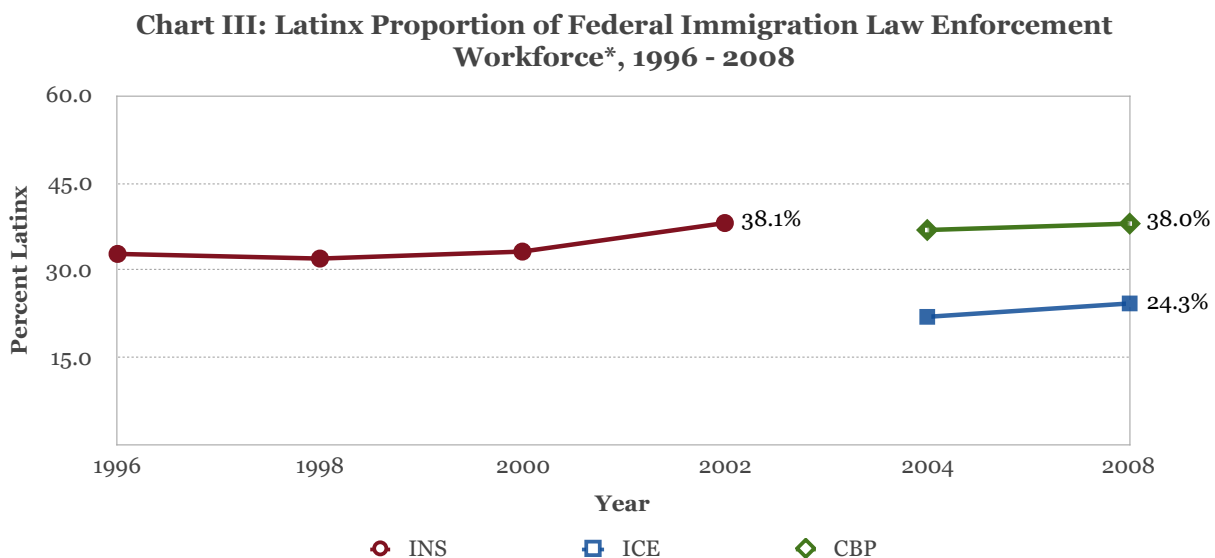
Chart II, for instance, which illustrates the growth of the Border Patrol from 1925 to 2015 — or, rather, its entire existence — reveals a singular story. While immigration law enforcement agencies have, at times, experienced slight, if not significant, decreases in size, such as that illustrated by Chart I at beginning of the 1990s, those agencies have consistently ‘recovered,’ and continued to expand to this day. In fact, despite the contraction across the sector at the beginning of the decade, by 2000, the Border Patrol had grown by one-hundred thirty-eight percent — from 3,733 agents in 1990 to 9,212 in 2000.¹¹⁰ In the ten years that followed, the agency, again (and not surprisingly), doubled in size, boasting by 2010 (and through 2015), a workforce of more than twenty-thousand agents.¹¹¹ Paralleling this growth, the division known, today, as ICE — the Detention and Deportation division of the INS — grew considerably since the downturn

¹¹⁰ The figures provided here by the Border Patrol suggest that by 1990, the size of the patrol force had decreased significantly from those levels reached in 1987; only slightly larger than it was in 1986, the gains that followed IRCA were almost entirely erased.

¹¹¹ In the wake of September 11, 2001, immigration law enforcement has become intertwined with counterterrorism operations as part of the Department of Homeland Security; the expansion of immigration law enforcement (i.e., personnel, resources, technology, detention facilities) has resulted in a de facto immigration industrial complex (see e.g., Sampaio 2015; Golash-Boza 2012; 2015; Dunn 1996; 2009; Welch 2002; Nevins 2010).

illustrated in Chart I. Between 1990 and 2015, this division grew by three-hundred eighty-nine percent (from 1,534 agents to 7,502).¹¹²

Contrary to earlier periods of expansion for the INS (i.e., 1924-1949; 1949-1974), the growth of immigration law enforcement in the last thirty years — from 1985 to 2015 — were accompanied by significant changes in the demographic make-up of those agencies. Between 1985 and 1996, for instance, the proportion of the INS comprised by Latinxs grew from — an at the time, astonishing — twenty-percent to nearly thirty-three percent.¹¹³ That same year, 1996, the workforce of the Border Patrol was, alone, forty-percent Latinx (Kopytoff 1996; Dunn 2009); and as illustrated by Chart III, the proportion of immigration law enforcement agencies comprised by Latinxs only expanded toward the turn of the century.



*: The figures here reflect only personnel authorized to make arrests and carry a firearm; support/administrative staff are not included.
 Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, “Federal Law Enforcement Officers, 1993-2008”; Data for years not included unavailable.

¹¹² Figure from 1990, see Dunn (1996); Data on ICE in 2015 are from official agency numbers (henceforth ‘Internal Agency Figures’) provided directly to me by an agency statistician. The figure utilized here as a reference for 2015 is that of ICE-ERO, not including the more than seven-thousand agents in the HSI division of ICE. With the restructuring that took place in 2003 as a consequence of the Homeland Security Act of 2002, ERO is the closest successor to the Detention and Deportation division of INS.

¹¹³ The exact number, as provided by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, “Federal Law Enforcement Officers, 1993-2008,” is 32.8% Latinx.

By 2002, the year that marked the end, and corresponding compartmentalization, of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the agency's workforce had grown to thirty-eight percent Latinx — up from thirty-three percent in 1996. Halted, if only for a year, during the reorganization of immigration law enforcement under the newly-minted Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the proportion of Latinxs within immigration enforcement only continued to grow after 2003. In fact, as part of DHS, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) — now parent-agency to the Border Patrol — and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) have been the primary drivers of advances in Latinx federal workforce participation.¹¹⁴ By 2008, thirty-eight percent of the CBP workforce was Latinx, with Latinxs accounting for roughly fifty-two percent of Border Patrol, alone (see e.g., Lytle Hernandez 2010; Rozemberg 2008; Pinkerton 2008). That same year, although the agency trailed CBP considerably, ICE also grew to more than twenty-four percent Latinx — a full ten percentage-points ahead of the agency with the next highest proportion of Latinx personnel, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), at 14.1 percent.¹¹⁵

Between 2014 and 2015, these figures held relatively steady. The proportion of Latinx CBP personnel, for instance, only rose by less than one percentage-point, with Border Patrol, even falling slightly to just under fifty-percent Latinx (49.9%).¹¹⁶ In the same time frame, ICE held consistently at just over twenty-four percent Latinx.¹¹⁷ Within ICE, however, the Enforcement and Removal Operations division, or ERO — the office most closely associated with its predecessor in INS, Detention and Deportation — inched closer to the Border Patrol in demographic make-up, with Latinxs comprising nearly thirty-percent of the division by 2015.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ United States Office of Personnel Management. 2014. "Annual Report to the President: Hispanic Employment in the Federal Government."

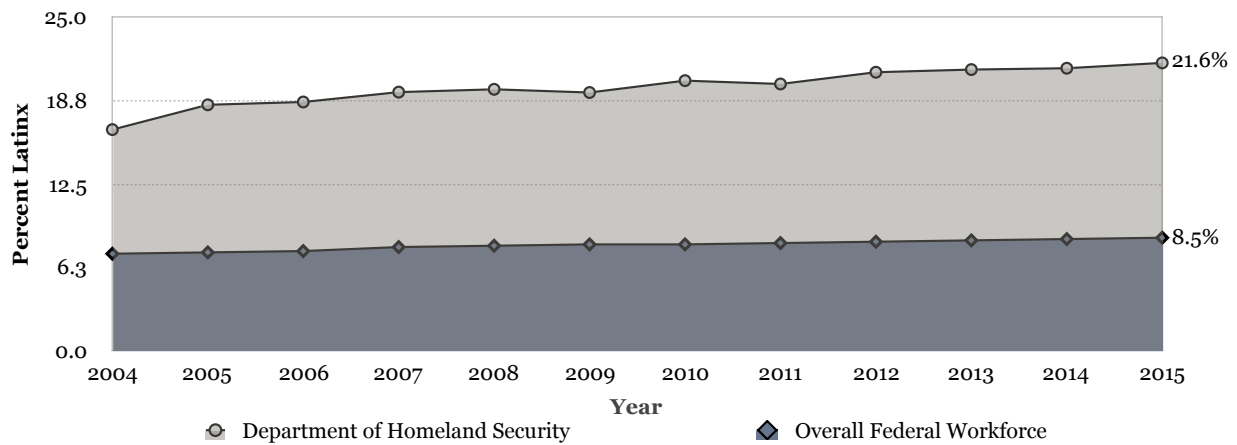
¹¹⁵ Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008; United States Office of Personnel Management. 2008. "Eighth Annual Report to the President on Hispanic Employment in the Federal Government."

¹¹⁶ U.S. Customs and Border Protection Office of the Commissioner, Privacy and Diversity Office. 2014. "Fiscal Year 2014 Annual Performance Report."

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Internal Agency Figures, 2015.

Chart IV: Comparison of Latinx Federal Workforce Participation, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to Overall Federal Workforce, 2004 - 2015



Source: Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), “Annual Report on the Federal Workforce”; Office of Personnel Management (OPM), “Annual Report to the President on Hispanic Employment in the Federal Government.”

With these proportions, immigration enforcement agencies, namely Border Patrol and ICE(-ERO), have helped to propel DHS ahead of all other federal agencies with respect to Latinx federal workforce participation.¹¹⁹ In fact, since its inception, DHS has consistently qualified as an ethnic occupational enclave, driving (if not sustaining), to an extent, *all* Latinx federal workforce participation (see e.g., Flores et al. 2007). Chart IV, for instance, traces the proportion of DHS comprised by Latinxs against that of the overall federal workforce between 2004 and 2015. During that time period, while the proportion of the overall federal government comprised by Latinxs has grown by only 1.2 percentage-points, from 7.3 percent Latinx in 2004 to 8.5 percent in 2015, DHS has, in turn, grown by five percentage-points, from 16.6 percent Latinx to 21.6 percent — aggregate-level figures unparalleled across the federal sector.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Table I (see *Chapter 1*), for instance, reveals that DHS, with Latinxs comprising more than twenty-percent of its workforce, is more than ten percentage-points ahead of the cabinet-level agency with the next highest proportion of Latinx personnel.

¹²⁰ Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), “Annual Report on the Federal Workforce”; Office of Personnel Management (OPM), “Annual Report to the President on Hispanic Employment in the Federal Government.”

Incomplete Explanations

The declaration of a ‘new era’ for the INS in 1976 amounted to more than mere rhetoric; as evidenced here, that year, in fact, appears to have marked the beginning of the fundamental transformation of immigration law enforcement. In short order, the INS went from a uniformly-white institution to one comprised disproportionately by Latinxs — the very people the agency had, for decades prior, worked so diligently to construct as a threat on which to justify its own existence and expansion.

To the casual — or perhaps better described as ‘disinterested’ — observer, the dramatic shift in the INS’s narrative and demographics from 1976-onward demands no grander explanation than that offered by the agency, itself. This explanation follows that the shift in trends outlined in the preceding section is, quite simply, the result of minority recruitment programs instituted by the INS (and broader federal service) after the passage of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act (EEOA) of 1972.¹²¹ On its face, this story makes a great deal of intuitive sense; legally obligated by 1973 to assure the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) — the agency charged with enforcing the EEOA — that its employment practices were not, in any way, discriminatory, the INS was, in effect, forced to breach the color line by both recruiting, and admitting into its ranks, Latinx personnel. Pursuant to this argument, the data revealed in the preceding section, are nothing more — and nothing less — than confirmation of the agency’s, thus far unparalleled, success in these efforts.

While there is, indeed, some validity to this explanation — namely in the role of the EEOA in promoting minority recruitment, employment, and advancement opportunities within the public sector in the time since its passage — to accept it full-stop would be short-sighted, if not simply lazy. Despite the simplicity (or convenience) of its impliedly causal chronology, this argument — henceforth the ‘EEOA-argument’ — fails its central charge on a number of fronts.

¹²¹ In the Summer 1977 edition of the Reporter, the agency explained the emergence of Latinx immigration agents: “With passage of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972, positive actions were taken toward increasing opportunities for the minorities” (“Minorities and Women in the INS,” 3).

First, and most glaringly, the EEOA-argument only addresses but one side of the phenomenon it portends to explain. Given recruitment and admittance can only ‘pull,’ and not ‘push,’ Latinxs toward open agency positions, the argument — while ostensibly helpful in explaining the actions of the INS (and its successors) post-1972 — is wholly insufficient as an explanation for overall trends.

Rooted in the first, the second major shortcoming of the EEOA-argument revolves similarly around the trends that followed the post-1972 narrative shift, namely the disproportionate distribution of Latinxs across the federal service (see *Chapter 1*, Table I). If the emergence of a disproportionately Latinx *migra* is, indeed, the result of the EEOA — a statute enforced across employment sectors, and not alone applicable to immigration law enforcement agencies — what, then, explains the wide disparities in Latinx workforce participation between DHS and its constitutive parts (i.e., Border Patrol, ICE), and other federal agencies (i.e., Departments of Commerce, Energy, or Education)? With assumedly (and quite apparently) more at play in these patterns than diversity-enrichment programs alone, the EEOA-argument here, again, provides little help — if any at all.

The last, and perhaps most damning, flaw of the EEOA-argument derives from the chronology on which it relies. To hold true, the argument depends on a basic, yet fundamental premise — that the shift in INS hiring practices was, in fact, preceded by the passage of the EEOA. This sequencing, however, is not entirely born out by data self-reported by the agency. Consider, for instance, the report published by the *I and N Reporter* in 1976 that brought the first-ever mention of INS agents of ‘Hispanic origin.’ Discussing the latest, and theretofore largest, group of agency recruits, the report’s authors boasted of the (impliedly note-worthy, but at the same time, not unprecedented) proportion of the group comprised by Latinxs — thirty-nine percent, or, more precisely, eighty-eight of two-hundred twenty-three new agents.¹²² This report, together with the number of Latinx INS agents on record by 1975 (952 Latinx agents; see Table

¹²² “Our Newest Border Patrol Agents,” 10.

V), suggests that the recruitment and admittance of Latinxs to the INS actually preceded the EEOA by a considerable number of years. In fact, granting even the most unrealistic of recruitment figures — higher than those reached in 1975, and consistent from year to year (i.e., 90 Latinx recruits on a yearly basis) — to reach the number of Latinx agents reported by 1975, the agency would have had to have been actively recruiting Latinxs for more than ten years. Here, even the most generous of hypotheticals suggests that the shift in hiring practices within the INS — and thus, the beginning of the march toward a disproportionately-Latinx immigration law enforcement workforce — preceded the passage of the EEOA by, at the very least (again a generous concession), seven years.

Insufficient as an explanation for the seismic shift in the demographic make-up of the INS, from exclusively-white to disproportionately-Latinx, the EEOA played, still, an important contemporaneous role; it was pivotal to — if not the outright reason for — the shift in the INS’s public narrative beginning in 1976. Insofar as the agency worked to re-frame publicly its (hi)story with respect to the racial and ethnic heterogeneity of its workforce, this shift, relative to any other, was driven by the passage, and subsequent enforcement of the EEOA. To avoid the appearance of discriminatory hiring practices, that is, the agency needed only to change its public image; and thus came the transition to the narrative — regardless of its veracity — that the agency admitted Latinxs into its ranks, then *and* always.¹²³ This shift was, in other words — and from all indications — nothing more than a symbolic gesture. Regardless of this, however, the EEOA (and the INS’s corresponding narrative shift) are key to understanding the underlying story at play in the development of immigration law enforcement and the industry’s demographics over time — a story of survival and existential dependence.

¹²³ While this section has, to some degree, conceded the fact that Latinxs existed among the ranks of the INS prior to 1975, the extent to which they “always had” is a more difficult argument to substantiate with available data.

A Means of Survival

An exclusively-white immigration law enforcement workforce was never going to be a winning strategy; of this much, elements of the INS appear to have always been certain. Early intra-agency communications, in fact, suggest that agency officials may have found such a model untenable from the earliest years of the service. In 1924, for instance, sector chiefs in Brownsville, Texas — perhaps recognizing the difficulty of operating in the region without ‘native’ assistance — stressed to superiors in Washington the importance, if not imperative, of recruiting new agents with ‘thorough knowledge’ of the border, fluency in the language of the region (Spanish), and, however less tangible, the appropriate ‘temperament’ for the job.¹²⁴ The high proportion of the agency’s early ranks comprised by white, so-called “borderlanders,” notwithstanding, the agency needed Latinxs, still (Lytle Hernandez 2010, 39-40). Without them, the men of the early service — men of ‘uniform,’ white appearance, lacking native Spanish-language fluency¹²⁵ — found themselves (and the agency), in territory both unfamiliar and, at times, unforgiving, the *true* outsiders; and for all intents and purposes, they were.¹²⁶

Despite early requests that, fulfilled, might have led to the contrary, the INS, for decades, both resembled and built its reputation as a foreign occupying force. Staffed as it was, the agency in communities along the U.S.-Mexico border was a most literal reflection of its (at the time) core operative narrative of ‘us versus them,’ ‘American (defined as white) versus Mexican (defined as criminal, regardless of status).’ For years, these dynamics, as discussed previously,

¹²⁴ The exact quotation follows: “This district has been promised an increased patrol force, and if the number of men asked for is given and they are men who have a thorough knowledge of the Spanish language and Mexican border conditions and are temperamentally fitted for this particular type of work, and proper transportation facilities are furnished, it is believed that the smuggling situation in this district can be effectually controlled” (1924 Report to the Secretary of Labor from the Commissioner General of Immigration, W.W. Husband, p 17).

¹²⁵ On the importance of Spanish, the agency maintained: “A patrol officer can not attain a maximum value on the Mexican border if he does not possess a good working knowledge of the Spanish language. If he does not have this at the time of appointment, he is expected to acquire it during the period of probation” (1930 Report to the Secretary of Labor from the Commissioner General of Immigration, Harry E. Hull, p 38).

¹²⁶ Amidst his broader (misogynistic) message to the wives of INS agents in 1958, U.S. Attorney Waters referenced these kinds of feelings, noting the “inward despair of entering into a new...community that is in marked contrast with that which you once knew” (“Recent Developments in Law Enforcement,” 50-51).

worked to the advantage of the agency by stoking moral panic and, thus, justifying the agency's continued existence and expansion. Those same dynamics, however, ultimately led the agency into an existential identity crisis.

By the end of the 1950s, and in the wake of 'Operation Wetback' — the nationwide deportation campaign that led to the removal of at least 2.9 million 'Mexicans' — the INS found itself the target of increased public scrutiny (De Genova 2013; Garcia 1980). While the agency had, theretofore, enjoyed little support throughout the country for myriad reasons — including the notion, popular to this day, that the nation's immigration law enforcement agencies, in fact, did too little¹²⁷ — the negative attention, at this point in time, was different. Here, it was rooted specifically in the metaphorical divide between the service and the communities in which it operated — reflected literally in the contrary, yet racially- and ethnically-homogenous demographics of both. Within this context, the fact that the nearly three million 'Mexicans' removed from the country during 'Operation Wetback' reportedly included United States residents, and in some cases, citizens, only deepened this divide, and drew further the ire of entire communities.

Laying bare the divide between the INS and the Latinx community, 'Operation Wetback' was, in a sense, clarifying in nature; never before had the agency been more visible, nor the contrast between its agents and the community more stark. By the end of the 1950s, the operation had not only made definitively clear the lack of community knowledge, and apparent disinterest therein, on the part of INS agents — a reflection of the untouched cultural distance between agency and community — it had also intimated strongly the existence of a more insidious project of anti-Latinx racial stratification and criminalization ongoing across the U.S.-Mexico borderlands (see e.g., Lytle Hernandez 2010; Calavita 2010 [1992]). As perennial

¹²⁷ One of the most well-known critiques was rooted in the contradictions inherent to the public's immigration enforcement priorities — namely between the desire to curb undocumented immigration and consequent loss of cultural homogeneity, and the desire among farmers for cheap, accessible, exploitable labor (see e.g., Calavita 2010 [1992]).

‘outsiders,’ lacking personnel who could truly connect with the community — or, as the agency described it, “speak in the form, or language, that [the community] understands the best and more, with which they have an emotional involvement” — the INS was ultimately powerless to tamp-down such perceptions, however valid they may have been.¹²⁸ As a consequence, the agency faced, in this moment, a pivotal crossroads, at which the landscape of immigration law enforcement would be turned on its head.

The dramatic demographic shift within immigration law enforcement — at least, from the perspective of agency hiring practices¹²⁹ — can be understood through recognition of a simple fact: if remaining an exclusively-white institution offered the INS any kind of future, that future most certainly promised to be limited. In communities increasingly wary and unwelcoming, the agency’s racially- and ethnically-homogenous workforce was, by the end of the 1950s, a liability — an impediment to effective, but more importantly, inconspicuous, mission-fulfillment; and as such, it posed an existential threat to the agency, itself. Confronted by this reality, the INS was, in effect, forced to change — not by legal authority (as the EEOA-argument would suggest), but by a persistent, if not zealous, will on the part of the agency to survive.¹³⁰

Latinxs offered the INS precisely that: survival. The recruitment and hiring of Latinx personnel — or, rather, the ‘breaking’ of the color line — afforded to the agency the opportunity not merely to ingratiate itself with, but to literally become part of the same community it was charged with policing. In so doing, the once hyper-visible, exclusively-white agency effectively (and arguably, seamlessly) folded into the Latinx community, becoming, in effect, *invisible*.¹³¹ Consequently absent of the barriers to communication, lack of cultural awareness, and unseemly

¹²⁸ Zimmer, William E. 1974. “People Relations.” *I&N Reporter* Winter 1973-1974: 36

¹²⁹ To be clear, this explanation, alone, does not account for the overall development of a disproportionately Latinx immigration law enforcement workforce. This narrative, while accounting for the ‘pull’ of immigration law enforcement, does not explain (nor portend to explain) the ‘push.’ That part of the process is developed in the section that follows.

¹³⁰ Arguably a characteristic of all bureaucratic institutions (see e.g., Wilson 1989).

¹³¹ A broader discussion of the specific advantages granted to immigration law enforcement agencies like Border Patrol and ICE by Latinx agents’ ethnic identities is included in *Chapter 2*.

optics by which it had been plagued previously, the INS positioned (or rather, *rooted*) itself in the Latinx community for permanence — for survival.

With survival a central focus, the INS approached the beginning of the 1970s fully engaged in the recruitment of Latinx personnel¹³²; and thus, with the passage of the EEOA in 1972, the agency — then in sync across both narrative and practice — merely *continued* (arguably, full-tilt) its Latinx ‘project.’ In the decades that followed, the INS (to include its successors today) not only survived, but, imbedded in, and wholly dependent on, the Latinx community as it was, it thrived¹³³; and as a consequence, today in predominately-Latinx communities across the southwest especially, immigration law enforcement agencies resemble less a ‘foreign occupying force,’ and more a central, irremovable community institution.

On An Existential-Dependence

The development of immigration law enforcement as it is understood today is ultimately a story of existential dependence. This is owed to the fact that, irrespective of demographic iteration, the core institutions of the industry (e.g., INS, Border Patrol, ICE) have never not relied, for their very existence, on Latinxs. In its earliest years, for instance, an exclusively-white INS utilized the threat of an alleged ‘invasion’ of ‘Mexicans’ to justify the necessity of not only its own contemporaneous existence, but of its continual expansion. In so doing, the agency

¹³² See preceding section for discussion of proportion of the INS workforce comprised by Latinxs by 1974.

¹³³ See the data presented in the preceding section; Additionally, that through these years, the primary motivation behind the inclusion, and subsequent promotion, of Latinxs was, indeed, survival by way of immersion in the Latinx community, became quite clear with the ascension of Latinxs to positions of authority in the agency. In 1978, for instance, INS Commissioner Castillo — the first Latinx to hold the position — established a Federal Advisory Committee “consisting of persons of various nationality, racial and ethnic groups”; their role, to serve as an “organized channel” between the agency and ethnic communities across the country (“Service Achievements in CY 1978.” 1979. *INS Reporter* 27 (4): 4). Similarly, when Silvestre Reyes assumed the role of El Paso Border Patrol Sector Chief — again, the first Latinx to hold the post — he moved quickly to engage the agency in the activities of the community by hosting town hall meetings, volunteering at public schools, conducting holiday food drives, and even sponsoring parties (Dunn 2009, 54). The most notable change made under his direction, however, came about during the aforementioned ‘Operation Blockade.’ In the aftermath of *Murrillo v. Musegades* (1992) — a federal civil rights case filed against the Border Patrol after a slew of apparently racially-motivated incidents stemming from the agency’s continued surveillance of, and obtrusive presence on, the grounds of a local high school — immigration agents were ordered out of the community and moved to the international boundary (see e.g., Dunn 2009).

linked itself to Latinxs such that insofar as the agency continued to exist and amass greater resources, personnel, and authority, all of this was, in fact, due to them, the agency's most essential, yet unwitting, partners.

Before too long, however, increasing scrutiny of the actions of immigration law enforcement agencies in Latinx communities across the country brought INS officials to a crucial realization: to hold on to the institutional growth garnered on the metaphorical 'backs' of Latinxs, the agency would have to change — and fundamentally so. At this crossroads, the INS found in Latinxs, again, a vehicle for survival. By recruiting and hiring from the Latinx community, the INS effectively transformed its unwitting ethnic partners into witting participants in the most literal work of the agency; and therein, Latinxs went from being the agency's oppositional *raison d'être* to its lifeblood.

With new demographic dimensions, the INS found itself capable of essentially 'disappearing' into the 'target-rich' Latinx communities in which it operated, thereby escaping the threat of mounting criticism, and creeping obsolescence.¹³⁴ More than simply a boon to the operations of the INS (to include Border Patrol and the division known today as ICE), however, the development of a disproportionately-Latinx immigration law enforcement workforce was ultimately an exercise of necessity, a project pursued actively by agency officials then *and* now; not because they were, or, are today, committed to racial and ethnic diversity, but because Latinxs have always been fundamental to the (continued) existence of immigration law enforcement.

The argument presented herein is, admittedly, an insufficient explanation for the emergence of a disproportionately-Latinx immigration law enforcement workforce, or *La(tinx) Migra*. Not without irony, this argument, in fact, suffers (rather noticeably) the same primary

¹³⁴ For broader conversation about the benefits to immigration law enforcement agencies of Latinx agents' ethnic identities (e.g., the submersion of the institution), see *Chapter 2*.

shortcoming as the aforementioned EEOA-argument, in that *if* true, it explains only one-half of the ‘story’ at hand. That is to say that insofar as we think of the overall process — the development of a disproportionately-Latinx immigration workforce — as two-sided, to include factors that both *push* and *pull* Latinxs to work in immigration, the argument presented here fails as an explanation for all but one side: ‘the pull.’ That said, while the inability of the ‘existential-dependence argument’ to, alone, explain the rise of the *La(tinx) Migra* is an undeniably significant shortcoming, it still is not, in and of itself, disqualifying. As it is not presented as — and does not, itself, portend to be — a parsimonious explanation for the entirety of the ‘process,’ dismissing it out of hand would, in fact, be a serious mistake; not simply because of what it reveals about the *pull* of immigration law enforcement agencies over time — arguably, a significant correction to the existing record — but the extent to which its central narrative of existential-dependence may apply, quite perfectly, in fact, to the half of the story the argument ostensibly fails to explain.

Joining ‘The Enemy’: A Story of Economic Self-Interest (and Survival)

Insofar as the shift in recruitment and hiring practices of immigration law enforcement agencies toward the development of the *La(tinx) Migra* can be explained as a story of existential-dependence and survival (the *pull*), the other ‘side’ of this process — or, why Latinxs, despite inherent contradictions, opt for and/or accept positions in immigration (the *push*) — is tied inextricably to the same narrative. That is, while scholars have previously addressed why Latinxs work in immigration law enforcement as a matter of identity¹³⁵ — ultimately explaining (albeit haphazardly) the emergence of a disproportionately-Latinx immigration workforce as the result of self-selection among (broadly-speaking) ‘non-identifying’ Latinxs (e.g., Heyman 2002; Garcia Hernandez 2012), and in at least one case, federal diversity-recruitment mandates (e.g.,

¹³⁵ See the opening section of this chapter.

Correa and Thomas 2015)¹³⁶ — the true answer may, in fact, be much simpler. Admittedly less sexy than those offered previously, the explanation put forward here rests on a much less complicated causal-chain; and that is, faced with dwindling economic circumstances, and scant educational and occupational opportunities, the decision to enter immigration, for Latinxs, is — like a reflection of the aforementioned case of the INS over time — purely instrumental, and at its root, about little more than basic existence and survival.

This contention, to be clear, is not, as in the case of some extant scholarship, a determination of identity as irrelevant, absolutely. Rather, given relevant extenuating circumstances (i.e., a dearth of educational, occupational, and economic opportunities), and granting the fluidity and situational-salience of identity — a commitment not shared by the extant scholarship (arguably to their detriment) — the decision to enter immigration is, for Latinxs especially, merely a moment of low ethnic identity salience.¹³⁷ Within this context (and again contrary to previous in-kind studies), Latinxs who elect to work in immigration law enforcement not only maintain, but attach meaning and value to their ethnic identities (and immigrant identities and histories). The argument presented herein (henceforth the ‘instrumental self-interest’ argument, or more succinctly, ‘survival’ argument), in other words, would, if true, not only help explain the emergence of a more racially and ethnically diverse immigration law enforcement workforce, but also potentially imbue such agencies with a diversity of thought, identification with ethnic identity, and identification with the immigrant experience. To be certain (as is explored more thoroughly in the chapter that follows), these kinds of diversity, given the discretionary authority granted to immigration agents, have the potential to shape the street-level implementation of immigration policy in significant ways. Pursuant to this argument, here, however, the section that follows outlines the context in which Latinxs across the

¹³⁶ Correa and Thomas (2015) explain the emergence of a disproportionately-Latinx immigration law enforcement workforce as the result of a Clinton-era executive order (#13171) on diversity recruitment that they, in fact, misattribute to George W. Bush.

¹³⁷ A visualization of this moment of low ethnic identity salience among Latinx immigration agents can be found in the theoretical models illustrated in Figures III, IV, and V, in *Chapter 1*.

country (and especially in the southwestern United States) decide to enter immigration law enforcement.

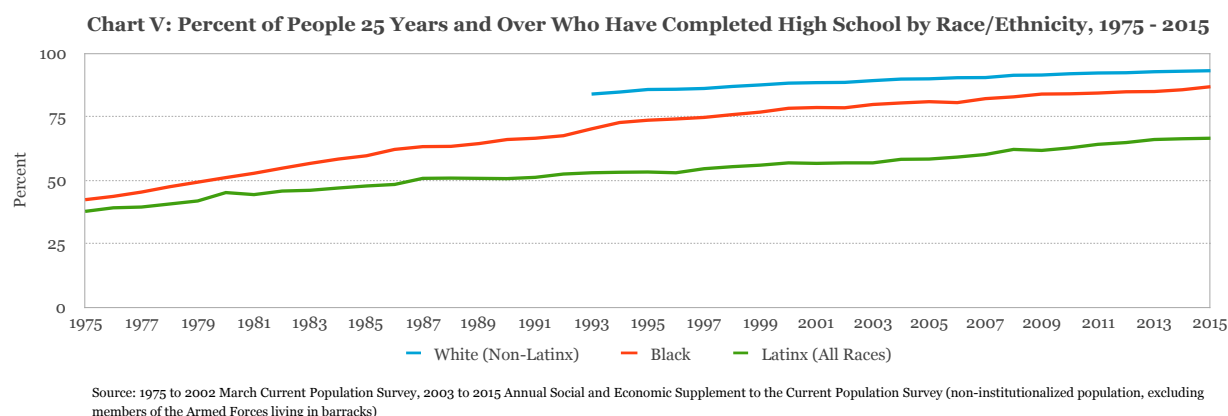
On The Push of Sending Communities

That Latinxs in the United States occupy a lower socioeconomic position relative to non-Latinx populations is a well-established, empirical fact. Predominately Latinx communities across the borderlands consistently rank among the highest in the nation in terms of poverty and unemployment, and among the lowest in terms of economic mobility and occupational opportunity (see e.g., Hero 1992; Garcia Hernandez 2012). The Rio Grande Valley of Texas (RGV) — a region in which the state’s immigration and border enforcement apparatuses are on full display¹³⁸ — is but one of these communities, but the economic conditions its people face are common across the southwestern United States. The percentage of people living in poverty in the RGV ranks among the highest in the nation at rates between thirty-three and thirty-five percent (more than twice the nationwide rate); and the unemployment rate consistently lingers in the double-digit range (Ura 2016; Garcia Hernandez 2012, 170). Where the mean annual wage is just under \$28,000, a job with an immigration law enforcement agency that not only offers to its employees starting-salaries up to \$46,000 per year, but generous benefits packages, can be life-changing (Garcia Hernandez 2012, 170-171). But while there certainly is evidence that economic conditions in the southwestern United States — especially border states in which Latinxs are concentrated (see e.g., Cardenas and Kerby 2012; Hero 1992) — are significantly worse than in other parts of the country, average economic measures for Latinxs nationwide suggest these are not isolated problems. Rather, Latinxs in the United States lag, as they have

¹³⁸ Author’s field notes: “Driving from the RGV to San Antonio today: about 10 miles south of the [Falfurrias] checkpoint, I saw what looked like a Predator Drone flying over *monte* [‘brush-land’] northeast of the highway. When I got to the checkpoint and answered the usual questions [verifying my nationality], I asked the BP agent there if ‘that was a predator drone back there.’ His response: a smirk as he waved me through” (3 June 2015).

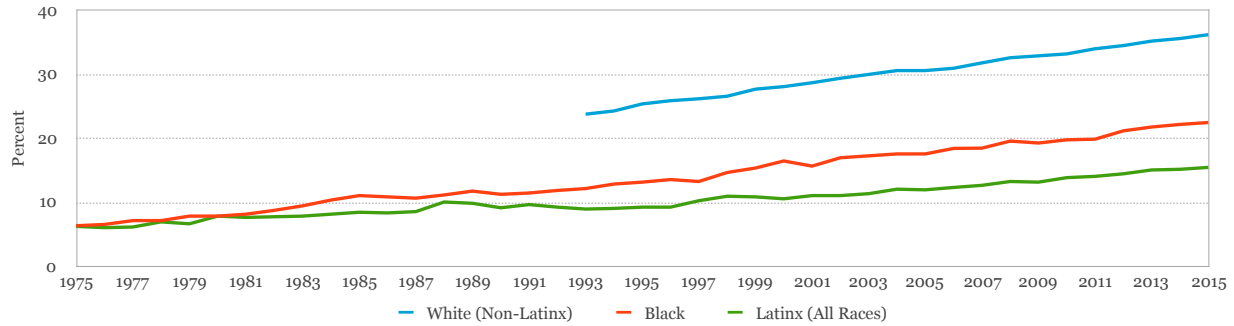
historically (see e.g., Hero 1992), behind non-Latinxs on the most basic measures of economic security.

In a 2012 report on Latinxs in the United States, the Center for American Progress found that despite improvement on some measures, Latinxs still lag behind non-Latinx populations on basic economic measures. For instance, the unemployment rate among Latinxs in 2011 was 11.5 percent compared to a rate of 7.9 percent among non-Latinx whites, suggesting Latinxs were disproportionately affected by the recession of 2008. Educational attainment among Latinxs, while improving in the last thirty years (see Charts V and VI), still remains a source of inequality and economic insecurity — especially given the relationship between educational attainment and the likelihood of living in poverty (DeNavas-Walt and Proctor 2015).¹³⁹ Among Latinxs not subject to prolonged unemployment in recent years, the center reported that only one-in-six employed Latinxs held college degrees, “less than half the proportion of employed whites” — most likely attributable to lower rates of college-completion than all other racial and ethnic groups (Cardenas and Kerby 2012, 2-5). Closing the gaps between Latinxs and non-Latinxs on basic economic measures, the report contends, remains an issue in need of serious attention and policy solutions.



¹³⁹ The 2015 Census Report on Income and Poverty in the United States reveals that in 2014, 28.9% of those aged 25 and older who did not have a high school diploma were living in poverty; 14% of those with high school education and no college were living in poverty; 10.2% of those with some college but no degree; and 5% of those with at least a Bachelor's degree (see DeNavas-Walt and Proctor 2015).

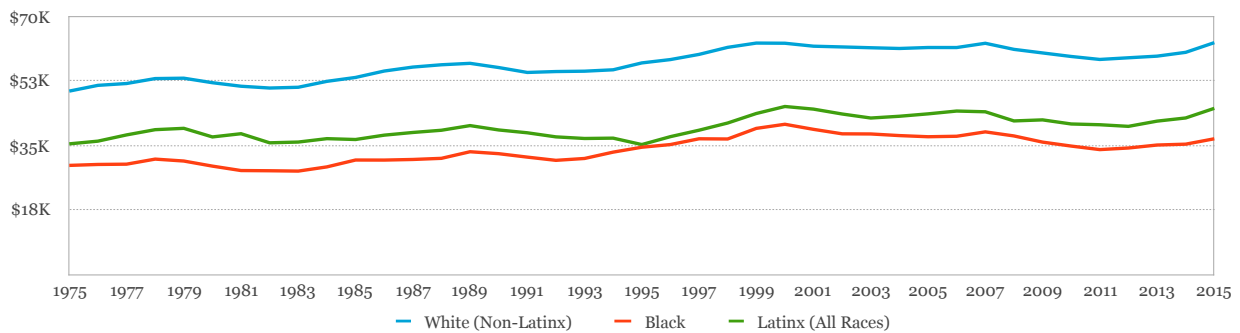
Chart VI: Percent of People 25 Years and Over Who Have Completed Four Years of College or More by Race/Ethnicity, 1975 - 2015



Source: 1975 to 2002 March Current Population Survey, 2003 to 2015 Annual Social and Economic Supplement to the Current Population Survey (non-institutionalized population, excluding members of the Armed Forces living in barracks)

A Census report on Income and Poverty in 2014 similarly reveals the economic inequality that continues to shape the Latinx experience in the United States. While the official U.S. poverty rate in 2014 was 14.8 percent — 10.1 percent for non-Latinx whites — the rate for Latinxs was 23.6 percent (DeNavas-Walt and Proctor 2015, 12-14). The report additionally reveals that in terms of median household income, Latinxs trail the national rate \$42,491 to \$53,657, a ratio of 0.79 (see Chart VII); the ratio of Latinx income to non-Latinx whites is reported at 0.71 — down over the last forty years from 0.74 (2015, 7).

Chart VII: Median Household Income by Race/Ethnicity, 1975 - 2015



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 1975 through 2016 Annual Social and Economic Supplements.

These circumstances (historically, and ongoing) lend support to the current argument that when Latinxs elect to work for immigration law enforcement agencies, they do so on strictly instrumentalist terms: the quest for survival through economic security and mobility. That is to

say, ethnic, Latinx, identity — and the abuses perpetrated against Latinx immigrants, residents, and citizens alike at the hands of *la migra* — may play a smaller role in Latinxs' decisions to enter such agencies than has been otherwise assumed. The pain of historical violence, as well as the potential for violence at the hands of today's immigration enforcement agencies, may simply pale in comparison to the pain of dwindling occupational opportunities and rampant economic inequality and instability. This thesis gains even more traction when we consider the way Latinxs have been found to think about success in the United States, the way they conceive of the 'American Dream.'

Drawing on focus group data used to inform the development of the 2006 Latinx National Survey, Fraga et al. (2010) explore what the 'American Dream' means to Latinxs in the United States. Arising organically in focus groups across the country in expressions of desire among study participants for their own success story, these discussions provided for a fairly clear definition of the elusive concept. The authors found that for Latinxs, the American Dream is comprised of four components, the latter three fundamentally-tied to the first: the attainment of 'financial security that comes with regular employment' (2010, 33). The second component, the ability "to move away from rough parts of town or to move out of the *barrios*," is entirely contingent on the acquisition of economic security as *ability*, in this case, is rooted in a freedom that comes from economic stability (34). Contingent on the first two components is the third component of the American Dream: home ownership in a good neighborhood; and lastly, the fourth component of 'fair treatment and respect from others' (35-36). Given this conceptualization of the American Dream, it is clear that for Latinxs in places like the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, or southern California, a job in immigration enforcement may appear as a door to their own dream: 1) a steady job that pays well and provides benefits; 2) a level of financial and job security that would provide the freedom to move out of 'bad' neighborhoods and purchase a home in 'the nice side of town'; and 3) the role of 'federal agent,' a title that

commands respect nationwide, especially in low-income border communities where government jobs are coveted.

The Latinx immigration agents interviewed by authors of previous in-kind studies (see e.g., Heyman 2002, Correa 2011; Correa and Thomas 2015; Garcia Hernandez 2012) touched on each of these themes, often explicitly in terms of fulfillment of the ‘American Dream.’ That such authors do not cite such statements as evidence for why Latinxs elect to work in immigration enforcement, and instead opt for explanations rooted in a fundamentally-flawed conception of the nature of identity (see opening of this chapter, as well as *Chapter 1*), is difficult to defend. It is clear, given the economic circumstances that Latinxs across the country face, especially in the southwest borderlands, and the quest for an American Dream among Latinxs rooted in economic security and mobility, that those who elect to work for immigration law enforcement agencies such as Border Patrol and ICE do so in service of primarily instrumental goals; and the data collected for this project, in fact, supports this contention.

A Test of ‘Self-Selection’ Versus ‘Survival’

While the primary goal of this section, and chapter, is a test of the theory outlined above — an explanation for why Latinxs work in immigration law enforcement rooted in instrumental, economic self-interest and survival — the argument that represents conventional thinking on the topic, attributed most often to Heyman (2002), and referred to here as the ‘self-selection thesis,’ demands similar attention. It demands, in other words, an empirical test of the argument’s essential, and heretofore unchallenged, claims for why Latinxs elect to work in immigration, both rooted in, or rather, derived from, the overarching contention that Latinx immigration

agents do not identify ethnically¹⁴⁰: 1) Latinx immigration agents, on account of being too far removed from it, lack an attachment to, or relevant understanding of, the immigrant experience; and 2) Latinx agents exist primarily as immigration restrictionists (Heyman 2002). In the following sections, utilizing the data collected for this project — ethnographic interviews with Latinx ICE agents across Arizona, California, and Texas — I provide the first substantive challenge to the self-selection thesis, and moreover, offer empirical evidence in support of a new explanation for the emergence of a disproportionately-Latinx immigration law enforcement workforce.

Classifying Respondents

A test of the central claims of the self-selection thesis requires the classification of study participants on two fundamental, yet undoubtedly crude measures: 1) attitudes toward immigration, simplified dichotomously to classify liberal and restrictionist immigration views; and 2) identification with, or understanding of the immigrant experience, simplified dichotomously to classify high and low levels of identification, or connection. To be certain, the simplicity of these categories necessarily lead them to be inherently rough; but absent specific sets of questions designed to build scale-measures of immigration attitudes, manual classification on these axes requires a careful, wholistic evaluation of the interview data collected.

Given that interviews varied quite considerably at times, I developed a rubric for determining how to classify each individual participant. For instance, I classify a Latinx immigration agent as an ‘immigration-restrictionist’ if they: a) believe that entering the United States without authorization or inspection is grounds for deportation; b) believe that being

¹⁴⁰ To be clear, Heyman (2002), like other authors of studies of Latinx immigration agents, fails to definitively address why Latinxs work in immigration; the ‘self-selection’ thesis, insofar as it exists, is implied by (and, to a degree, must be true for) his argument for *how* Latinxs work in immigration law enforcement. Correa and Thomas (2015), outside of making similar claims about the dissociation of Latinx immigration agents with their ethnic identities, somewhat dismissively attribute the emergence of the *La(tinx) Migra* to, as stated here already, diversity recruitment mandates.

undocumented necessarily makes someone a ‘criminal’; c) believe the majority of immigrants who enter the United States without authorization are ‘criminals,’ or are here to do the country, its citizens, and institutions harm; d) believe that immigration law enforcement agencies are doing ‘too little,’ and should be apprehending, detaining and/or deporting *all* immigrants present in the United States without authorization regardless of time or roots in the country, or humanitarian concerns.¹⁴¹

On the other hand, an agent is classified as an immigration-liberal if: a) they do not believe unauthorized-entry into the United States, alone, is grounds for deportation; b) they reject the claim that being undocumented necessarily makes someone a ‘criminal’; c) they believe the majority of those who enter the United States without authorization are ‘hard-working people in search of opportunity’ or a ‘better life’; d) they believe that immigration agencies are doing ‘enough,’ or ‘the right thing by focusing on individuals with serious criminal records,’ and should consider factors like time or roots in the country, or humanitarian concerns when deciding to apprehend, detain, or deport someone here without authorization. An individual is also classified as an immigration-liberal if they express support for some kind of ‘comprehensive immigration reform’; not simply a ‘securing of the border,’ as is often championed by politicians of all stripes, but a reform of the legal avenues of immigration to — as many participants put it — ‘make it easier for those who want to come to United States to work and make a better life for themselves and their families.’ Expressed support for ways of ‘dealing with’ the undocumented population in the United States beyond detention and deportation also contributes to the classification of a participant as an immigration-liberal.

¹⁴¹ It goes without saying that as immigration law enforcement agents, we would naturally assume that agents lean-restrictionist. That is to say, the measure in this case is biased toward the restrictionist category — it is, in essence, a low bar given the population being sampled.

Classification of study participants in terms of their identification with, or connection to the immigrant experience, was broken into two categories, low or high.¹⁴² Being the child of foreign-born parents, or being foreign-born themselves did not immediately warrant a ‘high’ classification. Rather, a respondent was categorized as having a ‘high’ level of identification with, or connection to the immigrant experience if, in the course of talking about their clientele, they brought up their family’s, or their own immigration story. A respondent would also be classified as ‘high’ on this axis based on how they talked about their family’s roots outside of the country. Naturally, those respondents that struggled to recall their family’s immigration history, or claimed no roots outside of the United States were classified as having ‘low’ identification with, or connection to the immigrant experience.

Prescribed Expectations

It became clear rather early in the data collection process that the argument that Latinxs self-select into immigration law enforcement positions due to a lack of connection to the immigrant experience, the prevalence of restrictionist immigration attitudes, or even the internalization of racial biases (i.e., the ‘self-hating Latinx,’ or ‘*vendido*’ narrative; see *Chapter 2*), was a wholly insufficient explanation for the emergence of a disproportionately-Latinx immigration law enforcement workforce (see e.g., Heyman 2002; Correa and Thomas 2015; Garcia Hernandez 2012). Yet, for a considerable number of years, such claims have remained conventional wisdom on the matter. To offer a rival explanation, however, requires that we take seriously the claims of the self-selection thesis as set forth by the extant scholarship, and test them empirically utilizing newly available data. This section is dedicated to just such an evaluation; it begins, simply, with an outlining of expectations — how we should expect the

¹⁴² Like the axis above — immigration liberal or restrictionist — this measure, too, is inherently crude, and as a consequence, wastes all the nuance of responses provided via in-depth qualitative interviews. I would argue, however, that its use is excusable given that it is limited, for one, and two, only being used for broad-level conversations about variation across the sample.

central claims of the self-selection thesis, if true, to manifest in the data collected herein — before moving on to a review of preliminary, aggregate-level results.

The first claim of the self-selection thesis as put forward by Heyman (2002) follows that Latinx immigration agents, bestowed with the rights and privileges of citizens (and lacking an identification with their ethnic identities), are too far removed from the immigrant experience to have empathy for, or perceive a co-ethnic bond with Latinx immigrants; and as such, they self-select into immigration law enforcement. If this is, indeed, the case, we should expect Latinx immigration agents to express, or exhibit, little to no familiarity with the immigrant experience, much less identification with (or knowledge/recollection of) their own individual, or family, immigration history. As such, on the dichotomous measure created to represent ‘connection to the immigrant experience,’ we should expect a preponderance of, if not *all*, Latinx agents to fall into the ‘low’ category.

The second central claim of the self-selection thesis follows that Latinx immigration agents also select-into such positions because they are, for all intents and purposes, immigration-restrictionists.¹⁴³ If this is true, pursuant to Heyman (2002) and subsequent in-kind studies in which complementary arguments have been proffered (e.g., Correa and Thomas 2015; Garcia Hernandez 2012; Correa 2011)¹⁴⁴, we should expect Latinx immigration agents not only to express personal preferences for restrictionist immigration policies, but also expressive of generalized negative perceptions — potentially via the use and repetition of stereotypes, racialized or not — of immigrants. Here, too, we should see, if not *all*, then a majority of Latinx agents fall into the ‘restrictionist’ category of the measure created to represent ‘immigration attitudes.’

¹⁴³ In fact, he argues that all Latinxs may be immigration-restrictionists, citing public support among El Pasoans for Silvestre Reyes’s ‘Operation Blockade.’

¹⁴⁴ While Heyman (2002) has asserted that restrictionist attitudes among Latinxs are primarily rooted in the ‘relative distance’ between those agents and their co-ethnic migrant counterparts (i.e., the first central claim), others have offered additional contributing factors, including the internalization of racist stereotypes and biases, and the wholesale denial of a co-ethnic bond with Latinx migrants deemed criminals or deviants (Correa and Thomas 2015; Garcia Hernandez 2012; Correa 2011).

Unsubstantiated Claims

As expected, the data reveal much more variation with respect to Latinx immigration agents' levels of identification with ethnic identity, levels of identification with the immigrant experience, their perceptions of immigrants, and attitudes toward immigration in general than we might expect to find if the self-selection thesis were, indeed, true. The most glaring point of contrast, in fact, is that eighty-seven percent of the Latinx agents in the sample (53 total Latinx agents) specifically identified in ethnic terms (i.e., 'Latinx,' 'Hispanic,' 'Mexican-American,' 'Mexican'). Moreover, in the cross-tabs of Table VI, the self-selection thesis suggests that a majority, if not *all*, of the sample should be concentrated in the lower-right quadrant (highlighted in grey), representative of the overlap of low levels of identification with the immigrant experience and restrictionist immigration attitudes. As illustrated therein, however, only twenty-one percent of the sample (13 total Latinx agents) are concentrated as such.

Table VI. Categorization of Latinx ICE Agents, Immigration Attitudes x Immigrant Experience

		IMMIGRATION ATTITUDES	
		LIBERAL	RESTRICTIONIST
CONNECTION TO IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE	HIGH	31	15
	LOW	2	13

The data, organized in Table VI, in fact, reveal a much different story than that purported by Heyman (2002) and other adherents of the self-selection thesis. Where we might expect to see little to no identification with, or connection to the immigrant experience among Latinx agents, seventy-five percent of the sample (46 total Latinx agents) expressed or exhibited high

levels of identification with, or connection to the immigrant experience. This may be a product of the fact that sixty-seven percent of the sample (41 total Latinx agents) were themselves, the children of immigrants; or due to the fact that sixteen percent of the agents who participated in the study (10 total Latinx agents) were foreign-born, and thus immigrants themselves. That a connection to, or identification with the immigrant experience runs deep among Latinx immigration enforcement agents — and that those with low connections to the immigrant experience constitute a minority of the sample — indicates that Latinxs do not work in immigration enforcement because of a lack of empathy born of a distance between themselves and that life experience, but that some other factor must bring them to this line of work.

In terms of Latinx immigration agents' perceptions of immigrants and attitudes toward immigration, generally, the data again prove the arguments put forward in the extant scholarship insufficient. Where we should expect to see a majority of the agents classified as immigration-restrictionists, the sample is nearly split down the middle: forty-six percent of the sample (28 total Latinx agents) can be classified as immigration-restrictionists.¹⁴⁵ This means that more than half of the sample, fifty-four percent (33 total Latinx agents), hold generally liberal attitudes toward immigrants, and immigration on the whole. Not only does this severely complicate the self-selection thesis as put forward by Heyman (2002), it also serves to dispel with conventional thinking about Latinxs in immigration enforcement not explicitly covered therein: that Latinxs at large, generally speaking, are predisposed to negative perceptions of immigrants and immigration — another proposition offered by Heyman (2002). If that were the case, we would not see such a large proportion of Latinxs classified as immigration-liberals.

¹⁴⁵ It bears noting that given the rubric established for the classification of study participants along this axis (immigration liberal or restrictionist), the rubric was noticeably biased toward restrictionists — that is to say, it was easier to classify someone as a restrictionist than a liberal; perhaps that is to be expected given the slant that already exists given that we are dealing with immigration law enforcement agents.

How, then, if not the identity-based rationales proffered in the extant literature, do we explain the emergence of a disproportionately-Latinxs immigration law enforcement workforce? The data, in this case, clearly point to an instrumental self-interest rationale: Latinxs work in immigration law enforcement to secure economic gains, in service of stability, mobility, and ultimately, survival. This is evident in that despite the variation exhibited on Latinx agents' ethnic identification, their identification with, or connection to the immigrant experience, or agents' attitudes concerning immigration, agents across those axes overwhelmingly (by seventy-four percent, or 45 total Latinx agents) cited 'money,' 'a stable, or good job,' or 'benefits' as the reason(s) for joining the agency. What this suggests is that despite a Latinx agent's attitudes toward immigration, their level of ethnic identification, their perception of undocumented immigrants as inherently good-hearted or malicious, the decision to work in immigration enforcement is most-often based on instrumentalist, economic considerations.

In the section that follows, I delve more deeply into the responses of individual Latinx immigration enforcement agents when it comes to the decision to enter immigration law enforcement positions. Utilizing the classifications created as a response to the extant literature (see Table VI), the agents introduced here not only represent the variation in attitudes toward immigrants and immigration, and connection to the immigrant experience, but at the same time reveal the sample-wide unifying factor that brought these agents to the service in the first place: the quest for a well-paying, stable job with benefits, and the opportunity for economic security and existential survival.

In Their Own Words: Narratives of Economic Self-Interest and Survival

The sun going down in the windows behind Patty Delgado on a late afternoon in April filled the room with a warm pinkish-hue. Silent, compared to the hum and hurried movement of the parts of the building we had walked through to reach it, her office, nestled in the back of the

massive complex, struck me as the kind reserved specifically for people like her — a soft-spoken, almost stoic, veteran of the service along the border in south Texas. As we sat there talking, Patty was an open book; for more than two hours, with intermittent smiles and laughter, she recalled countless stories from the wealth she had amassed over the course of a twenty-four year career that, from the beginning, was never meant to be more than just a ‘job,’ a way to pay for school books.

It was 5 a.m., Patty recalled aloud as she stared up at the ceiling; and knocking on her front door was her friend, Theresa. With the Border Patrol beginning another mass-hiring blitz, as she called it, in the Rio Grande Valley, the agency advertised a sweepstakes of sort. That morning, “the first two-hundred people to get [to a local city auditorium] were going to be allowed to [‘test-in’],” or, attempt to qualify for open positions; and Theresa, determined to be among the first in line, arrived early at Patty’s house that morning to drag her along. When they — along with a group of thirteen other friends — arrived to the auditorium, however, they found that theirs was by no means an original idea.

“The line of cars was probably a couple of miles [long],” Patty said as she shook her head and chuckled; “there was no way [we were] going to be [in] the first two-hundred.” Despite having expressed early misgivings about accompanying Theresa that morning, Patty’s description of this moment carried with it a very noticeable air, or tone, of disappointment. As she continued with her story, however, this appeared to be solely the effects of hindsight — a feeling projected on that moment, in other words, for all that might not have been without the stroke of luck she came upon that day.

Faced with unlikely odds, Patty and the rest of the group were stunned to find sitting in a flat-bed at the head of the ‘mile-long’ line, another group of friends also vying for a shot at a job with the Border Patrol. Having lined up, apparently, the previous day, they were perfectly positioned to be first through the doors when they opened. At their invitation, Patty, Theresa,

and the other thirteen among them, piled into the truck and waited. Shortly thereafter, they were through the doors.

By the end of the day, only two of the original group of fifteen had passed the preliminary examination to proceed through the hiring process; and Patty was, of course, one of the two. As she came to this point in the story, she paused for a moment, appearing to reflect on all that she had just shared — and the apparent role of luck in what amounted to a life-changing chance-opportunity more than twenty-four years prior. To that end, in describing her feelings upon officially accepting the job, she said quite simply: “I just thought myself lucky”; she was.

In fact, all of the agents I interviewed *were* — or at least considered themselves — lucky. In a majority of the conversations I had with Latinx ICE agents across the southwest, circumstance was a common theme, and it was difficult not to pick up, rather quickly, on an underlying connecting thread in agents’ rationales for electing to work in immigration law enforcement: the quest for economic well-being, stability, and survival. Many, as it happens, were quite forthcoming, and explicit, about those motivations:

What’s going to provide for your family? Yeah, it’d be nice to have a career where you look forward to going to work every day, but when that Golden Eagle shifts in your account every two weeks and you see how much it’s leaving, you’re like, “pfft, *alright!*” It’s like, “You’re paying me *this* much for *that*?”¹⁴⁶

Lalo Rivera, 41, has been in immigration enforcement for nine years. The son of a Customs and Border Protection (CBP) immigration inspector, he said he held out as long as he could before ‘caving’ and applying for the job of Immigration Enforcement Agent (IEA) at ICE. Given that his father worked immigration, he described never really having an interest in that kind of work. When he applied for immigration enforcement positions, however, he was working for a beer wholesaler; the motivation for applying to the federal government, he said,

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Lalo Rivera (2015).

was the desire for a ‘career, not just a good job.’¹⁴⁷ But while this is *his* career, he claims to be ambivalent about the issue of immigration — a claim that he negates later in our discussion when he refers to *people* coming over from Ciudad Juarez as “trash.”¹⁴⁸ To be fair, while Lalo is classified as an immigration-restrictionist, comparisons between him and others similarly classified reveal the aforementioned crudeness of such a categorization; other agents, quite simply, exhibited more tact in expressing their negativity than Lalo cared to exercise.¹⁴⁹

Sonia Duran, 54, a veteran of both ICE and Border Patrol has worked in immigration enforcement for twenty-four years; law enforcement, however, was never something she saw herself doing when she was growing up. “My goal in high school,” she told me, “was fashion design, but I realized that wouldn’t be an option.”¹⁵⁰ She cited the regional isolation of her hometown on the border and her family’s finances as the primary reason that her dream of becoming a fashion designer quickly became no more than that, a dream. As a child of immigrant parents, Sonia was determined to secure a job with which to support herself:

I was adamant about getting a government job. I promised myself, whatever [job] comes up, I’m taking.¹⁵¹

She described “putting in” for every government job possible; the INS was, quite simply, the first to call. When I asked what the allure of Border Patrol was at the time, she replied as many agents in the sample did: “that was what we’d been exposed to [on the border].”¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ For clarification, I utilize double-quotation marks for direct quotes (except for block quotations), and single-quotation marks for similarly-worded paraphrases.

¹⁴⁸ Comments such as this, and a slew of others similarly tasteless, brought me to classify Rivera as an immigration restrictionist with low identification with, or connection to the immigrant experience.

¹⁴⁹ This was an interesting interview. There were several moments when I felt as though he was irritated with me and my questions — an odd feeling to have given that *he* invited me into his home.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Sonia Duran (2015).

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

Despite her classification as an immigration-restrictionist¹⁵³, such attitudes or perceptions of difference between herself and her clientele were never brought up as a rationale for her taking a job in immigration enforcement; for her, a job in immigration enforcement was her best option to make money, to secure a future and some kind of economic freedom:

What is the best paying job here in the [border region] at the time? I don't have quite the education to be a doctor or anything like that or a teacher...but I *can* do this.¹⁵⁴

Daniel Mireles, 35, has worked for ICE for six years; like many of his fellow agents in the sample, Daniel's path into immigration enforcement began years prior to his employment with ICE. Becoming a father at sixteen, before finishing high school, Daniel enlisted in the military in the hope that his service would lead *somewhere*; it did:

I decided to just go the military route right away. I didn't even tell my mom until a couple days before I was leaving. I just did it on my own. But, it worked out. I mean, *the reason why I'm here is because of that*. My life probably would have turned out a lot differently, so...I can't complain.¹⁵⁵

The opportunities, however, did not emerge right way. Upon returning home from a tour in Iraq in 2005, Daniel enrolled in college, but soon found it difficult to keep up financially — and underwhelming GI Bill benefits left him in need of a stable, good paying job. After applying broadly to immigration law enforcement positions, because it was 'something that seemed fun as a kid growing up on the border,' an opportunity presented itself:

¹⁵³ This classification came from her characterization of all undocumented immigrants as, essentially, criminals. When asked about current ICE policy and enforcement priorities, she explained that she would prefer the agency go after everyone, regardless of criminal history — an interesting position to take given her high identification with the immigrant experience exhibited in the way she talked about her parents' immigration story.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Sonia Duran (2015).

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Daniel Mireles (2015); Emphasis mine.

Luckily one of my good friends that I met in the Army, who is also from [my hometown], got me a job working at, ironically, the ICE facility [there]...the detention center, as a contract security officer.¹⁵⁶

Daniel ultimately left the contract-security position because he was still determined to go to school; that this was a difficult decision for him at the time was evident both on his face and in his tone:

It was one of the higher paying jobs, but I was like, man...you know...I didn't want to get stuck just working this contract job and then just leaving school, so I quit and I just went to school, just tried to make it on my own just going to school.¹⁵⁷

During a routine visit to the VA office, Daniel found an advertisement for work-study positions. He described loving this job; it provided him flexible hours and encouraged him to continue his studies. He spent six months at the VA office before ICE called and offered him a job: "I got the phone call that said 'Are you still interested in the job?' and I was like, 'Yeah.'"¹⁵⁸ Needless to say, when Daniel took the job with ICE, he left college behind.

The totality of my conversation with Daniel revealed a story of a young man — a child of immigrant parents who grew up in government housing — just trying to make a life for himself. While he was initially intrigued by the Marines, he chose the Army because they were, at the time, offering cash incentives for enlistment. His decision to quit the contract security job was so that he could focus on school in the hopes of potentially getting a better job than at a detention center. He did not, in other words, elect to work in immigration enforcement because he lacked a connection to his ethnic identity, lacked a connection with the immigrant experience, or

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

necessarily cared at all about the work the agency did.¹⁵⁹ It was instead a stable, government job, and a step up from the work-study job. It was, most importantly, the offer of a career without having to struggle through, and finish, college. The following statement, to me, clearly revealed this:

It's just a job to me, you know. It's not something that I *wanted* to do, that I *wanted* to fight illegal immigration, you know; it's just something that...the opportunity opened itself. I mean, I do my job...I do it as best as I can, but I'm not going to sell my soul to it.¹⁶⁰

Carla Linares, 42, has spent eleven years in immigration law enforcement between ICE and Border Patrol.

In [my home town] it's either law enforcement, teaching or nursing.¹⁶¹

While Carla did not *explicitly* say that she entered immigration enforcement because of the opportunity it provided for economic advancement, the entirety of her story suggests a struggle for survival; to her, Border Patrol was an available job — and as she said, it simply is one of the jobs that you can find in cities along the border. It became clear rather early in our discussion that Carla was determined just to find *a* (or any) job.

When Carla finished college, she was hoping to find a job as an adult probation officer. Positions such as this in her hometown on the border, however, she claims are “very political,” and she simply could not ‘break in.’ As a consequence — and as evidence of her statement about job prospects in her hometown — she went into education, because, in her words, “why not?”

¹⁵⁹ Throughout our talk, Daniel made it very clear that he was not in immigration because he had negative perceptions of immigrants — in one particular part of the interview, when we talked about the role of prosecutorial discretion in his job, he noted occasions when he has been willfully insubordinate and refused to do something that he disagreed with. He is, in no way shape or form a restrictionist; his inclusion in the part of the chapter is not only to share his incredible story, but he serves as a representative of the top-left quadrant of Table VI, immigration-liberal and a high identification with, or connection to the immigrant experience.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Daniel Mireles (2015).

¹⁶¹ Interview with Carla Linares (2015).

Interviewer: So why'd you leave *that* job?

Carla: I had no idea what I was doing; I had to get out.¹⁶²

To be fair, teaching is not for everyone; but it definitely is not a job for people who are, simply, looking for *a* job. When she came across an advertisement for Border Patrol in the local newspaper, she applied; the agency called soon thereafter and offered her the job.

While Carla — like many of her colleagues in the sample — grew up on the border and knew who Border Patrol were, the ever-present “*migra*,” she never envisioned that she would work in law enforcement, much less *immigration* law enforcement. It is quite clear that what brought her to her position in immigration was the need for *a* job, and, of course, the circumstance (or happenstance) of coming across an ad in the newspaper; her ambivalence toward the job — surely a consequence of this — was quite evident during our conversation. This ambivalence, however, manifests in attitudes and perceptions of immigrants that put her, quite firmly, in the category of immigration-liberal. Most interesting, though, is that she is one of two agents in the sample who can be categorized as such without a high identification with, or connection to the immigrant experience.

The agents described here represent a broad spectrum of attitudes toward immigration, perceptions of immigrants, and identification with, or connection to the immigrant experience. But despite this variation, they all expressed — some more explicitly than others — an instrumental self-interest rationale for the decision to work in immigration law enforcement. Stories such as these abound across the sample with seventy-four percent of all respondents citing ‘money,’ ‘job stability,’ or ‘tangible benefits like health insurance and pensions’ as what made working in immigration enforcement so alluring. The argument that Latinxs self-select into immigration enforcement because they hold restrictionist attitudes, they deny their ethnic

¹⁶² Ibid.

identity, or because they have no connection to the immigrant experience, is simply not supported by empirical data.

Conclusion

I was just hoping for a federal job. I just wanted to get back in with the government; I wanted those benefits, I wanted something secure, with benefits that I could support myself and my family. Growing up [on the border], government jobs were the gold standard. If you could get a government job, *scoffs* you know, those folks that I knew, they lived on the nice side of town, they lived good, you know. So I thought, if I can do that, if I can get a government job — so like I said, I started applying everywhere.¹⁶³

Claudio ‘CJ’ Juarez, 48

Without a doubt, the Border Patrol, singlehandedly, without a doubt, has changed the lives of so many generations of Hispanics who otherwise would not have had the chance that they’ve been given...*I* know firsthand.¹⁶⁴

George Jurado, 48

That Latinxs make up such sizable proportions of federal immigration law enforcement agency workforces is inherently puzzling; the mere existence of scholarship dedicated to explaining this demographic shift is, alone, evidence of this. There is, quite simply, something odd (or perhaps unsettling) about the over-representation of Latinxs in agencies that historically have been the perpetrators of state-sanctioned violence against Latinx communities across the country. The immediate inclination, as evidenced by the explanations put forward in the extant literature, is to look to identity — conceptually and practically. Scholars, in other words, have suggested that for Latinxs to work in immigration enforcement necessitates some kind of identity-negotiation, be it a distancing between themselves and their co-ethnic targets, a denial of shared identity or origin with Latinx immigrants, or a denial — or disdain, to some extent — of self. But as discussed previously, such explanations do more to address *how* Latinxs work in

¹⁶³ Interview with Claudio Juarez (2014).

¹⁶⁴ Interview with George Jurado (2015).

immigration law enforcement than *why* they elect to work for such agencies in the first place. To address *why* Latinxs work in immigration law enforcement requires us to reject knee-jerk inclinations associated with the self-selection thesis, set aside identity — at least for the time being — and entertain the idea that the decision to become an immigration enforcement officer may be less a question of identity than a question of economic necessity and existential survival. Interviews with sixty-one Latinx immigration enforcement agents across three states — Texas, Arizona, and California — both substantiated this thesis and helped refute the conventionally-accepted self-selection thesis, revealing that despite broad variation in terms of attitudes toward immigrants and immigration in general, a significant proportion of the sample (seventy-four percent), like the agents above — CJ Juarez and George Jurado — cited economic self-interest (or, survival more broadly) as reasons for electing to work for immigration law enforcement agencies.

CHAPTER 4

LIMINAL IDENTITY AND THE LATINX IMMIGRATION LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENT

“You’re an *immigrant*,” I said, somewhat surprised; and without hesitation, he quipped back, “I *am*.”

Carlos sat there leaning-back in his chair and rolling a bottle of water back and forth across the table between his fingers. It wasn’t a nervous-tick, like he was counting minutes or anything like that¹⁶⁵; it was confidence — contentment, even. Sitting opposite him as we talked, I quickly got the sense that he had been waiting for an opportunity like this — a chance to tell his story, and voice his opinions, without having to worry about ‘ruffling any feathers.’ Seven years in, in other words, he was well aware of how much he and, at least, some of his coworkers differed in their respective approaches to the job; *his*, as it turned out, was deeply personal.

Born and raised in Colombia, Carlos was seven years old when he immigrated to the United States — Queens, to be exact. On petition from his aunt, he and his mother left South America because, as he described it, she, quite simply, wanted “better” for the both of them; and the opportunities afforded by their adopted home did not disappoint. In fact, at thirty-one, Carlos’ story epitomizes the ‘American Dream’: he is college-educated, gainfully-employed, building a pension, and married, with children. That others aspire to the same experience — if not some lesser version of it — is not lost on him. When I asked, generally, about the people with whom he comes into contact on a daily basis, he dropped his head, and in a tone that implied he had drawn the parallels aloud before, shot back up to reply:

I’m an immigrant, you know. I understand why people come here — *my* family did it. You have to escape where you think you don’t have a chance [and get] where you want your kids to grow up.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ At least, I don’t think it was.

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Carlos Ortegon (2015).

He was defensive; not of himself, specifically — not even necessarily towards me — but of the broader group to which he very obviously saw, and repeatedly and assertively declared, himself a part. Despite having immigrated ‘the right way,’ and having lived in the U.S. for more than twenty years, Carlos saw himself, still, at least experientially-linked to *all* immigrants — including the very people he, on account of his institutional role, was charged with apprehending, detaining, and removing from the country. Surprised by him for a second time since we had sat down in the break room of his duty station that afternoon, I decided to press him on this line of thinking by asking who, then, he thought should be subject to the enforcement actions of ICE. Carlos, here, remained consistent; while he noted his absolute lack of tolerance for those who ostensibly “come [to] commit crimes,” he lamented the ‘needlessly-aggressive’ actions taken by the agency ‘in the past,’ as he alleged, against people whose ‘crimes’ amounted to no more than unauthorized-entry.

There was a tension in the room that built as we talked; and with enough time, like a wave, it crested. As we neared the end of our conversation, it took a turn that I had not anticipated, but, in retrospect, makes sense as the likely source of Carlos’ early apparent-eagerness to share his story. Pointing, again, to his persistent immigrant-identity, and the inherent connection rooted therein between he and his ‘clienteles,’ he revealed that he had had his fill of the conflict that resulted from the intersection of ‘who he was’ and ‘what he did’; *he* was opting out.

I feel for these people — I’m an immigrant, you know? You talk to [them], and you understand. ‘*Señor, no — tengo mis niños.*’ [‘Sir, no — I have kids.’] And like, I understand that. [I]t sucks because, ‘hey man, I’ve got to arrest you...because this is who I work for; this is what I have to do.’ Do I *want* to? Not really, you know? But I already told my wife, I can’t see myself doing this job anymore. I’ve got to do something else — something more meaningful, in a way. I mean, not to put everyone

else down who loves this job. But, for me, it's just — this is not for me anymore.¹⁶⁷

• • •

Insofar as Latinxs — by considerable proportions (74%)¹⁶⁸ — elect to work in immigration law enforcement in service of economic self-interest and survival, the agencies they enter are imbued with a diversity that extant scholarship has heretofore dismissed as improbable (see e.g., Heyman 2002; Correa and Thomas 2015; Garcia Hernandez 2012). In direct contradiction of conventionally-accepted theory (i.e., the ‘self-selection thesis’¹⁶⁹) that, at its most basic level, holds that Latinxs elect to work in immigration because they do not identify ethnically, they are too far removed from the immigrant-experience, and generally hold ‘restrictionist’ immigration attitudes and policy preferences, the instrumental self-interest, or ‘survival,’ thesis (as developed in *Chapter 3*), portends a much less uniform model of ‘the’ Latinx immigration agent, writ large, than that typically presented. Therein, while the Latinx immigration enforcement agent can most certainly be the non-identifying ethnic theorized thus far — in favor of restrictive immigration policies and far removed from the immigrant-experience — they can *also* be a strong-ethnic identifier, they can favor liberal immigration policies, they can be the children of immigrants, and immigrants themselves; they can be, like Carlos, all of these things.

An example of the kind of diversity that exists within the ranks of ICE, Carlos is, himself, evidence of the insufficiency of the self-selection thesis; but moreover, he and his story beg a fundamental question: given *why* Latinxs elect to work in immigration, and the implications of that finding (i.e., the ‘survival’ of ethnic identity through enlistment, and thus, the emergence of a model of the Latinx immigration agent who claims and attaches meaning and value to that identity, and identifies with the immigrant-experience), *how* do Latinxs work in immigration law

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ See *Chapter 3*.

¹⁶⁹ See *Chapter 3*, and Heyman (2002).

enforcement? Or rather, how do they deal with the tensions engendered by the intersection of (at least) two inherently contradictory identities: ethnic and institutional? On this question (as discussed previously in *Chapter 2*), relevant extant scholarship has provided limited answers.

Extant scholarship regarding street-level bureaucrats (i.e., police officers, teachers, soldiers, and counselors), for instance, holds that social identities like race and ethnicity are ultimately irrelevant to the day-to-day decisions and behavior of state-agents; not because they are inherently irrelevant — as we would expect if the self-selection thesis were true — but because they are rendered as such by institutional norms, cultures, and socialization (see e.g., Lipsky 2010 [1980]; Wilson 1989; Kaufman 2006 [1960]). Under this proposition, regardless of whatever sense of, or attachment to, ethnic identity an individual may have prior to enlistment in an agency like Border Patrol or ICE, that identity is effectively subordinated, if not altogether supplanted, by one(s) derived specifically from membership in, and socialization into, the institution itself (i.e., ‘immigration agent,’ ‘federal agent,’ ‘law enforcement officer’). Resigned to such a theory, the question of *how* Latinxs work in immigration requires no grand investigation; Latinxs, in effect, can be expected to work in immigration just as anyone else does — as uniform(ed) agents of the state.

Intuitive, and wholly consistent with popular conventional thinking related to analogous state-agents (i.e., the idea of police officers being ‘blue,’ *not* black, white, or brown¹⁷⁰), the arguments put forward by bureaucracy scholars nevertheless betray a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of identity. Just as in the case of the self-selection thesis, scholars, and the arguments (and conclusions) they proffer here, are bound, inextricably, to a now widely-disputed assumption of identity as unchangingly-static.¹⁷¹ By asserting that upon enlistment, agents’ decisions and behavior are shaped solely by those identities acquired therein,

¹⁷⁰ See e.g., Weitzer and Tuch (2006).

¹⁷¹ See Social Identity Theory literature (e.g., Brewer 2009; Deaux 1991; Stryker 1987; Tajfel 1981; Mead 1934), or selections in Race and Ethnic Politics literature (e.g., Jimenez 2009; Garcia-Bedolla 2005; Waters 1999; Cohen 1999; Jones-Correa 1998; Okamura 1981; Patterson 1975).

scholars tacitly commit to a view of agents within a vacuum, in which they — both scholars and agents — remain unburdened by the influence of any other extra-institutional, ‘rival,’ identity. Social identity theory (and scholarship so informed) suggests, however, that the adoption of a ‘uniform-identity’ (i.e., the ‘federal immigration law enforcement agent’) does not so much supplant, and thus foreclose the salience of, extra-institutional identities like race and ethnicity, as much as it simply adds another ‘layer’ to a rich tapestry of dynamic, overlapping identities — each imbued with the potential to shape agents’ decisions and behavior given specific contexts (see e.g., Brewer 2009; Deaux 1991; Tajfel 1981). Evidence no further away than the opening of this chapter, in fact, intimates that the socializing ‘power of the institution,’ notwithstanding, the role, and effective influence, of extra- and pre-institutional identities and attitudes is not as easily jettisoned as scholars have believed previously.

Carlos’ ethnic identity — “Latin, Hispanic, Spanish,” as he describes it — did not cease to exist when he assumed the role of ‘federal immigration law enforcement agent’; enlistment in ICE, in fact, may have even made it more salient for him than ever before. In the most routinized of encounters with ‘cliente’ — the moments he trained for in the months preceding his official assignment in southern California — Carlos found himself struggling to keep his ethnic and immigrant identities (intertwined as they are) at bay. Such efforts, however, quickly proved futile, as reflected in the faces, voices, and stories of those immigrants he encountered, Carlos saw his mother — and saw himself. Finding an early measure of relief from the tensions engendered therein by, as he put it, “[going] out of his way to help them,” the conflict that resulted from the activation of his ethnic-immigrant identity, and the overlap of that and his inherently contradictory institutional self (or ‘uniform-identity’), proved to be too much; by the time we talked seven years into his career, Carlos was determined to leave it behind — provided he could, of course, secure employment elsewhere beforehand.

Where extant scholarship pertaining specifically to Latinx immigration agents (e.g., Heyman 2002; Correa and Thomas 2015; Garcia Hernandez 2012), and that more broadly focused on street-level bureaucrats (e.g., Lipsky 2010 [1980]; Wilson 1989; Kaufman 2006 [1960]), remains resolved that ethnic identity is irrelevant to the decisions and behavior of Latinx immigration law enforcement agents, this dissertation offers an alternative argument. Rooted in social identity theory — and thus, the premise that identity is, by its very nature, multiple, fluid, situational, and many times, contradictory¹⁷² — the argument holds that despite institutional socialization, and the increased salience of identities derived from, or accentuated by, agents' institutional roles (i.e., 'citizen,' 'insider,' 'soldier,' 'state-agent,' 'law enforcement officer'¹⁷³), ethnic identity remains a persistent analytical and behavioral frame through which Latinx immigration agents both experience and exercise their roles as agents of the state. More than simply a suppressed, or dormant, artifact of life prior to enlistment, that is, Latinx agents' ethnic identities — made salient in routine encounters with metaphorical 'broken mirrors' — are a consistently active part of agents' daily institutional lives, where, as illustrated by Carlos' story, they engender conflict, and come to shape their decisions and behavior.¹⁷⁴

In this chapter, drawing, again, on the interviews I personally conducted with sixty-one Latinx ICE agents, I explore *how* Latinxs work in immigration law enforcement. Split into three central sections — on the 'persistence,' 'activation,' and 'conflict' of identity — the chapter proceeds primarily as a refutation of the model of 'the' Latinx immigration law enforcement agent presented by extant scholarship; that of the one-dimensional state-agent, divorced of ethnic identification and connection to the immigrant experience. The evidence presented herein simultaneously serves to bolster the argument put forward, alternatively: Latinx immigration agents' ethnic identities not only persist, but implicated by the duties prescribed by their

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ For broader discussion on the emergence of identities rooted in, or accentuated by, the institution, see *Chapter 2*.

¹⁷⁴ For more detailed explication of the 'broken mirror' metaphor, see *Chapter 2*.

institutional roles, they engender tension, shape agents' decisions and behavior, and force accommodation of some kind. The evidence suggests that Latinx immigration agents, far from one-dimensional, exist in a liminal space, positioned firmly between, yet immersed within, two distinct camps. Beginning with a brief discussion of the central claims put forward herein, the data utilized in this chapter, and preliminary results assessed through aggregate-level descriptive statistics of the sample, the remainder of the chapter is driven by agent-centered narratives.

The Latinx Immigration Agent: A Set of Three Central Claims

Resolved that extra-institutional identities are ultimately irrelevant to the decisions and behavior of state-agents, above all else, extant scholarship stipulates that we should not expect to find high levels of ethnic identity salience among Latinx immigration agents. On three fronts, however, this dissertation argues to the contrary: 1) despite institutional socialization toward the adoption of a uniform-identity among state-agents, Latinx immigration agents — given an understanding of identity as dynamic in nature — remain subject to multiple, overlapping identities; 2) given the nature of immigration law enforcement, specifically the focus on policing in communities to which Latinx agents, themselves, belong — and experiences to which they, in fact, owe their own existence (e.g., the 'broken mirror') — agents' ethnic identities are consistently activated and made salient in the performance of their institutional identities and the duties prescribed therein; and 3) upon activation, Latinx agents' ethnic identities engender tension with their institutional identities and duties — a tension agents ultimately are forced to confront and 'deal with,' or develop means by which to mitigate. None of these arguments are meant to suggest that Latinx immigration agents necessarily shirk their responsibilities as state-agents, or that they act solely in accord with their ethnic identities, only that Latinx agents *must* (and *do*) wrestle with the pressures of liminality on a daily basis; and as such, ethnic identity is

much more relevant to the decisions and behavior of Latinx immigration agents (and other analogous state-agents) than extant scholarship has, to date, entertained.

While the first of the three arguments presented herein primarily derives from social identity theory, to support the assumption that ethnic identity is, in fact, available for activation among Latinx agents, I draw additionally on Jimenez (2009). Pursuant to his finding that positive individual attachment to ethnic identity — a requisite element of identity salience, per Tajfel (1981) — is contingent on the ready availability of cultural practices and markers (what he calls ‘ethnic stuff’), I contend that few Latinx immigration agents do not, in fact, maintain such an ‘attachment.’ In communities where Latinx immigration is an omnipresent fact of life, Jimenez argues, ethnic identification among U.S.-born Latinxs is buttressed by a continual replenishing of ethnic culture (2009). Given that Latinx immigration agents are continually exposed to ‘fresh’ sources of ethnic identity and culture, both in the course of their institutional duties, and as residents in (or near) ‘settling’ communities, I expect Latinx immigration agents to hold strong attachments to their ethnic identities, making them more likely to become activated, engender conflict, and consequently shape their decisions and behavior.

The second central argument here rests on the assumption that while the decision to enter immigration law enforcement among Latinxs is primarily made absent of considerations of ethnic identity, and instead made in service of economic self-interest and survival (as revealed in *Chapter 3*), considerations of identity become increasingly difficult for Latinx agents to ignore upon confronting the ‘realities’ of the job. In the course of their daily institutional duties, that is, Latinx agents come face-to-face with metaphorical ‘broken mirrors,’ in which they find themselves confronted by faces that resemble their own, voices that speak a familiar, and shared language, and stories of struggle and sacrifice that, in many cases, parallel those of their own

families.¹⁷⁵ In these moments, the boundaries of other relevant cleavages, including those accentuated by agents' institutional roles (i.e., 'citizen/non-citizen,' 'law enforcement agent/suspected law-breaker'), are blurred and become subordinated to shared membership in a transnational ethnic group (see e.g., Tajfel 1981; Barth 1969; cf. Garcia-Bedolla 2005). As such, I expect recognition of commonality via in-group markers (i.e., faces, voices, and stories¹⁷⁶) between agents and their clientele — or, the 'broken mirror' — to activate and make salient Latinx agents' ethnic identities.

Lastly, that traditional scholarship on bureaucracy misunderstands, and thus discounts social identity does not erase its merits; there is much to be gained, in fact, from understanding how bureaucratic institutions bound and shape the behavior of their constitutive parts, or members. Consider, for instance, one of the central contributions of Lipsky (2010 [1980]), that street-level bureaucrats develop 'coping mechanisms' for dealing with the dilemma of finite resources in the face of infinite demand. The third argument presented here, in fact, borrows from Lipsky and rests on the assumption that while agents cope with uniquely-institutional constraints, they simultaneously cope with the tensions engendered by the activation and increased salience of their ethnic identities in the performance of institutionally-prescribed duties; as a consequence, I expect to find that agents develop and deploy discernible means by

¹⁷⁵ An alternative way of thinking about this is that in the street-level implementation of immigration policy, Latinx immigration agents become acutely aware of the consequences of immigration policy; they confront not only the violence perpetrated by immigration law enforcement agencies, but the concentration of that violence in Latinx communities across the United States. Pursuant to Zepeda-Millan (forthcoming), who finds that group-consciousness can be activated among Latinxs in the face of individual- and group-level threat, specifically where anti-immigrant legislation affects Latinxs, Latinx agents' ethnic identities can be expected to become activated in the recognition of the broader effects of policies as implemented.

¹⁷⁶ Or, phenotype and physical features, language, and common origins and immigrant histories.

which to — within reasonable measure — ‘deal with,’ or mitigate, identity conflicts and tensions.¹⁷⁷

To address these arguments, in this chapter, specifically, I draw on data collected through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with sixty-one Latinx ICE agents across Texas, Arizona, and California. The section that follows begins with a brief discussion of the make up of the ‘sample,’ and proceeds with a review of preliminary results through aggregate-level descriptive statistics.

The Latinx Immigration Agent: In Preliminary Numbers

Given the specific focus of the question at hand — how *Latinxs* work in immigration law enforcement — this chapter (like *Chapter 3*), is built solely around the interviews of the sixty-one Latinx ICE agents who participated in this study. As such, anywhere reference is made in this chapter to the ‘sample,’ it only refers to those sixty-one men and women in the overall-sample ascriptively identified as ‘Hispanic’ or Latinx. Here, the use of the term ‘ascriptively,’ it should be similarly noted, is meant to denote the fact that study participants were not allowed to opt into the study *because* they specifically identified as Latinx; rather, they were either identified by myself or their peers as being of ‘Hispanic’ or Latinx heritage, and ‘coded’ as such. Subsequent to this, each individual, during the actual interview, was provided the opportunity to self-identify however they might (e.g., Latinx, ‘Hispanic,’ or non-ethnically). Study participants were, in effect, assigned two identities: one ascribed, and one ‘claimed.’ In a number of cases (as discussed further in the sections that follow), the incongruence between the two (e.g., ascribed,

¹⁷⁷ I qualify this expectation with ‘within reasonable measure’ because the simplest way, it would seem, to mitigate identity conflicts would be to leave the agency altogether. Given, however, the findings of *Chapter 3* — that Latinxs elect to work for immigration enforcement agencies in the interest of economic security and survival — it is difficult to assume that agents would so easily give up a ‘good job.’ While I could imagine *some* deciding that the pressures are too great (i.e., Carlos Ortegon), and benefits not worth the stress, I think the most common response would be to attempt to mitigate those conflicts within the bounds of the institution (or within their personal life) and find a way to be both Latinx and an immigration law enforcement agent — a way to ‘survive,’ as it were.

‘Latinx’; claimed, ‘American’) was a useful predictor of those agents’ attitudes toward clientele and the perceived importance of ethnic identity in their roles as state-agents.

That being said, while the sampling method employed — multiple-entry snowball-sampling — can not reasonably be described as random, it produced, ultimately, a fairly representative sample of the universe from which it was drawn (see Table VII).¹⁷⁸

Table VII: Comparison of Latinx Subsample to Sample and Universe

	LATINX SUBSAMPLE “SAMPLE”	OVERALL SAMPLE	AGENCY (ERO)
Age	41	41	44
Gender (Women)	23%	24%	22%
Latinx	100%	61%	30%
Education (BA+)	38%	52%	33%
Tenure (yrs)	12	12	15
Veteran	33%	36%	39%
Foreign Born	16%	10%	-
Parents Foreign Born	67%	41%	-

Source: Internal agency figures (Dec. 2015)

Compared to the overall agency (ICE-ERO), the sample actually tracks quite closely, if only averaging slightly younger per agent, a slightly shorter tenure with the agency per agent, and somewhat counterintuitively, slightly more educated.¹⁷⁹ Perhaps most striking about the data, though, were two measures the agency does not actually publish: ‘nativity’ and ‘generation.’ Immediately, however, these figures (as mentioned briefly in *Chapter 3*) jump out in stark contrast to the image we get of the Latinx immigration agent from extant scholarship as ‘far removed’ from the immigrant experience (see e.g., Heyman 2002), with sixty-seven percent of

¹⁷⁸ Multiple-entry snowball-sampling was utilized as the best sampling method for accessing a ‘hidden’ population. For a more detailed discussion of the data collection process, see *Chapter 1*.

¹⁷⁹ I return to this result, and offer an explanation for it, in the final chapter, *Chapter 6*.

the sample (41 total agents) being the children of immigrants, and sixteen percent (10 total agents), immigrants themselves; but this is not where the contradictions of the extant scholarship end.

Contrary to the central claims of the extant scholarship discussed herein — boiled down, however crudely, to ‘ethnic identity does not matter’ — when it comes to Latinx immigration law enforcement agents, the data collected reveal that identity, specifically ethnic, Latinx, identity, *matters*; and three preliminary patterns emerge from the interviews. First, despite institutional socialization, and the adoption among agents of a ‘uniform-identity,’ ethnic identity — or, at least, ethnic ‘identification’ from these early figures — persists among a majority of Latinx ICE officers, with eighty-seven percent of the sample identifying as Latinx or ‘Hispanic’ (53 total agents), or in country-of-origin specific terms (i.e., ‘Mexican,’ ‘Mexican-American,’ ‘Salvadoran’).¹⁸⁰ Those not included in this proportion were those agents who, while ascriptively-identified as Latinx, refrained from actually claiming that identity. Mike Diaz, for instance, fit this profile; upon self-identifying as ‘American,’ he went on to explain that his ethnic identity was not necessarily something to which he ever felt attached: “What I grew up knowing was that you’re an American and that’s it. So I never identified myself as being ‘Latino,’ ‘Mexican-American,’ ‘Hispanic,’ *whatever* — I just identified myself as being *American*.”¹⁸¹ While Mike, and others like him, most certainly match the profile extant scholarship suggests we are most likely to find among Latinx immigration law enforcement agents, they comprise a mere minority of the sample, with only thirteen percent (8 total agents) of the agents with whom I met opting to self-identify in specifically non-ethnic terms.

¹⁸⁰ It bears noting that self-identification does not necessarily imply strong attachment to that identity. Further analyses revealed that while eighty-seven percent self-identified in ethnic terms, only seventy-five percent of the sample revealed, or expressed, that their ethnic identity was important to them, or was an important part of how they see themselves.

¹⁸¹ Interview with Mike Diaz (2015); Mike was one agent whose ‘two’ identities did not match. While he was ascriptively identified as Latinx — and would likely be by anyone who saw him (his features and skin tone were indicative of Latinx heritage) — he did not claim that identity; in fact, he seemed to want to deny it. This incongruence was a fitting premise to his restrictive attitudes toward immigration and negative perceptions of immigrants, in general.

Second, agents' ethnic identities are activated, and made salient in the course of their institutional duties, specifically in the recognition of a connection with, or rather, reflections of themselves in, their co-ethnic clientele (i.e., the 'broken mirror'); eighty-two percent of the sample (50 total agents), in fact, acknowledge such a connection with (at least *some* of) their clientele. At this rate, while there are Latinx agents who do not acknowledge a connection between themselves and their co-ethnic clientele, and whose ethnic identities accordingly are not activated, such agents comprise only a minority of cases. Consider Elizabeth Armenta, for instance, a self-identified 'Hispanic' with six years of service in immigration enforcement. While she identifies in ethnic terms, she does not see herself reflected in, or acknowledge those with whom she comes into contact in the course of her work as co-ethnics: "[They're] not my people. My people are American citizens, or people who are here legally."¹⁸² Elizabeth, and those who share her restricted group boundaries, still make up only eighteen percent of the sample (11 total agents). A strong majority, on the other hand, acknowledge a connection that activates their own sense of shared identity and experience; some even express worry over threats they see as common across the group. Agent Gerardo Fuentes, for instance, the U.S.-born child of foreign-born parents, revealed that he has at times worried that his own family would be taken into custody by ICE and summarily deported.¹⁸³

That majorities of Latinx agents identify ethnically, hold strong attachments to those identities (75% of the sample; 46 total agents), and extend the boundaries of membership in their ethnic group to include their co-ethnic clientele is not unimportant. As elements fundamental to social identity salience, these dynamics suggest that Latinx immigration agents experience their dual identities as Latinxs and state-agents simultaneously; and the data appear to support this as well. In interviews, sixty-four percent of the sample (39 total agents) revealed that ethnic identity, in some way, shapes their approach to the role of 'ICE agent.' As before, there are, in

¹⁸² Interview with Elizabeth Armenta (2015).

¹⁸³ Interview with Gerardo Fuentes (2015).

the inverse of that proportion, agents who stress vehemently the absence of overlap between their ethnic identity and their institutional duties. Cesar Cardenas, for instance, a fifteen-year veteran of immigration law enforcement in south Texas, left no ambiguity in his response when asked about the potential influence of *'who he is'* on *'what he does,'* stating: “[it] persuades me in no fashion.” But that agents like Cesar exist is not, in fact, surprising; extant scholarship suggests that insofar as Latinx immigration agents exist, they should be of precisely the same mold. That such agents are in the minority of cases, however, *is* surprising; and suggests that the story of ‘the’ Latinx immigration agent offered by extant scholarship is (as argued herein) incomplete.

All told, the interviews reveal a much different picture of the Latinx immigration law enforcement agent than extant scholarship suggests we should find — a picture of liminality as a lived experience for individuals caught between, yet immersed within, two camps. In the sections that follow, I focus on the stories of agents (in their own words) to better illustrate not only how Latinx immigration agents’ identities come into play, but how they deal with the tensions engendered by the emergent salience and overlap between those identities and those derived from their institutional roles.

On the Persistence of Latinx Identity

I met Severo Torres on a chilly Wednesday evening in February in a small Texas border-town. The day before, we had decided that we would talk over dinner as that was the only time he could offer me. Weekdays were tough, he explained, with nearly three hours of his day spent driving to and from his duty station where he worked eight-, some days ten-hour shifts, leaving little time in the evenings for anything more than a visit to the gym and a meal before he began prepping for the following day; but weekends, on the other hand, belonged to his kids, who throughout the rest of the week, lived with their mother. “So if we can do this over dinner — if that’s OK with *you*,” he said, “I’m down.” We settled on a place — a regional, cafeteria-style

chain, somewhere we might reasonably expect to find a quiet corner in which to talk on a weekday — and planned to meet early the following evening.

As we sat down in a back corner of the restaurant, right next to the kitchen door, I began with the simple, demographic questions, the easy, ‘break-the-ice’ stuff (e.g., How old are you? Where were you born? Where do you currently live? What’s your title? How many years have you been with the agency?). But when I got to the question “How would you identify yourself,” Severo answered without missing a beat, and stopped me in my tracks:

I’m Mexican; even though I know I was born here and everything else, but still my roots are Hispanic, they’re Mexican. You know, I’ve never referred to myself — even since growing up — as an American, even though I am; it’s just Mexican.¹⁸⁴

I was floored in that moment that a federal agent specifically charged with defending the integrity of United States immigration law would stray from traditional, U.S.-bound labels, such as ‘American,’ or ‘Hispanic/Latinx,’ and identify as ‘Mexican’ — without the qualification of a hyphen (e.g., ‘Mexican-American’). Beyond this, though, Severo’s response was all the more surprising given his profile: a veteran of immigration law enforcement, former police officer, and military veteran. All of his adult life, in other words, had been spent in institutions that we might deem high-socialization venues — bureaucratic organizations that specifically aim to supplant extra-institutional social identities with uniform, organizational (if not national) identities. That his ethnic identity persisted in the face of socialization, and the emergence of an institutional identity (i.e., federal law enforcement agent), was, however, quite clear, and summed up rather perfectly in Severo’s assessment of what it is like to be caught between two camps in his role with ICE:

¹⁸⁴ Interview with Severo Torres (2015).

“We’re supposed to be transparent to a point where ‘that’s an agent — that’s not a Mexican, that’s not a white guy, that’s not a black guy, that’s an *agent*.’ It doesn’t always work that way.”¹⁸⁵

• • •

Guillermo Peña and I sat across the table from each other in a quiet break room shortly after dawn; but the office would not remain quiet for long. While I had shown up to the field office that morning before the sun was out in hopes of meeting, and talking with a few agents before things got busy, I was surprised by how soon empty hallways filled with movement, and sounds from adjacent rooms bled through the surrounding walls. None of this, however, seemed to faze Guillermo as he sat and recounted his story — the story of a ‘Hispanic’-immigrant federal agent.

Coming to the United States at seventeen was formative for Guillermo; that he is an immigrant — Salvadoran *and* ‘Hispanic’ — is a fundamental part of who he is. And despite having lived in California for eighteen years, and having been an ICE agent for six, this identity persists. On several occasions throughout our conversation he referred to himself not only individually as an immigrant, potentially — if not hypothetically — subject to enforcement actions like deportation, but as part of a broader community of ‘Hispanic’ immigrants; and time and time again, in fact, he stressed that while he had a job to do, *he* was not *his job*. That he applied for, and accepted a position in immigration law enforcement, in other words, did not mean that he relinquished his ‘Hispanic,’ or immigrant selves; he, like a majority of Latinx immigration enforcement agents, quite simply, needed *a* job. In the course of our conversation, it became clear that rather than erasing his extra-institutional social identities, becoming an immigration agent not only highlighted, but brought into conflict, and forced Guillermo to ‘deal with’ his multiple, overlapping identities. On being caught between two camps, and being both ‘Hispanic’-immigrant and ICE agent, Guillermo explained as follows:

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

[I]n the Hispanic communities, it's a disadvantage because they think that we are racist or because, 'ey, this guy *no se ve en el espejo* [this guy doesn't see himself in the mirror], how he looks, it's like me.' [T]hen it sucks because they think it's more personal...that you're being cruel probably or racist, or now you don't remember where you're coming from, or where your grandpa came from.¹⁸⁶

...

I drove across a stretch of Arizona desert on a surprisingly warm December morning to meet Daniel Mireles at his apartment. As I stepped out of my vehicle and found him waiting to greet me in the parking lot, I was struck by how familiar he looked; not because we had met previously, but because he resembled many of my friends from back home — people with whom I grew up, and whose stories, it turned out, tracked quite closely with his.

Growing up in a border-town can be *both* identity- and life-shaping; and Daniel, like many of the Latinx ICE agents with whom I spoke, is a testament to this. The lack of economic opportunities and high levels of unemployment and poverty that plague border cities significantly shape and constrain the life-choices of border residents — residents whose individual conceptions of self are simultaneously shaped by life at a literal intersection of nations, cultures, and people; and Daniel was not immune to these intersecting forces.

I grew up in...well...yeah, I guess low-income housing, government housing. [A]s far as I can remember — I know I wasn't...from birth I wasn't there, but eventually, from my earliest childhood memories, I was there...But you know, I wouldn't trade it for the world. It was a building right next to the border highway in [my hometown]. You can throw a rock to Mexico from there like it's literally, I don't know, less than 300 meters from the Rio Grande, and it's right there.

[B]ut I even lived in Mexico for a while — yeah, when I guess my mom wanted to get out of that [housing] situation for a little bit — so we lived with my grandma...in [the adjacent Mexican border town]. [W]e would wake up every morning and [go] to school [on the U.S. side]. We did that for like a year...when I started high school is when I moved out of

¹⁸⁶ Interview with Guillermo Peña (2015).

there. I don't know, I have nothing bad to say about it. I would go home and hang out with my friends and go back [to Mexico] and it was fun.¹⁸⁷

While life in a border community that blurred international boundaries instilled in him a trans-national conception of his ethnic identity, the economic circumstances of that same community left him with few employment options outside of military service or immigration law enforcement.

Daniel: [A]ll I knew was Border Patrol along with everybody in [my hometown] that wants to be Border Patrol.

Interviewer: Was that you? Did you grow up wanting to be Border Patrol?

Daniel: Yeah, yeah, it was *something*, it was a border town, it seemed like something fun to do as a kid.¹⁸⁸

And while Daniel instead opted for military service — specifically because it “offered [him] more benefits, [including] a cash bonus” — and never served in Border Patrol, his military service led him back to immigration enforcement; first in contract detention, “one of the higher paying jobs [in town],” and finally to ICE.¹⁸⁹ That this is a typical path for people like himself is not lost on Daniel:

I think a lot of Hispanic communities, there'll be a lot of people [who] will join the military, too, and that route will end up taking you this way...and I think that's...why there's a lot of Hispanic people here [in the agency].¹⁹⁰

Limited means and proximity to the border instilled in Daniel an incongruence both mirrored in, and constitutive of his liminality today: a trans-national, ethnic identity and the desire (if not necessity) for a career rooted in boundary enforcement.

¹⁸⁷ Interview with Daniel Mireles (2015).

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

...

Cecilia Cano's office was a mess the morning we met; case-files in stacks on her desk sat higher than her computer screen, and boxes of additional files covered the floor. I didn't dare comment on it, though, as this appeared to be normal, and she seemed at home; that she, too, barely acknowledged my difficulty finding room to sit made that clear. In listening to her story, I came to see her office as a reflection of her commitment to her role as a state-agent; it was the mark of a dedicated street-level bureaucrat on par with those described by Lipsky or Wilson, someone who had been in this, or other offices like it for years. Despite witnessing — over the course of seventeen years between both sides of the immigration 'house' — the pain of people who deserved relief they did not receive, and the cracks in policy that extended benefits to 'undeserving' serial offenders, Cecilia remains committed. But the importance of her institutional role as state-agent notwithstanding, Cecilia's extra-institutional, ethnic identity — and strong attachment to it — persists.

When I asked Cecilia how she identified ethnically, she stated, quite simply: "Mexican."¹⁹¹ Naturally stunned by an answer like this — especially by the lack of a U.S.-specific tether — I pressed her on this response; she again, however, confirmed that this is her identity.

Interviewer: Mexican? What's a term you use, if I asked you how you identify?

Cecilia: *Yeah*, Mexican. My parents are from Mexico.¹⁹²

While still skeptical, I moved on knowing that we would, as the discussion progressed, return to questions related to her ethnic identity. Throughout our conversation, however, Cecilia remained consistent. While she used the term 'Latino' when referring to a broader community to

¹⁹¹ Interview with Cecilia Cano (2015).

¹⁹² Ibid.

which she sees herself a part, she still cycled back to the more specific conception of self, ‘Mexican.’ When comparing herself to her boyfriend, for instance, who she described as “white,” she reiterated and stressed contrast: “*I’m Mexican Mexican.*”¹⁹³

• • •

It really felt like Gerardo was just moments away from standing up and walking out of the room. Bouncing his keys in his hands, he sat there guarded, somewhat slouched over in his chair, and answering each of my initial ‘ice-breaker’ questions with a noticeable air of (what almost seemed like) disdain. This, quite honestly, confused me; just minutes before, as we walked upstairs from the detention pod, he seemed excited (eager, even) to talk with me — starting in on his life story as we made our way through the building. Something about this moment, however, was different; the tone had changed. Knowing, now, though, how often Gerardo puts himself in the metaphorical ‘shoes’ of his co-ethnic clientele, and how much he carries that tension, these early uncomfortable moments make much more sense; sitting across the desk from me, and having questions directed at *him*, for a change, touched a nerve.

Gerardo grew up the child of an undocumented single-parent; by the time he was five years old, he remembers his father — who had, himself, been brought to the United States ‘illegally’ as a child — being left to raise three young children on his own, and quickly assuming the role of both mother *and* father. Despite being Spanish mono-lingual and illiterate, Gerardo recalled aloud with pride that his father did everything he could to provide for the family — for many years, working as a plumber with Gerardo by his side as translator. Throughout our conversation that afternoon, Gerardo continually referred back to his now-deceased father as a kind of model. To him, he clearly was; not simply against which to measure the immigrants with whom he came into contact in his role as ICE agent, but against which to measure himself.

When employment opportunities along the border in west Texas failed his aspirations, Gerardo, faced with economic uncertainty, thought of what his father would do, so situated; and

¹⁹³ Ibid.

without a second thought, he took the best (and only) job available to him at the time: a job with ICE. Aware, by the time we talked, of the kinds of claims made against ‘people like him,’ he made clear to me that his decision to enlist was never about his ethnic identity, describing himself on multiple occasions that afternoon as ‘Mexican,’ nor was it about a lack of connection to the immigrant experience, something he, for all intents and purposes, lived, himself; for Gerardo, rather, becoming an ICE agent was about survival and, like his father, a responsibility to his family.

When I became an agent, I was just so, so happy that I was able to make it; and, you know, doing *immigration* stuff — I didn’t think it would be immigration — but [that’s what] it ended up being.

• • •

“It was not at all part of the plan,” she replied, shaking her head and smiling; “this was just a job because I couldn’t get one — and it *turned into* a career.”¹⁹⁴

I drove up to Victoria Martinez’s house just in time for dinner on a weekday evening in June; and like I was family, both she and her husband greeted me at the door to welcome me in. It was a modest place, unassuming in its decor — not at all unlike the house I had grown up in just a few hours away on the border. Sitting down at the kitchen table with her husband and daughter, Victoria and I began our conversation as we ate. While her husband and daughter quietly excused themselves from the table soon thereafter, she and I remained planted there, talking for more than two and a half hours.

Like many of the Latinx agents with whom I met, Victoria, too, was born to immigrant parents; and in the course of our conversation, it was made clear that this fact was (and *is still*) central to the formation of her identity. Her parents came to the United States from the interior of Mexico, she explained, and by her own assessment, that made *her* Mexican, as well — ‘Mexican-American,’ at least. She didn’t always include the hyphen, however; and while, to her,

¹⁹⁴ Interview with Victoria Martinez (2015).

there was no issue in so doing, she recalled with laughter, an instance in which referring to herself as ‘Mexican’ sparked an argument with a fellow agent; a fellow *Latinx* agent, at that. When I asked her about the circumstances of this encounter, she paused, and stated matter-of-factly: “They denied their Mexican heritage; and I was like, ‘*really?*’”¹⁹⁵

Victoria’s ethnic identity, and its fundamental connection to the immigrant-experience, is not something she hides; nor is it something that disappeared when she took a job with the INS — because she needed *a* job — eighteen years ago. It is a persistent part of both who she is and how she approaches her role as ICE agent. For this (and pretty much anything else she says), she makes no apologies.

Broken Mirrors: On the Activation of Ethnic Identity

That Severo qualified his explanation of what the agency expects of its street-level agents as he did — ‘it doesn’t always work that way’ — suggests not only that his ethnic, ‘Mexican,’ identity exists, but more importantly, that it shapes his experience, and exercise of the badge. He is, in other words, more than simply an agent of the state when he acts on its behalf; his ethnic identity *also* matters. In the course of our discussion, it became clear that the increased salience of his ethnic identity in his role as state-agent is rooted in an extension of group membership to the those with whom he comes into contact on a daily basis — that is, he acknowledges his clientele as co-ethnics; and nowhere was this more evident than in an instance in which he stepped in to assist a fellow agent in communicating with an immigrant:

Some years back, I was still [in another nearby office], they brought in a group of guys detailed from Miami. Miami had a lot of Puerto Rican, a lot of Cuban, Dominican, and others...like that. And I noticed that they were a lot different than we were...they were talking to the aliens [sic] and getting upset, yelling at them, you know. And one of them, in particular, tapped me and said ‘Hey, can you help me out with this guy?’ I said ‘Yeah’ — I had already heard him, what he was trying to get, then I

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

talked to the [immigrant], and I told him in Spanish what it was that he was trying to get, and like ‘Oh, ok, *pues...no pues*’ — he explained to me, and I told [the agent], and the guy looks at me and says ‘What did you say to him?’ I said ‘I asked him in *our* way,’ I said, ‘*our* way’ — and I pointed at [the immigrant] and me — ‘in *our* way what it is that *you* wanted.’¹⁹⁶

There is much at work in this short excerpt, but one thing is clear, Severo’s story provides a glimpse into the situational nature of his ethnic identity; a real world example of that identity not only assuming greater salience than his institutional identity, but shaping his behavior. In the use, and stressing of the word ‘our,’ Severo not only acknowledges the immigrant as a co-ethnic, but this shared identity becomes a relevant behavioral frame. Where we might typically think of Severo and his fellow agent as insiders to the group, ‘immigration officers,’ and the immigrant, an outsider, in this instance those boundaries are redrawn: on one side, Severo and the immigrant, members of a distinct ethnic identity group, and on the other, the agent, relegated to outsider status. For Severo in that moment, his ethnic identity was most relevant, subordinating to a degree his identity as an immigration agent.¹⁹⁷

• • •

The claims made against Latinx ICE agents are lost on Guillermo; that he might as well be looking into a mirror when he sits across the table from a client is something he recognizes quite well on his own. In our conversation, he articulated the connection between himself and the people with whom he comes into contact like no other Latinx agents I interviewed:

[E]ven though you may not agree with what these guys are doing here... there’s a connection, dude. You cannot say, ‘Oh, I’m not like this guy’ — c’mon, dude, don’t lie to yourself...because we’re the same — no matter

¹⁹⁶ Interview with Severo Torres (2015).

¹⁹⁷ There are other fascinating identity dynamics at play here; that the other immigration agent is himself, a fellow Latinx, introduces another interesting wrinkle. That Latinx identity in this case is subordinated by origin-specific ethnic identity is not surprising, though. In identifying himself, Severo stressed the importance of his ‘Mexican’ identity; that this identity (group) would supersede his pan-ethnic identity just as fast as his institutional identity points to the relevance of self-identification.

where you're coming from, from *el punta de fuego* [the southern tip of South America] all the way to here— you're the same, no matter what.¹⁹⁸

The connection Guillermo describes is not merely an exercise in reflection, or an artifact of our discussion; it is an identity frame that emerges in mundane interactions on the job, and shapes the way he views, and exercises his role as immigration agent.

[A]lthough you were born here...if you have a grandma or grandpa talking about whatever they are coming from or whatever, you know... somehow you connect to that. You see a picture of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* — if you believe in that or whatever the thing is — 'Oh man, that's my grandpa.'¹⁹⁹

But the salience of this connection, and his 'Hispanic'-immigrant identity, is not relegated to his role as ICE agent.

When discussing Guillermo's level of political engagement, he revealed that his sympathy for — not necessarily identification with — the Democratic Party was born of his membership in a community of immigrants:

I don't have any specific preferences...I like to listen to both sides and then I follow, or I go through the one that I think is going to do the best for the country, first of all, and then...hopefully, to help the community. I mean, that's why I have no preferences but, you know, the Democrats tend to be more understandable — sometimes — to the cause of many immigrants.²⁰⁰

Guillermo's 'Hispanic'-immigrant identity is, in other words, a fundamental and relevant part of who he is, regardless of overlapping, or competing group memberships — regardless of the uniform.

• • •

¹⁹⁸ Interview with Guillermo Peña (2015).

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

While Daniel no longer lives in his hometown — pressed up against, and in many ways, stretched across into Mexico — his identity remains tied to the *frontera* [the border], tied to notions of blurred boundaries.

The thing about [my hometown] is that I feel like you don't really know, it's like one of those things that nobody really talked about. Like you don't know who's illegal [sic], who's not — nobody really cares...it's like part of the community, you know.²⁰¹

Having grown up as part of a community that was, in a sense, trans-national, that “didn't care” about neighbors' citizenship statuses, instilled in him a conception of self that inexorably links him to those with whom he is now charged with apprehending, detaining, and deporting. That Daniel recognizes the only thing that separates him from the immigrants he encounters as an ICE agent is circumstance is, in fact, quite clear:

Interviewer: I hear a lot of compassion in you — compassion for the people that you're dealing with. Where do you think that comes from?

Daniel: From knowing that that could have been my mom back before she became a U.S. citizen.

Interviewer: So she was here—

Daniel: She was here illegally.

Interviewer: *'Illegally'*?

Daniel: My mom came over illegally.²⁰²

Over the course of our conversation, Daniel revealed how his recognition of shared group membership with his clientele has actively shaped the way he has approached his role as immigration law enforcement agent.

²⁰¹ Interview with Daniel Mireles (2015).

²⁰² Ibid.

Daniel: I just kind of think that when you're out in the field, I mean, nobody's watching you, it's like, you don't have to arrest everybody. It's like, just, you know, use some judgement. It doesn't have to be that way.

Interviewer: So have you, personally, looked the other way?

Daniel: I have. And I've also been in a situation when I have to tell someone above me, like, 'I'm not doing it. You can do it, or you can ask someone else to do it — I'm not doing it.'

Interviewer: To arrest somebody that you didn't think you needed to?

Daniel: Exactly.²⁰³

Despite being a self-described 'military-man,' and an agent of the state — identities that scholars readily assume suppress extra-institutional identities — Daniel's ethnic, trans-national conception of self not only persists, but, activated in the recognition of a link between himself and his clientele (i.e., the 'broken mirror'), it fundamentally shapes his role as ICE agent; so much so that it has achieved levels of salience that have caused him to be openly insubordinate.

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While early on she tied her identity to that of her parents, who were *from* Mexico, it became clear as we talked that Cecilia's strong sense of ethnic, 'Mexican,' identity is rooted in her connection to the community in which she grew up, and where she still lives to this day — a community she describes as "typically Latino."

It's a typically Latino community. Everybody knows everybody. It's funny because my boyfriend lives in [a different part of town], right? *hushed* There's a lot of white people there. And everybody says hello to each other, but nobody knows anybody's business — and I *love* that about [my neighborhood]. Your neighbor will call out the person that goes up your stairs, and is wondering why you're there. It's a very close-knit community; everybody knows everybody, people hang out at hamburger stands. [G]rowing up there was, in my area, a lot of violence, there was shootings...But I feel safe there, it's *my* community. I loved

²⁰³ Ibid.

growing up there because...as dangerous as it was, it opened my eyes — it's not a safe world — but I wouldn't want to grow up anywhere else.²⁰⁴

And when she says, 'it's *my* community,' she means it. Throughout our conversation, it was tough to miss that this sense of ownership, and community identity pride, is something very much tied to both '*who she is*' and '*what she does*.' Growing up in an ethnic neighborhood, in other words, imbued Cecilia with a sense of community — a closeness with people that shared more than the streets they lived on; they shared language, culture, and in many cases, ties beyond the U.S.-Mexico border. The child of immigrants herself, Cecilia fondly recalls memories of traveling to and from Mexico with her grandfather, the family's patriarch, and first to migrate to the United States. That immigrants — whom she recognizes as members of her community, both physical and ethnic — are maligned as they are is a major source of frustration for her.

Interviewer: [Regarding how immigrants are typically portrayed by politicians and media] What's the balance, from your perspective?

Cecilia: The majority [of immigrants] are good people and *some* are criminals, but here's the deal with that — you only see the bad things... in this world.

Interviewer: *You all...*only see the bad things?

Cecilia: No, no, no. I'm just saying in general, you only hear about the bad things. You don't hear about Jose in my neighborhood that just became a citizen, and he's opening up a shop and gives kids jobs — you don't hear about that on the news.²⁰⁵

When I asked her about characterizations of immigration as a 'problem,' and immigrants as 'criminals,' she responded by bringing the discussion back to her community, to her lived experience. But to test the boundaries of this community, of who Cecilia counts as part of her community, I pressed her on 'Jose,' the face of the stories she says we never hear about; I pressed her on the circumstances of his arrival in the United States.

²⁰⁴ Interview with Cecilia Cano (2015).

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

Cecilia: You don't hear about Jose in my neighborhood that just became a citizen, and he's opening up a shop and gives kids jobs — you don't hear about that on the news.

Interviewer: But did he cross the 'legal way' or the '*illegal* way'?

Cecilia: I think that's irrelevant.²⁰⁶

She responded quite simply, "that's irrelevant." For Cecilia, that immigrants enter the United States without authorization is unimportant. What Latinx immigrants do once they are here, however, weighs heavily on her — because it is the 'some [who] are criminals' that shape public perceptions of the broader community — her community. And thus, to protect the broader Latinx community, Cecilia uses her position — her authority as an agent of the state — to police not only the boundaries of that community, by removing from it (and the country) elements she deems negative, but to police in-group behavior, going so far as to chastise those who are working their way through the appeals process.²⁰⁷

*You, as a Latino...expect your fellow Latino to follow the law, you know, it's kind of a disappointment...Like, c'mon, you grew up Mexican, you know your dad spanked you, you know right from wrong — c'mon!*²⁰⁸

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*'Ey! ¿Por qué tu? ¿Qué, no eres Mexicano? ¿Por qué, por qué?' y le digo, 'si, mi amigo, pero tengo que hacer mi trabajo — discúlpame.'*²⁰⁹

['Hey! Why you? Aren't you Mexican? Why? Why?'] and I tell him, 'yes, my friend, but I've got to do my job — forgive me.']

Some agents try to put up walls between themselves and the immigrants they encounter; Gerardo isn't one of them. In nearly every story he shared with me that afternoon, this much was

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Cecilia engages in a prime example of 'selective dissociation' as articulated by Garcia-Bedolla (2005).

²⁰⁸ Interview with Cecilia Cano (2015).

²⁰⁹ Interview with Gerardo Fuentes (2015).

evident. Even when challenged on his ethnic identity by an undocumented man he was arresting — and begged to acknowledge an implied ‘sameness’ between them — Gerardo did not recoil; he’s *not* that different, and he recognizes it. Responding in the affirmative, but explaining that he had a job to do, from the man *he* was arresting, Gerardo asked for forgiveness.

Noticeably more comfortable as the afternoon wore on, Gerardo ended up spending a considerable amount of time with me recalling stories like this from his nearly ten years with ICE. Like many of the other Latinx agents with whom I met, he seemed to relish the opportunity sitting in front of him; a chance to acknowledge openly the inherent connection — both ethnic and experiential — between he and the agency’s clientele without the threat of judgement (much less, ridicule) from his peers. He had, as it happened, learned his lesson before.

“They used to call me the Mexican Consulate, or stuff like that.”²¹⁰ While he shook his head as he said it, as if to dismiss such comments as collegial ribbing, there was, still, more than a hint of annoyance in his voice. In his time with the agency, Gerardo explained, a number of fellow agents seemed to take offense to his uniquely-ethnic ‘relationship’ with detainees and those otherwise in agency custody; they thought he was *too* close. But Gerardo didn’t see anything wrong in it:

I’m just communicating with them...Every time I talk to [the immigrants in custody], I talk to them with respect; and I also talk to them in their lingo. I say words that nobody would probably say and they’re like, ‘oh, wow’ — and right away, they feel at home. ‘¿Qué onda, cabrón?’ [‘What’s up, asshole?’], or something like that...and right away they [open] up.²¹¹

If he *was* close, Gerardo couldn’t help it; interactions like this, that implicated (and made salient) his ethnic identity, simply invited him to be himself. For every bit that his light-hearted, and familiar, conversations with immigrants made *them* feel ‘at home,’ they seemed to also do

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ The phrase used here, undoubtedly crude, is slang, and used most often (as it is here) as a friendly jab among friends.

the same for him. Throughout our conversation, in fact, his description of interactions he had had ‘on the job’ suggested that, many times, he felt more comfortable — if not that he had more in common — with the immigrants he encountered on a daily basis than with his fellow agents. In one such instance, he recalled overhearing a group of agents asking aloud, angrily, why immigrants “were here” — why they came to the United States. Without a second thought, Gerardo inserted himself in the conversation to provide an answer on behalf of people like his father, his grandparents, and extended family who, to this day, remain undocumented:

‘Sometimes they don’t have a choice, you know. Sometimes they don’t have a choice — [so] they’re here. Do your *job*: send them to see the judge, or send them voluntary — give them their rights. Don’t worry about what happens afterwards.’²¹²

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If she was ambiguous about anything, she certainly didn’t show it; Victoria had a definitive answer for every question I asked. From the beginning of our conversation, sitting there at the kitchen table, she made clear that there was no separating her ethnic, Mexican, identity (or ‘*who she was*’) from her role as ICE agent (‘*what she did*’). She hardly stood, as a matter of fact, for any other Latinx agent even attempting to do so, themselves. To her, she was *always* Mexican, and this meant that her two primary identities — ethnic and institutional — were inseparable. “[Besides],” she quipped with confidence, “we [Latinxs] all have a connection to [this] at some level — probably more direct than most.”²¹³

Victoria was right; a self-identified ‘Mexican,’ first-born child of immigrants, she was, in fact, quite familiar with the immigrant experience. Having come to the United States from Mexico to find work, her parents were legal permanent residents in Texas for more than thirty years. While she was growing up, she explained, her father even helped recently-arrived

²¹² Interview with Gerardo Fuentes (2015).

²¹³ Interview with Victoria Martinez (2015).

immigrants situate themselves in the country — marching them down to the INS office to apply for some kind of legal status, and then hiring them to work in his car-repair shop. They were by-the-book types — model-immigrants, as Victoria described them; and today, in the activation of her ethnic identity, they serve as a measure of the co-ethnic immigrants she encounters. For many, unfortunately, this does not bode well.

Today is a different kind of immigrant than the immigrant my father was, or my mother was. [My parents have] never taken a dime, and they've faced incredible adversity.²¹⁴

There is no question that Victoria acknowledges the immigrants she encounters on a daily basis as co-ethnics, and that routine interactions with them activate and make salient her ethnic identity; unlike fellow Latinx agents, however, that activation, more than drawing her closer to her co-ethnic clientele, only appears to drive her further away. Like the notably visceral reaction she had to her Latinx cohort who denied their ethnic heritage, Victoria's ethnic identity and personal connection to the immigrant experience manifests defensively when sat opposite people she deems less virtuous than her parents. In such cases, following, again, the lead of her parents, she enforces the law proudly, and by-the-book.

Between (But Immersed In) Two Camps: On Coping With Conflict

Back then there was another administration that was on, and back then it was about getting statistics — 'You have to get us statistics, you can't just go out and work fifteen hours, you know, doing surveillance, and not be able to catch anybody.' And at that time, we had some guys that were real aggressive like that. You'd look at them [and they'd be] like, 'You've never been on the street before or what, what's going on? We got to catch everything.' For example...we went to [a small town nearby] to look for somebody — we couldn't find them — and it turns out that it wasn't the person that we thought it was. And this guy said, 'You know what, on the way in I saw that there was a carwash over there, let's go over there.' And I go, 'You going to wash your car or something, what's

²¹⁴ Ibid.

going on?’ — being sarcastic, you know, I knew what he meant. ‘No, I want to go look for targets.’ I said, ‘A target? A target is the person we were looking for that we couldn’t find — a target is you already know who that target is. Now if you’re going to go look for incidentals, you know, I don’t know,’ *le dije* [I told him]...These guys would *love* to go up and look for people like that. [T]o me it seemed very useless — like, why do that?²¹⁵

As we sat there in the back of the restaurant, I gestured over Severo’s shoulder toward the kitchen door and raised the point that, given where we were, there were likely people without documents working behind it — people the agency might refer to as ‘incidentals’ — not on a target list of ‘criminal aliens,’ but ‘illegal,’ nonetheless. To his credit, Severo acknowledged the likelihood, but maintained that there was a difference between ‘*those*’ people and the people the agency deems priorities — the ‘*real* criminals.’ Over the course of our dinner, in fact, Severo made clear that his distinction between who he thought the agency *should* and *should not* be targeting was rooted in more than policy; his connection with, and understanding of the immigrants with whom he comes into contact on a daily basis — and those he doesn’t — shapes his perspective. Beyond his frustration with ‘aggressive’ fellow agents who treated work like a game, willing to hit a car wash where there *might* be undocumented people working, he was troubled by the thought that the agency might remove someone from the country who deserved to stay, or qualified for relief of some kind — going as far as to review finalized cases for reasons to offer deportation relief that might have been missed. That Severo’s ethnic and institutional identities came into conflict in the course of his duties was evident in our discussion; but even more interesting was how he dealt with those tensions.

When Severo came to the aid of a fellow officer in the aforementioned anecdote, he acknowledged the immigrant the officer was dealing with as a co-ethnic. But his extension of shared identity is not necessarily uniform. On the contrary, Severo draws clear distinctions, notably when claims on shared identity, or roots, are made by people he deems criminals. When

²¹⁵ Interview with Severo Torres (2015).

referring to people who have “broken the law, or committed crimes,” he maintains, “those aren’t my people.”²¹⁶ The boundaries of belonging being fluid, Severo is in a position where he can selectively draw and re-draw those boundaries; and he uses this power to cope with the tensions engendered by his overlapping, contradictory identities. To avoid seeing cases that activate his ethnic identity and sense of shared group membership or commonality, Severo opts for units where his clientele are more easily dismissed as “threats to the community,” and thus, ‘not his people.’ By opting out of units dedicated to service, Severo effectively minimizes the tensions that result from the activation of his Latinx, or ‘Mexican’ identity.

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As we sat in the break room talking over coffee, the quiet gave way to the sound of a child crying the room next door; it was a waiting room for immigrants reporting to the agency, Guillermo explained, where families sit nervously, unaware of whether they are leaving the building on any given day or not. That this is what his job entails — and yet it is also what keeps him afloat financially — is a major source of conflict for Guillermo:

I see people, little kids mainly, when they don’t have the father — their father has some type of criminal history, which is sometimes drugs at home or selling drugs, whatever. It’s tough to see it on the kids and maybe the mom — for your mom, no matter how bad you are, still gonna love you — you know as a Hispanic, we live together *la mama y el papa* [the mother and the father], you name it, I feel bad — but not bad — but I feel sad...If you have a little bit of sense, a *corazon* [a heart], you will feel like, “hey, this kinda sucks.” And yeah, it touches me, personally, it does; but I have to move on — it’s my job and I can’t let that stop doing what I do, because then *I* get fired and then *I* can’t pay my bills.²¹⁷

More than having a ‘heart,’ having a ‘*corazon*’ — a heart tied to ethnic, immigrant identity — has created an indelible internal tension for Guillermo. He is torn between his connection to the ethnic immigrant community he calls home and the economic security that comes from his

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Interview with Guillermo Peña (2015).

employment with ICE.²¹⁸ But this tension extends beyond his institutional duties; being *both* Latinx and an ICE agent has created conflict for Guillermo at home and in his personal life, where he has recoiled from his ethnic community.

Interviewer: Are you active in the community at all? Do you participate in city, community, or religious functions or anything *like* that?

Guillermo: No, not anymore — I don't.

Interviewer: Not *anymore*? Did you used to?

Guillermo: I used to — to be somehow involved in church and all the activities that people would do, mainly when I used to live in [a different side of town] south of the area because, you know, I like to be involved somehow; but now because of what I do, I don't do it.

Interviewer: Why is that?

Guillermo: Because to me it's like a conflict of interest. Many of the people that were where I used to live mainly — now I don't even know my neighbors — these people that has the same background as me, immigrant people, barely coming to this country and maybe I will guess with a lot of immigration issues, probably. And personally, I think it's a conflict of interest when they know — they might think that I'm able to help them — I'm not, I'm a worker. I mean, that's why I don't do it anymore.

Interviewer: Do you still feel connected to the *cultura* [culture], though?

Guillermo: Of course, man, yeah, I mean—

Interviewer: But not being involved in the community that you were—

Guillermo: I'm always involved in the sense that at least I know, I am aware of what's going on, but I'm not like helping anymore, bringing ideas, just because of that. I don't want people, you know — because the thing is in our community, we are a very tight community, I will say, but it's just one of those things that everybody...wherever they're coming from, and you know, if you're a doctor in that community—

²¹⁸ Guillermo makes clear that his decision to enter into immigration enforcement was not rooted in anything more than the necessity for a good paying, stable job: "I don't think it's just to be— to enforce immigration. In every job, it depends what you do, you have to do what the job is requiring you to do. And I don't think these [other Latinx agents], myself for instance, I didn't do it because of that. I just did it because I needed a job, a stable job, and I was blessed to get it."

Interviewer: Everybody's going to come to you?

Guillermo: Exactly. And *that's* why — and I don't see anything wrong with it — it's amazing! But, in here, you cannot do that much, and that's why, just for respect of them and respect of my job, I try to put the things separate.

At work, Guillermo has found a means of coping with tension engendered by his overlapping, contradictory identities that mirrors, to some degree, his motions at home; that is, he minimizes contact with fellow in-group members. Like Severo, Guillermo finds refuge in units dedicated specifically to enforcement — not only where he is dealing with 'criminals,' or people he can easily dismiss as '*not* the same' as him, but where he has the discretionary authority to decide, for himself, who he targets.

Guillermo: I like 'Fug-Ops' [Fugitive Operations].

Interviewer: Because of the rough-and-tumble element or...?

Guillermo: Well, I mean, not necessarily. I guess it's just — you have more — you can decide exactly what you do. Like you can go after people that's just have criminal history, not just people who are just here illegally, you know. I mean, I don't personally — if I have to do it, I do it — but otherwise if I have a choice, I wouldn't mess with *el abuelito*, *la abuelita* [the grandfather, the grandmother]. If someone has a criminal history, of course, that's my job and they pay me for it.

Interviewer: So the *mesero* [waiter] is someone you're not concerned with?

Guillermo: Not personally.

To deal with, and mitigate the tensions brought about by the conflict between his ethnic, immigrant identity and his role as immigration law enforcement agent, Guillermo uses available institutional means that help not only to discriminate between deserving and undeserving clientele, but accommodate the connection he feels to the community he polices.

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Like I said, I would never do something...that would put me in a situation where I could lose my job, but I *will* take some chances knowing that it's just, that I can justify it, and I can talk my way out of, like, why I did what I did.²¹⁹

The field comes with particular perks; namely, the discretionary authority to decide what kind of ICE agent you are going to be. But as Daniel quickly learned, institutional, and peer pressures significantly shape and constrain the exercise of that authority. Field operation leaders, in other words, have the power to force their fellow agents into situations they might otherwise avoid.

There was a case where we were looking for some female, and you know, you do research, you try to get addresses of work, and somehow we came up with an address that was associated to her. [I]t turned out that the woman was a — she wasn't related to her, but she somehow knew her like...through her children — like somebody else was connected to her or something. So basically, she *wasn't* the target. So it was her, it was two kids in the house, and she said, "No, I don't know her, this and that." So [the lead agents] started asking her questions about her immigration status [and] it turns out that she was undocumented, so we tried to see if she had a criminal record. Apparently she had some shoplifting conviction from a long time ago, say like, twenty years ago or around that time. So then the next question was, "Do you have someone that can" — because she had a small child in the house — "Well, I have a son who's eighteen," so [the agents] call him and they get ahold of the son, so he shows up and they said, "You're responsible for this kid now, you're eighteen," and we *took* the mom. I didn't agree with that — that didn't have to happen. It wasn't even somebody we were looking for. Just let it go — it's not that, you know what I mean, it's not like she was a violent person, she had kids in the house.²²⁰

In operations like this, Daniel came to find that his authority was often trumped by that of more senior agents; and thus, he was forced to confront the ugly realities of his position. While the agency is certainly engaged in removing 'criminals' from communities, the boundaries of who *is*, and who is not a criminal are often obscured, if not altogether ignored by aggressive

²¹⁹ Interview with Daniel Mireles (2015).

²²⁰ Ibid.

fellow agents. In these instances, Daniel's ethnic, trans-national identity not only becomes activated, but comes into conflict with his institutional identity — and where other Latinx agents have found refuge in the freedom, and minimal identity conflict, offered by the field, Daniel feels otherwise.

When it comes to being a numbers game, it's just not something I'm anxious to do at all. I mean, the problem really is that all the good cases, all the ones with the criminal records, are the hard ones to find — so you can exhaust a lot of time looking for one guy with a good criminal record. You're going to waste a lot of time when you can get a lot of guys that open the door and let you right in like, 'Sure....,' [and] that's why I'm not — I don't do field stuff...I don't have to be one of those guys that's out there knocking on houses, and grabbing people...Maybe other people want to do that, but there's plenty of like — the job isn't just about that. It's about ten percent that is going out and arresting people, and the rest is administrative stuff.²²¹

That the decision to 'come in' from the field and focus on administrative work is a deliberate act, a means of coping with the tensions those operations engender, Daniel leaves no question.

Interviewer: So, if you're not going out there and doing the door knocking, is that easier to deal with then, not to have to—

Daniel: It's *a lot* easier for me to deal with. The thing about it is that there's people that look at this job for something it's not. And they wanna do this and that and go home and tell stories about what they did — and that's *not* me.²²²

When I asked him if opting out of field operations made the job easier to deal with, he replied, enthusiastically; and by stressing who he is not, he roots himself, and his identity, outside of the agency, fundamentally tied to the blurred boundaries that continue to shape his life.

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²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

Near the end of our discussion, I asked Cecilia to think of me not as graduate student, but as a rookie agent, new to her office, and give me advice on how to handle the job. Her response was telling:

Be tough, it's tough. Not only when you're here, when you're home, too. Yeah, don't take the job with you, leave it all here, because there's going to be a lot of things that you see, and I don't mean like wrong things, it's just *life* things, you know. That could be your mom, that could be your dad, but you have a job to do — you *have* to do it — leave it all here.²²³

Cecilia very obviously recognizes a conflict in being Latinx *and* an immigration enforcement agent — in being part of both the police *and* the policed. But this, she explains, is just part of the job — you have to push it aside; and the way she does so, the way she copes, is really quite fascinating.

To avoid the tension engendered by her overlapping and contradictory identities, to cope, Cecilia shifts the blame for negative characterizations of immigrants, at-large, from the people who make them, to immigrants, themselves. She is, in other words, openly skeptical of the people she encounters, and contends that anyone the agency takes action against must be a 'criminal' — even if that person has not committed a crime, she considers them a potential 'criminal-in-waiting,' someone who could potentially bring shame to the community she takes ownership of, and holds in such high esteem.

Coming in...you give everybody the benefit of the doubt. But after four or five mistakes, I mean c'mon, I'm not giving you the benefit of the doubt anymore. 'You know what you did, and you know why you're here.' So you don't want to give people second chances because you see what happens with those people — they make the mistakes again. So you try to correct it that first time you encounter them, as before I would be like, 'Well, maybe if I give them a second chance' — I don't see it like that. I say, 'What if I give them a second chance and they go out and kill somebody?' — then it's on *me*, and *I* have to live with that.²²⁴

²²³ Interview with Cecilia Cano (2015).

²²⁴ Ibid.

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It would break my heart in the beginning, as a junior agent. I would go home and it was depressing. I would think, ‘oh, I guess they broke the law,’ but at the same time, I’m like, ‘man, they should probably give this person a break’; but [that] wasn’t happening.²²⁵

Gerardo assured me things had gotten easier over time; but this seemed like something of a low bar. Just moments before, in fact, he had described his first two years at ICE as the *worst years of his life*. “I had hair back then,” he said with a laugh, as he motioned up to his skin-bald head; “I couldn’t even sleep.”²²⁶ Having enlisted with the agency for the opportunities it offered toward economic security and survival, upon entry, the realities of the job hit him like a ton of bricks. Between the unrestricted enforcement practices of the time, and the high salience of his ethnic identity and personal connection to the immigrant-experience, Gerardo found himself lost in conflict:

At one point, I was scared that I’d even [have to] grab [and arrest] *my* family, and [be like] ‘hey, *vamanos* [let’s go]!’ I’m like, ‘what do I do *then*,’ you know?²²⁷

Internal, and rooted in the intersection of his inherently contradictory identities, the conflict Gerardo experienced through the early stages of his career was not bound to his duty station; it followed him everywhere. Several times during our conversation, he explained that even ‘home’ offered little respite. There, in his off-duty hours, the conflict, in fact, persisted; Gerardo found himself, on one hand, dwelling on cases in which he felt a responsibility to act, but was powerless to do so, and on another, being reminded by the community, itself, of the inherent contradiction between ‘*who he was*’ and ‘*what he did*.’

²²⁵ Interview with Gerardo Fuentes (2015).

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

‘Hey, you, coconut! Your family should be proud,’ they [screamed] at me; ‘Your family should be proud!’²²⁸

[They] would, like, curse me out and spit at me. Like, I wouldn’t have a chance to take off my uniform at the supermarket [and they’d yell] ‘hey, motherf-,’ and they would just tell me off.²²⁹

Gerardo straightened up in his chair a bit, though, when I asked how things had changed; he was proud to share that part of the story. For him, he explained, the shift in agency policy — the emergence of the priority enforcement program — helped alleviate much of the tensions that had overwhelmed him during his first two years. Just like Severo and Guillermo, the agency’s focus on ‘criminals’ — and the ability to concentrate his own efforts therein — gave Gerardo a way to cope with the tensions engendered by the activation of his ethnic identity and strong identification with the immigrant experience. By focusing primarily on people that had ostensibly brought the agency’s attention upon themselves, he claimed to have steeled his heart. On several occasions throughout the rest of our conversation, though, this was difficult to believe.

I wish I could just sit in my car and just release my stress. Sometimes it is [hard] — it is, yeah. Being this stressed, [you] still bring a little bit home. Like yesterday, I was a little upset and I just wanted to go to my room and relax — take off my boots, relax and just sit there for a while. [I]t’s hard.

For all that he claimed the agency had changed, and continued to do so, Gerardo remained troubled, ultimately, by the same feelings he had described in some of his earliest comments; certainly, he thought, the people he was dealing with had, at least on some level, ‘broken the law,’ but at the same time, perhaps they deserved a break. The inherent crudeness of the category, ‘criminal,’ in other words, raised in him serious doubts about who truly received the

²²⁸ ‘Coconut’ is a derogatory word used for Latinxs who ‘think they are white,’ or are thought to be ‘brown on the outside, and white on the inside.’

²²⁹ Interview with Gerardo Fuentes (2015).

brunt of the agency's new enforcement actions: "I would arrest people and [be] like, 'I'm sorry, you know, you gotta go, because this [other] person screwed it up for you. This person with a DUI ran over so many people, and now you gotta go, too.'"²³⁰

Gerardo ultimately conceded that outside of quitting, there was no *real* escape from the tension he experienced; he simply had to learn to deal with it, because if he wasn't doing *this*, he'd be working construction, or something worse. Without a college degree, that is, he knew he would be hard-pressed to find a job that paid as well and offered the same kinds of benefits as ICE. Knowing, and acknowledging, this much, he looked for little ways to cope — little ways of dealing with the cases that still brought about significant conflict for (and in) him. Every chance he got, Gerardo pleaded with the immigrants he encountered to stay off of his radar, to stay "in the shade." If they remained out of sight, he thought, then they might remain out of mind.

'If you're here illegally, don't get in trouble, you know? If you're just here to work, go to work and don't get in trouble' ...I just say, *en Espanol* [in Spanish], '*vete por la sombrita*' ['stay in the shade'].

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"I feel comfortable with myself, and I sleep well at night."²³¹ Victoria raised her hands, as if to apologize as she said it; but the gesture appeared to be for my benefit, alone. Neither the overlap of her ethnic and institutional identities, nor the way in which the activation of her ethnic identity manifested in the daily exercise of her role as ICE agent, seemed to engender any conflict, whatsoever, for her. She didn't appear troubled by what she did, or how she did it, and it certainly didn't seem to rob her of any sleep (like it did for others). As a law enforcement agent, she explained, she was doing what she was hired to do; and as a Latinx, or 'Mexican,' preserving the integrity and reputation of her ethnic group, she was doing what she thought she ought to do.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Interview with Victoria Martinez (2015).

It is possible, of course, that Victoria's 'by-the-book' approach was, in fact, a means for coping with the realities of her job, and possible tensions engendered therein, that she simply did not feel comfortable discussing. She did, on at least one occasion during our conversation, note that in interviews with immigrants, she makes it a point to stick to facts; the "other stuff," she described as "too emotional."²³² Such a tendency, however, is not incompatible with her legalistic approach — her concern was either the legal grounds for appeals, or the legal grounds for removal. Moreover, the idea that she was possibly uncomfortable with being too revealing during our conversation is difficult to believe. While elaborating on the differences between the 'immigrants of today' and those from her parents' era, for instance, Victoria was candid, describing her frustrations with the so-called "drain" immigrants wrought on social services and medical resources — a drain she referred to as "astronomical."²³³

By the end of our conversation that evening, Victoria remained as assertive, and self-assured, as when we first sat down for dinner. Consistently returning to the rule of law, she seemed to want to convince me (or maybe herself) that her approach to her role as (Latinx) ICE agent wasn't personal — or that she wasn't, as she put it, herself, "the bad guy." When I asked her about popular suggestions about ICE agents being heartless, she replied without skipping a beat: "that's not true."²³⁴ When I pressed her, however, and asked her to provide an example of how *she*, specifically, was not, she drew a blank.

Conclusion

State agents are more than their uniforms; subject to multiple, overlapping, and in many cases, contradictory identities, agents' institutional identities and behavior are shaped by more than the organizational constraints and conditions they encounter therein.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

Identity, in other words, *matters* — and taking seriously the power of identity in shaping not only the lives, but the behavior of state agents matters as well.

Latinx immigration enforcement agents confront the conflict of their overlapping identities every day; not merely internally, but in the reality of their institutional duties and the communities they call home. On the job, they wrestle with the duties with which they are charged: arresting, detaining, and deporting people they, in large measure, see as co-ethnics. In the field, they encounter the harsh effects of immigration policy on individual families, and the communities to which they belong; in the office, they deal with stories that in many ways mirror their own, or those of their family — stories that often end in heartbreak when agents (and clientele) exhaust all available relief options. At home, however, Latinx agents are chastised for their role in ‘breaking up families,’ and terrorizing their *own* communities. Here, too, agents are again faced with difficult choices: 1) quit the job that has, in many cases, provided them unprecedented economic stability; or 2) recoil from their ethnic communities. Extant scholarship, however, would have us believe that Latinx immigration agents are not unlike their non-Latinx counterparts; that ethnic identity does not shape the way they act as agents of the state — they are *agents*, no more, no less.

In the time I spent with the sixty-one Latinx ICE agents I had the opportunity to meet, I observed a much more complicated picture than the extant scholarship suggested I would find. Therein, agents wrestle, on a daily basis, to find a balance between ‘*who they are*’ and ‘*what they do*,’ perpetually caught between, yet immersed within two distinct camps. But rather than discarding their ethnic identities as wholly incompatible with their role as state agents (or the other way around), they find ways to accommodate the two, to cope with the tensions engendered by their overlapping, yet fundamentally contradictory identities. While some opt to minimize the likelihood that their ethnic identities will be activated — by dealing with immigrants they can reasonably characterize as ‘criminal,’ and thus, not part of *their* group —

others incorporate their ethnic identities into their institutional roles and seek out ways of helping immigrants they acknowledge as co-ethnics maneuver their way through the immigration system. Others, still, find a middle ground, and between service and enforcement, use their authority as Latinx immigration enforcement agent to police not only the territorial boundaries of the United States, but the boundaries of the Latinx community, itself.²³⁵

²³⁵ That these are embodied interests, and that they are not incompatible, is rooted in *frontera* (intersectional) identities (see e.g., Barvosa 2008; Anzaldua 2012 [1987]).

CHAPTER 5

WHO BELONGS? THE LATINX IMMIGRATION LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENT AS THE PALATABLE MINORITY

He laughed as he repeated what they'd said, but there was a very real unease in his laughter. It wasn't like he was offended, necessarily; because he wasn't — that much was clear. It was like he was recognizing, in that moment, that to some people he would just always be foreign. As he leaned back in his chair, he shook his head and said it again, only this time under his breath, as if he was still stunned by it all these years later: "we've got 'wets' deporting 'wets' now."²³⁶

Antonio 'Tony' Ramirez' story is a fairly common one among Latinx immigration agents. Born along the border to Mexican-immigrant parents, he was four years old before the family '*officially*' moved to the United States; but, as he explained, overall, it was a pretty typical, 'Hispanic' upbringing. Finding employment and educational prospects wanting after graduating high school — as most people in his hometown do — Tony enlisted in the military. This, he thought, might open up some doors when he got back home; but the opportunities wouldn't materialize as quickly as he hoped.

Finding good work, in fact, proved quite difficult when Tony returned to Texas at the end of his active service. With a host of applications filed across the federal government, he bounced around from job to job — from pest control to contract security — in the hopes of landing something steady. By the time the INS called more than a year later, he was happy just to have the opportunity; and he jumped on it without a second thought. As we sat down to talk in his office late that afternoon in May of 2015, he was nearly halfway through his eighteenth year with the agency.

²³⁶ Interview with Antonio Ramirez (2015).

It was a jailer, he explained, who'd made the comment. In a routine stop at a local detention facility, from which they were to be moving a group of undocumented detainees "down south," he and his partner walked into the main office to find themselves the only Latinxs outside of holding cells. Quickly looked up and down, they were, at least metaphorically, thrown in with the lot. To the other men in the room, they were no different than the undocumented immigrants for whom they had come. When I asked what he'd said in response, Tony came forward in his chair and pursed his lips: "I held back — I just ignored it."²³⁷

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I didn't typically think to have tissues on the table between myself and the agents when we sat down to talk; they weren't supposed to be *those* kinds of interviews, I thought. Luckily, though, there was a box on the desk next to us that afternoon. As I noticed the unmistakable shake coming up in his voice, I reached over to grab the tissues and held them out toward him. With tears welling up in his eyes, he reached over, pulled a few out, and continued with his story.

"I just wanted to get a career going, [and] not everyone's got a college degree," Jorge said of his decision to apply to ICE twelve years prior.²³⁸ He understood the position being offered was essentially that of glorified bus driver, but to him it was a step up; "it was better than what I had," he explained.²³⁹ Resolved, Jorge applied, tested, and waited — for three years. Notwithstanding the long wait, Jorge welcomed the call from ICE. Compared to the job he had worked for ten years — a security guard at a retail store — this was a chance to have, for the first time in his life, *real* job security. Never did he think he would, nine years later, be facing down the possibility of termination; nor could he have imagined the circumstances.

Jorge had been taking a few classes at a local community college prior to receiving the call from ICE; it was then and there, he explained, that he met his wife. Dating a bit before he

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Interview with Jorge Gámez (2015).

²³⁹ Ibid.

left for ‘the academy’ — the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC) in Glynnco, GA — their ‘courtship,’ as he put it, didn’t get serious until after he returned home to southern California to ‘EOD,’ or ‘enter on duty,’ with the agency. When he got her pregnant not long thereafter, he proposed; and it was then that she revealed she was undocumented.

“Who, when [they] go on a date, asks ‘what’s your citizenship,’” Jorge asked aloud with frustration in his voice. He was beside himself as he sat there recalling the story; he could not, for the life of him, believe that after nine years in, he was under investigation by the agency, let alone for ‘failing to report a violation of immigration law’ on the part of his wife. “This is the mother of my child...this is my wife,” he said repeatedly that afternoon; “she’s a poster child for [the] DREAM Act.”²⁴⁰

One of the worst revelations for Jorge, too, was the fact that *someone* — likely someone he considered a friend — must have “ratted him out.” When I asked him if he had any clue as to who it might have been that ‘said something,’ he couldn’t say. All he knew was that shortly after revealing to some of ‘the guys’ the circumstances of his marriage, he was called into his supervisor’s office for questioning. While he grew increasingly upset as we talked, he ultimately pushed through the tears to contextualize and explain his frustration more fully:

It’s hard [not] to be so grateful for this job that has given me so much — I’m a homeowner, you know. But we release aggravated felons every day — I mean, there’s people that we let go every day — [and] you’re going to take my job away from me for marrying my wife? *long pause* Excuse me. *crying here on* She keeps my house together when I’m not there. When I have a bad day at work, when I get in a fight, or somebody assaults me, she’s the one that bandages me up, if you will. And we do the right thing, we finally get married, and— I don’t know if I should be looking to sell my house right now or what...Because I’ve been living with an ‘illegal’ alien, that’s harboring aliens — that’s what they’re getting me for — I’m harboring an alien, who’s my wife now. [This is] why we’re the worst place to work in the federal government.²⁴¹

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

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One of the central arguments of this dissertation holds that Latinx immigration law enforcement agents' ethnic identities are not only activated in interactions with co-ethnic immigrants in the course of institutional duties, but those identities supersede, in salience, agents' institutional identities and shape their decisions and behavior. Committed as such, this dissertation stands in contrast to extant scholarship dedicated specifically to Latinxs in immigration law enforcement, and that more broadly dedicated to analogous street-level bureaucrats (i.e., police officers, social service administrators, military service personnel). As detailed in *Chapter 2*, this scholarship generally stipulates that the adoption of uniform, institutional identities ultimately renders social identities like race or ethnicity irrelevant to the decisions and behavior of state-agents — especially Latinx immigration agents, who are seen as uniquely opposed, or in some cases even resentful, of ethnic identification, and far removed from the immigrant experience (see e.g., Heyman 2002; Correa and Thomas 2015; Garcia Hernandez 2012; Lipsky 2010 [1980]; Wilson 1989). *Chapters II* and *III* of this dissertation, however, present evidence toward the contrary; therein, the stories shared by sixty-one Latinx ICE agents, in fact, suggest a much more complicated picture, in which ethnic identity not only persists, but engenders tension and shapes the exercise of agents' institutional authorities.

Lost in the preceding chapters, however, is a recognition of the corresponding, inverse implication of this argument. That is, insofar as Latinx immigration agents' ethnic identities are activated and made salient in encounters with co-ethnic clientele, interactions with non-Latinx peers (or fellow agents) should necessarily be marked, for Latinx agents, by contrastingly-low ethnic identity salience. Pursuant to the theory from which the central argument here derives (see e.g., Brewer 2009; Deaux 1991; Stryker 1987; Tajfel 1981; Mead 1934), it follows that such interactions would more likely be 'governed' — for lack of a better word — by agents' shared institutional identities, or others rooted similarly therein (i.e., 'citizen,' 'soldier,' 'insider'). The

primary argument of this dissertation, thus, portends that co-ethnic immigrants see one ‘side’ of Latinx agents while their non-Latinx peers see another.

Suggested here, however, is that the predominance of non-ethnic identities in interactions between Latinx agents and their non-Latinx peers may not solely be an involuntary consequence of the dynamic, and situational, nature of identity. This chapter proposes, rather, that the activation, or performance, of a shared non-ethnic identity may, in fact, be strategic (see e.g., Waters 1999). Under this premise, non-Latinx agents do not passively *see* uniquely ‘un-ethnic’ versions of their Latinx peers, they are purposefully presented with, or rather, *made* to see, those versions; and the rationale behind this kind of deliberate ‘code-switching’ (or signaling) on the part of Latinx agents is not difficult to conceive. The stories that mark the opening of this chapter, in fact, suggest there is a price to be paid by Latinx agents who do anything otherwise.

Consider Tony, for instance; nearly eighteen years in, one of the most memorable moments of his career was one in which his ethnic identity — that, alone, worn in immutable ascriptive markers like his dark complexion — made him an outsider in a room full of non-Latinx peers. For him, merely appearing Latinx invited suspicion and ridicule on the part of those with whom he worked on a daily basis. As far as he was concerned, however, there was nothing he could do to change such perceptions — he looked how he looked. For Jorge, on the other hand, it was more than just his appearance; the exercise of his ethnic identity was what raised suspicions. From the perspective of his non-Latinx counterparts — people he, by all measures, considered friends — Jorge was much too close to his co-ethnic clientele and the world they inhabited. So much did this closeness concern his peers that by the time he and I sat down to talk, it appeared all but certain he would pay for it with his job.

Latinx immigration agents can not help who they are, but they *can* help who they (metaphorically) *appear* to be. That is to say that while physical ascriptive markers (i.e., skin color, or skin tone) that signal identity can not necessarily be manipulated, or abandoned, the

content, or performance, of the identity signaled very well can (see e.g., Waters 1999); and the stories presented herein, alone, illustrate a clear rationale for Latinx agents to signal their ethnic identities as no more than skin-deep. Ultimately implied by those stories is that survival in immigration law enforcement is, for Latinx agents like Tony and Jorge, entirely contingent on their ability to — outside of immutable ascriptive markers — conceal, or downplay as much as possible, their ethnic identities, and their closeness to the communities and experiences that tie them to the agency's clientele.

To address the selective deployment (or performance) of non-ethnic identities by Latinx agents in the presence of non-Latinx peers, this chapter focuses specifically on how non-Latinx agents perceive their Latinx counterparts — and the reason for doing so is fairly simple. Latinx agents have, in a sense, *already* revealed how they see themselves as immigration agents; and the resulting image — the Latinx immigration agent presented in *Chapters 3* and *4* — is one in which ethnic identity remains a source of persistent and significant influence. Insofar as non-Latinx agents paint a markedly different picture of their Latinx peers (i.e., uncommitted to ethnic identification, far removed from the immigrant experience, and potentially 'harsher' on co-ethnic clientele than other agents), this would (at least, in part) provide support for the argument presented herein — that Latinx agents purposely present themselves differently around their non-Latinx peers than they do in front of co-ethnics. Accordingly, this chapter focuses on a simple question: how do non-Latinx ICE agents see their Latinx counterparts?

Drawing on interviews conducted with thirty-nine non-Latinx ICE agents across Texas, Arizona, and California, this chapter presents another glimpse of *the* Latinx immigration law enforcement agent as seen through the eyes of their non-Latinx peers. Beginning with a brief review of the theory that undergirds the argument presented herein of strategic identity 'code-switching,' and what it portends for the question at hand, the chapter proceeds with an

exploration of *the* non-Latinx ICE agent as represented in the subsample collected, before addressing the central question of those agents' perceptions of their Latinx peers.

On A Skin-Deep Ethnic Identity

You realize that a lot of them have relatives in, let's say, *Mexico*. That makes them more vulnerable to coercion from the *narcos* [drug traffickers], or other criminal organizations. So that's something you have to look out for.²⁴²

Dave Taylor wasn't *necessarily* suggesting that his Latinx colleagues were inherently untrustworthy when he said this with a smile on his face, only that there was reason for, at least, some level of caution. Given who they were, and where they came from, he thought, if there *were* any holes in the metaphorical wall the agency represented, the Latinx agents were them. And thus, to ensure that those agents didn't 'slip,' they needed to be 'watched' with some (if not extra) care. Most telling about his comments, however, were not the words, themselves, necessarily, but the confidence with which they were delivered; implied therein was that, to him, the scrutiny of Latinx fellow agents was part of his job — a natural consequence of working in a disproportionately-Latinx office in southern California. More than anything, though, my conversation with Dave made one thing evident: for Latinx agents, there exists a clear reason not to appear *too* Latinx, or *too* close to co-ethnic clientele — their non-Latinx peers are watching.

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That Latinx agents would downplay their ethnic identities, selectively (or strategically, rather), is not unprecedented. As discussed in *Chapter 2*, for instance, Mary Waters (1999) reveals how second generation West Indian immigrants to the United States utilized the selective activation of ethnic identity, or code-switching, to avoid stigmatization. In some cases, Waters found that to position themselves as distinct from the native-born (non-ethnic) black community,

²⁴² Interview with Dave Taylor (2015).

and associated racial stereotypes, her subjects played up their ethnic (immigrant) identities. Other times, however, those same subjects attempted to downplay ascriptive ethnic markers, specifically accents, to erase any kind of distinction between themselves and the non-immigrant black community. Depending on the relevant reference category, or stigma, rather — be it anti-immigrant or anti-black — her subjects selectively rolled-out (or rolled-back) identities as they deemed necessary, and/or advantageous.

The current argument borrows from Waters and suggests similar patterns among Latinx immigration agents, specifically in interactions with non-Latinx peers. In this case, to avoid the ‘stigma’ associated with being *too* Latinx, or *too* close to criminalized co-ethnic clientele, Latinx agents are expected not only to strategically downplay their ethnic identities as no more than skin-deep, but to simultaneously prioritize, and perform, those identities that reinforce a connection among uniform fellow agents (i.e., ‘ICE agent,’ ‘law enforcement officer,’ ‘soldier,’ ‘citizen’), irrespective of other rival social identities like race or ethnicity. Therein, the Latinx agent perceived by their non-Latinx counterparts — exhibiting little regard for ethnic identification, and if any, only minimal connection to the immigrant experience — would appear no different than that previously theorized by extant scholarship (see e.g., Heyman 2002; Correa and Thomas 2015; Garcia Hernandez 2012), no different than anyone else.²⁴³

Simplicity of presentation notwithstanding, for some agents the performance of non-ethnic identities, alone, may not suffice — or appear, to them, *enough* to suffice — to position themselves as distinct of co-ethnic clientele, as well as belonging among non-Latinx (predominately-white) peers. Whereas the race of Waters’ subjects did not inherently contradict the identity claims being made from one context to another, the same can not necessarily be said of the current case.²⁴⁴ Given the persistence of immutable ascriptive characteristics, or ethnic-

²⁴³ I return to this point in *Chapter 6*. That extant scholarship, specifically Heyman (2002), landed on the conclusions that he did may have more to do with him (and interviewer effects) than the agents with whom he met.

²⁴⁴ No matter how far removed they might purport themselves to be, that is, some agents will, on account of their ethnic appearance, always be seen as ‘others’ (see e.g., Tony Ramirez, this chapter).

markers (i.e., skin color, skin tone), and the inherent contradiction between Latinx identity and immigration law enforcement (see *Chapter 2*), some agents may feel the need to work harder than others to create ‘distance’ between themselves and the co-ethnic migrants they encounter alongside non-Latinx agents — and with whom they have an inherent connection. It is under these conditions, the current argument portends, that the Latinx agent perceived by non-Latinx peers could be expected to approach the popular image of Latinx immigration agents as “harsher” on co-ethnic clientele than any other agent (or group of agents).²⁴⁵

The current argument ultimately implies a very clear set of expectations. Given the costs associated with appearing *too* Latinx, or *too* close to co-ethnic clientele, Latinx agents selectively downplay their ethnic identities, and connections to the immigrant experience (suggested otherwise pervasive in *Chapters 3* and *4*), in the company of non-Latinx agents. Consequently, the Latinx agents perceived by their non-Latinx peers assume a discrete set of types: 1) the non-ethnic Latinx agent, far removed from ethnic identification and the immigrant experience; and 2) the ‘harsh’ Latinx agent, resentful of ‘criminal’ co-ethnics. To evaluate these expectations, in this chapter I draw on interviews conducted with thirty-nine non-Latinx ICE agents from the same field locations as the Latinx subsample in Texas, Arizona, and California.

A Sample of Non-Latinx ICE Agents

Given the specific focus of the question at hand — how Latinx agents are perceived by their non-Latinx counterparts — this chapter draws specifically on the interviews of the thirty-nine non-Latinx ICE agents in the sample. To be clear, while this portion of the sample is, as illustrated in Table II (see *Chapter 1*), comprised predominately by non-Latinx white agents (31 total agents), it also includes five non-Latinx black agents, two Asian agents, and one Arab.

²⁴⁵ See e.g., the comments provided by Robert Alvarez in Heyman (2002), 496; similar characterizations are made of minority police officers (see e.g., Weitzer and Tuch 2006). In the song ‘Fuck Tha Police,’ performed by popular recording artists, N.W.A. (1988), for instance, O’Shea Jackson (aka ‘Ice Cube’) writes of the fear of encounters with black police officers with white partners: “But don’t let it be a black and a white one, cause they’ll slam ya down to the street top, black police showing out for the white cop.”

Table VIII: Comparison of Non-Latinx and Latinx Subsamples to Sample and Universe

	NON-LATINX SUBSAMPLE	LATINX SUBSAMPLE “SAMPLE”	OVERALL SAMPLE	AGENCY (ERO)
Age	40	41	41	44
Gender (Women)	26%	23%	24%	22%
Latinx	-	100%	61%	30%
Education (BA+)	74%	38%	52%	33%
Tenure (yrs)	11	12	12	15
Veteran	41%	33%	36%	39%
Foreign Born	10%	16%	10%	-
Parents Foreign Born	15%	67%	41%	-

Source: Internal agency figures (Dec. 2015)

Table VIII illustrates the make-up of this subsample as compared to the Latinx subsample, the overall sample, and the universe from which it was drawn, ICE-ERO.

On basic demographic measures, specifically age and gender, the non-Latinx subsample, in fact, tracks quite closely with both the Latinx subsample and the overall sample; the average age of the non-Latinx subsample is forty years, and in terms of gender diversity, twenty-six percent (10 total agents) of the group is comprised by women. Notably younger relative to the universe from which it was drawn, the subsample is marked by a correspondingly shorter average tenure with the agency per agent, at eleven years. Perhaps most interesting here, however, are the points of divergence between the two relevant subsamples: non-Latinx and Latinx.

In terms of education, for instance, the non-Latinx subsample, on average, reports a much higher rate of educational attainment than the Latinx subsample. Whereas thirty-eight percent of the Latinx subsample (23 total agents) hold a bachelor’s degree or higher, the non-Latinx subsample boasts a significantly higher rate of seventy-four percent (29 total agents). Noticeably absent from my conversations with non-Latinx agents relative to those with Latinx agents, however, were statements that indicated any kind of struggle individuals may have faced in attending, let alone completing, postsecondary education. This dynamic, it turned out, was

indicative of a broader distinction between Latinx and non-Latinx agents to which I return in the section that follows.

In initial comparisons, though, several other points of variation became evident. First among them was the difference between the proportion of the non-Latinx and Latinx subsamples comprised by military veterans. While thirty-three percent of the Latinx subsample (20 total agents) reported prior military service, forty-one percent of the non-Latinx group (16 total agents) reported the same. Here, in fact, the non-Latinx subsample appeared to outpace the overall agency in terms of veteran participation. Secondly, and perhaps unsurprisingly, was the fact that whereas sixty-seven percent of the Latinx subsample (41 total agents) were the children of foreign-born parents (or, immigrants, rather), only fifteen percent of the non-Latinx subsample (6 total agents) reported the same; and compared to the sixteen percent of the Latinx group who were, themselves, born outside of the United States, ten percent of the non-Latinx group (4 total agents) were similarly foreign-born. There are, however, some important points of clarification to add to these figures, specifically.

That fifteen percent of the non-Latinx subsample were born to foreign-born parents, and that an overlapping ten percent were, themselves, born outside of the United States, does not necessarily imply that those agents, or their parents, were ‘immigrants’ of the same mold as those within the Latinx subsample. In fact, on closer inspection, three of the four agents who were born outside of the United States were born to active-duty military service personnel, and were, thus, U.S. citizens by birth. Moreover, those three agents make up half of the proportion within the subsample who reported having a foreign-born parent. In each of those three cases, those agents’ fathers married foreign-born women while stationed overseas, had children, and returned to the United States with a family. Such stories are a far cry from the stories of the foreign-born in the Latinx subsample, like Arnoldo Lopez, for instance, who was brought to the United States

by a *coyote* [smuggler] under the cover of darkness when he was just seven years old (see *Chapter 1*).

Fundamentally different life trajectories and experiences; ultimately *this* was the primary narrative that emerged between the interviews of Latinx and non-Latinx agents. As the basic descriptive statistics revealed here illustrate (see Table VIII), agents' ethnic identities, and lack thereof, seemed to portend a distinct set of life experiences (i.e., education, military service, migration) that not only made agents who they were, but, as it became evident over the course of conversations, brought them to work in immigration law enforcement and shaped the exercise of their authorities therein. In the section that follows, I draw these differences out in more detail, and in so doing, provide further evidence to suggest why Latinx agents might feel it necessary to downplay their ethnic identities in the presence of their non-Latinx peers.

The Non-Latinx Immigration Law Enforcement Agent

Striking, but by no means surprising, the image of the non-Latinx immigration law enforcement agent that emerged from the interviews conducted here is indicative of an entirely different life-experience for non-Latinx agents as compared to that of their Latinx counterparts. From the earliest moments of those conversations, this much was, in fact, quite clear. But more than merely intriguing in their own right, the differences revealed between Latinx and non-Latinx agents herein are fundamental to understanding the context in which those agents find themselves working alongside one another. Pursuant to such an understanding, in this section I draw out those differences in more detail, by addressing — as I did with the subsample of Latinx agents in *Chapter 3* — the rationales behind non-Latinx agents' enlistment in immigration law enforcement, those agents' connections to the immigrant-experience, and particular attitudes toward immigration, and immigrants, writ large.

On Enlisting in Immigration Law Enforcement

One of the most notable differences between non-Latinx and Latinx agents came about in agents' respective descriptions of how they came to work in immigration law enforcement. Contrary to the stories of necessity and survival that emerged in the stories of the Latinx agents interviewed, non-Latinx agents generally described their journeys to positions in ICE as if they had been pre-destined. Of the thirty-nine agents in the subsample, all but six (eighty-five percent of the subsample) explained their entry into immigration law enforcement as nothing more than a natural consequence of their personal aspirations to be federal law enforcement agents. Many, in fact, explained that becoming a federal agent was something they had dreamt about as children, and that they saw their enlistment with ICE as fulfillment of those dreams — they wanted a position in federal law enforcement, so they got one.

While eighty-five percent of the non-Latinx subsample came to work in immigration law enforcement because it was what it was — federal law enforcement — a smaller minority, still, were not as steadfast in their commitment to the profession. The remaining six agents, comprising fifteen percent of the subsample, in fact, described the decision to apply with ICE (or its predecessor, INS) similarly to the majority of their Latinx peers — as a matter of steady employment, generous benefits, and the opportunity for a 'real' career. Conspicuously missing from such answers, however, was the most common thread underlying those of the Latinx agents: survival. That is, of the six agents who sought out a job in immigration law enforcement because it was, quite simply, a job, only one of them — who explained that he was living in his car at the time that he applied — described their circumstances prior to enlistment as dire, or at all urgent. In conjunction with the higher, on average, rate of educational attainment among non-Latinx agents (see preceding section), and apparent absence of any difficulties in the pursuit of both an education *and* the means to pay for it, the stories of non-Latinx agents, here, revealed a notably different underlying thread than that that emerged among Latinx agents. Whereas the

stories of Latinx agents were marked by adversity and struggle, the stories of non-Latinx agents generally spoke to the contrary.

The Distribution of Attitudes and Connection to the Immigrant-Experience

In the interest of comparing, and drawing out further the differences between, the non-Latinx and Latinx agents in the sample, I borrowed again from Heyman (2002), and categorized the non-Latinx agents in the sample on two axes: 1) connection to the immigrant-experience (high or low); and 2) attitudes towards immigrants, and immigration policy (restrictive or liberal). While the simplification of complex qualitative data into categories like this — and the organization of those categories in a 2x2 frequency table — is admittedly crude, this exercise nonetheless provides for a quick, aggregate-level glimpse at the diversity not only within, but across, subsamples. Pursuant to this, by utilizing here the same rubric used to assign Latinx agents in *Chapter 3*, the distribution of non-Latinx agents along these axes — as illustrated in Table IX — is directly comparable to that of the Latinx subsample as illustrated in Table VI. For this subsample alone, however, the results are fairly intuitive.

Table IX. Categorization of Non-Latinx ICE Agents, Immigration Attitudes x Immigrant Experience

		IMMIGRATION ATTITUDES	
		LIBERAL	RESTRICTIONIST
CONNECTION TO IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE	HIGH	2	3
	LOW	17	17

Given that the classification of an agent as having a ‘high’ connection to the immigrant-experience was based largely on that agent bringing up, and expressing a positive connection to, their own family’s immigration history, or roots outside of the country, the fact that a majority of non-Latinx agents were consequently categorized as having ‘low’ connection to the immigrant-experience was not all that surprising. As discussed in the previous section, even among those agents born outside of the United States, a majority did not consider themselves ‘immigrants.’ For five agents (thirteen percent of the subsample), however, their families’ immigration histories — some several generations removed — were, to them, central enough to their identities to raise in conversation.²⁴⁶ On the opposite end of this category, not unexpectedly, thirty-four agents (eighty-seven percent of the subsample) were categorized as having ‘low,’ if not no connection whatsoever to the immigrant-experience.

With respect to non-Latinx agents’ attitudes toward immigrants, and immigration policy in general, the results were also fairly unsurprising.²⁴⁷ The subsample fell nearly evenly across this axis, with fifty-one percent of non-Latinx agents (20 total agents) being categorized as immigration-restrictionists, and the remaining forty-nine percent (19 total agents) categorized as immigration-liberals. While a majority of the agents who were categorized as immigration liberals obviously did not, themselves, have personal connections to the immigrant experience, many explained their support for more liberal immigration policies — namely support for a simplification of the legal immigration processes such that fewer people find themselves in

²⁴⁶ One of the agents included in this categorization, it bears noting, was included because she claimed to have lived in an ethnic immigrant community in her hometown for several years. And in so doing, she explained, she became familiar with the immigrant experience and felt as though she was one of them. This, again, points to the crudeness of the categories utilized herein.

²⁴⁷ This was unsurprising insofar as we expect that, given the rationale for non-Latinx agents to take jobs in immigration law enforcement, the non-Latinx subsample is representative of the general population. If true, we should expect half the subsample generally to identify with one side of the political ideological spectrum, and the other half, the other. Given the polarization of the issue of immigration within American politics, the splitting of the subsample along this axis was not surprising. To be clear, however, I do not consider attitudes toward immigration policy, or immigrants in general, necessarily as a proxy for partisan ID. In the course of interviews with agents it became clear that while partisan ID did contribute to agents’ attitudes toward immigration, these views were also shaped by first-hand knowledge of official policy in action.

violation of the law — as a consequence of their time on the job and experience dealing with people that many described as ‘not *real* criminals.’ As one might expect, however, on the reverse end of this axis, agents were not only more comfortable referring to all immigrants (if not a majority) as criminals, but supportive of increased interior and border immigration law enforcement efforts, including contemporaneous proposals toward the construction of a ‘great’ wall along the entirety of the U.S.-Mexico border.

Combined and illustrated in Table IX, the results of this exercise displayed as such are rather telling. While the non-Latinx subsample is nearly split down the middle with respect to immigration attitudes (49% liberal/51% restrictive), it skews heavily — by eighty-seven percent (34 total agents) — toward the bottom half of the table, denoting, as explained previously, a ‘low,’ if not non-existent, connection to the immigrant-experience. Concentrated in this way, it jumps out in stark contrast to the subsample of Latinx agents as illustrated in Table VI (see *Chapter 3*). Therein, with Latinx agents similarly categorized, the distribution skews in the opposite direction, with seventy-five percent of the subsample (46 total agents) concentrated in the top half of the table — or that denoting a ‘high’ level of connection to the immigrant-experience. While the two groups share common ground — with Latinxs, for instance, distributed across the axis of immigration-attitudes similarly to their non-Latinx counterparts (54% liberal/46% restrictive) — the implication of the divide between agents with respect to their connection to the immigrant-experience is, still, more significant. Revealed in the comparisons herein is that the major differences between non-Latinx and Latinx agents, again, hinge on the persistent divergence between agents’ life-experiences.

On the Lines of Division

The disjuncture between the life-experiences of Latinx and non-Latinx agents demonstrated in the preceding sections is not inconsequential; it is a dividing line that invariably shapes every interaction among them. As evidenced through the last three chapters (to include the current), Latinx immigration agents, it would seem, share more in common with their co-ethnic clientele than their non-Latinx peers. In fact, outside of their institutional roles — outside of their uniforms — they appear to have little more that binds them together than the most inconsequential of overlapping experiences (i.e., being residents of the same cities, parenthood, pet ownership). In a multitude of ways, Latinx and non-Latinx agents are, quite simply, ‘different’; and those differences lead to an inherent distance, not between Latinx agent and Latinx migrant, as extant scholarship would have us believe (Heyman 2002; Correa and Thomas 2015; Garcia Hernandez 2012), but between Latinx agent and non-Latinx counterpart.

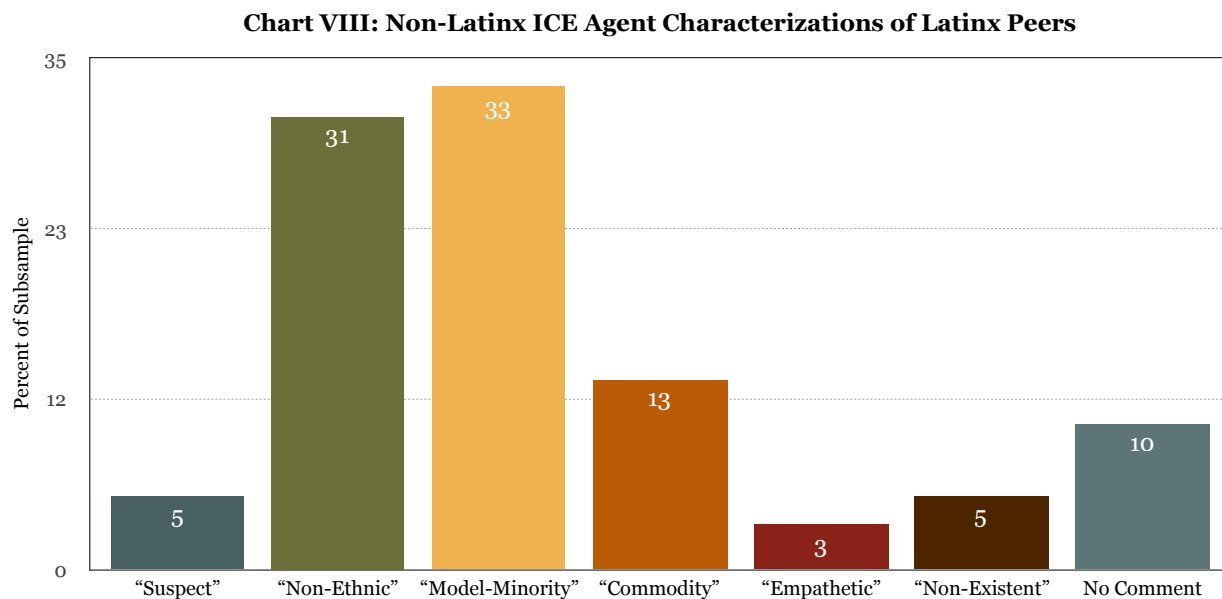
What is ultimately implied by the evidence presented herein is that Latinx agents are more apt to empathize with (and see themselves reflected in) the adverse life-experiences of co-ethnic clientele than the relative privilege of their non-Latinx counterparts — who, at the same time, seem to lack the requisite understanding of their Latinx peers and clientele to empathize with either. In this context, the current argument suggests, Latinx agents must guard against the costs of appearing *too* Latinx, and *too* ‘close’ to stigmatized co-ethnic clientele, by strategically downplaying their ethnic identities, and rolling-out (or performing, rather) uniquely un-ethnic identities. In so doing — and in the interest of survival — Latinx agents position themselves closer to their non-Latinx peers.

Through the Eyes of the Non-Latinx Agent

While non-Latinx agents’ perceptions of their Latinx peers varied to some degree across the subsample, a clear and unmistakable pattern emerged from my interviews with the group.

More than sixty-percent of the characterizations provided therein, in fact, centered around two primary models — or images — of Latinx immigration agents as perceived by their non-Latinx counterparts. The first of these images was that of the ‘non-ethnic’ Latinx agent, uncommitted to ethnic identification, and in their uniformity, indistinguishable from any other agent, irrespective of race or ethnicity. The second image was that of the prideful model-minority, or ‘model-Latinx agent,’ resentful of purported connections between themselves and stigmatized co-ethnic clientele, and reportedly ‘harsher’ on co-ethnic immigrants than any other agent or group thereof. In this section, I review these images (and those that comprised the other roughly twenty-six percent of the subsample) as described by non-Latinx agents themselves.

Outside of the Majority



As illustrated in Chart VIII, while a majority of agents (sixty-four percent of the subsample, or 25 total agents) characterized their Latinx counterparts, as expected — in one of two primary models — the other thirty-six percent (14 total agents) filtered out across several

other impromptu ‘categories.’ Most unexpected among these were the two right-most categories on the chart, in which five-percent of the subsample (2 total agents) explained that they had yet to even notice Latinx, or ‘Hispanic,’ agents in their office²⁴⁸, and another ten-percent (4 total agents) quite simply opted not to offer any comments whatsoever about their Latinx peers.²⁴⁹

Notwithstanding the reticence of some agents to share their perceptions of fellow agents — and apparent blindness of at least two in particular — most were, in fact, rather unreserved in their comments. Despite the evident unpopularity of the assessment he provided, for instance, Caleb Walker described his Latinx peers as a force for much-needed positive change within the agency.²⁵⁰ Noting specifically the empathy Latinx agents exhibited toward co-ethnic clientele, he pointed to the potential influence of an increased number of Latinx agents on the day-to-day operations, and broader trajectory, of the agency overall: “[The Latinx agents] understand that maybe we should change our looking of this — our way of enforcing and looking at immigration.”²⁵¹ From Caleb’s vantage point, the emergence of a disproportionately-Latinx workforce was a net-positive for the agency; others, however, did not share his enthusiasm.

Five-percent of the subsample (2 total agents), in fact, offered descriptions of their Latinx peers marked by clear skepticism. Aptly labeled “suspect” in Chart VIII, this category emerged with Dave Taylor, who (as discussed previously) characterized his Latinx peers as deserving of closer scrutiny than others because of their ostensible ties in — as he put it — “Mexico.”²⁵² Joining Dave in his suspicions, however, was Chris Dawson, a college-educated, southern California-native, with nine years of experience in ICE. For him, it was more than just Latinx

²⁴⁸ Throughout these conversations, I could not figure out if agents were being willfully ignorant or attempting to signal that they were ‘colorblind,’ or rather, that they did not see people by race or ethnicity. Nonetheless, it was a frustrating response.

²⁴⁹ While such a decision certainly piqued my interest, there did not appear to be any unifying factor among those who self-selected into this category; and thus, as of now, I do not have an explanation for these agents refraining from speaking on their fellow Latinx agents.

²⁵⁰ He was the only agent to offer such a description. As illustrated in Chart VIII, under the category labeled “empathetic,” Caleb comprised three percent of responses.

²⁵¹ Interview with Caleb Walker (2015).

²⁵² Interview with Dave Taylor (2015).

agents' familial ties in Mexico, or any other Latin American country, that made them suspect; it was that no one could be sure of their *true* motives.

"If you're coming [to work for ICE], and you're doing it," Chris began to say with assurance in his voice, "you do love the country...*let's hope*, you know?"²⁵³ It was an innocuous comment, I thought as he said it — a playful way of acknowledging that, from his perspective, he really couldn't say *why* his Latinx peers had chosen to work in immigration law enforcement. But before I could string together a follow-up, he expanded on the thought; not by clarifying that he was joking — that he didn't *really* believe that Latinx agents didn't love their country — but by likening them to terrorists.²⁵⁴

Well, you know, you've got terrorists that are going to come here, or come to England, let's say, and they want to come to a country, but then the first thing they want to do is figure out how to blow it up, or *demolish* it — you know? They're here and they want to stay, but they also want to bring the whole damn thing down. That's kind of crazy. I mean, like, obviously not all of them are going to [do] that but...you never know.²⁵⁵

He *wasn't* joking; the seriousness with which he delivered those final words — "you never know" — made that pretty clear. For Chris, the mere presence of Latinx agents raised questions, because unlike he and his non-Latinx peers, there was no way of knowing whether the Latinx agents loved the United States — no way to know whether they had come to the country, or enlisted with the agency to, as he put it, "bring the whole damn thing down." For him, and for Dave, their Latinx counterparts were suspect.

The next most frequent description of Latinx agents, outside of the two primary models, revolved around the idea of those agents as commodities. That is, insofar as the agents who made up this proportion of responses — thirteen-percent of the subsample (5 total agents) —

²⁵³ Interview with Chris Dawson (2015).

²⁵⁴ This is not an exaggeration; there was nothing between these statements but the following from me: "Well, they *laughs* — right? You want to be here—."

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

discussed their Latinx counterparts, they were described as nothing more than translators, or resources to be deployed on behalf of the agency. In most of these cases, in fact, it appeared as though the agents being interviewed were searching for any way to steer the conversation off the topic of their Latinx peers. Still, the fact that Latinx agents were characterized by their non-Latinx counterparts in such a way is not surprising. As argued in *Chapter 3*, the recruitment of Latinxs by the INS came about largely because of the benefits gleaned specifically from agents' ethnic identities.

The Non-Ethnic Latinx Agent

Uncommitted to ethnic identification, and in their uniformity, indistinguishable from any other agent, white, black, or brown; the 'non-ethnic' Latinx agent was a popular theme throughout my interviews with non-Latinx agents. Thirty-one percent of the subsample (12 total agents), in fact, described their Latinx peers as such. In one interview after another, non-Latinx agents offered descriptions of their Latinx peers as unburdened by what they perceived as irrelevant ethnic identities. To them, their Latinx counterparts were 'agents,' first and foremost; and beyond that — many agents made it a point to note — above all else, they were *American*.

Taylor Stevenson, 44, was a firm proponent of this characterization. To him, a twenty-two year veteran of immigration law enforcement, there was no difference between himself and *anyone* he worked alongside. The 'Hispanic' agents that he knew were, for him at least, the same as everyone else:

[I]n my mind, they're all the same. *Everyone* is — we're all the same, regardless of — if you're a guy or a girl, if you're white or black, or Hispanic, *whatever*. Everyone's the same.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁶ Interview with Taylor Stevenson (2015).

The fact that some of his fellow agents were ‘Hispanic’ meant little to Taylor; and as far as he could tell, it meant even less to those agents, themselves. As our conversation continued, to prove that agents’ ethnic identities were no more than skin-deep — that they portended nothing about who people were, how they behaved, or, perhaps most interestingly, what skills they brought to the agency — he gestured toward his own skin:

I don’t think there’s really too many white guys that come whiter than I am, you know. But I came [to Arizona] and taught a lot of people Spanish.

Sarah Stanley, 41, agreed; the Latinx agents that she knew in her twenty-years as an immigration law enforcement agent were nothing if not consummate, ‘by the book’-type, professionals. From her perspective, ethnic identity — despite its immutability — was irrelevant to “the Hispanics,” because like her, they were servants of the law.

The Hispanics who work for ICE, I think, would not even identify themselves — even though they *are* — as ‘Hispanics.’ They just want to do their job; they want to be a cop and be able to enforce the law, and they can’t. They’re trying to put people *into* immigration proceedings, not anything toward the contrary.²⁵⁷

She was assertive in her response, almost defensive even; but this was not uncommon. In fact, over the course of my interviews with non-Latinx agents, when I brought up their Latinx counterparts, many appeared to have an emotional response. Some agents even seemed to feel like they needed to defend their Latinx peers; Scott Prater, 43, for instance, was one them.

In fourteen years of working in immigration, from one end of the border to the other, Scott had met a lot of Latinx agents. Sure, he explained, there were a few ‘bad apples,’ but for the most part, the ‘Hispanic’ agents *he* knew were just like him: government agents, sworn to

²⁵⁷ Interview with Sarah Stanley (2015).

serve and defend the law. As such, he was bothered — and visibly so — by what he perceived as unfair criticism of those agents.

I think they get a lot of pressure from [the] media and stuff, like, ‘you’re a traitor,’ but they’re not, they’re *Americans*. They’re working for the United States government — they took an oath to uphold the law. You’ve got guys that [their] family have been here, three, you know, four generations. So, you know, *yes*, they’re ‘Hispanic,’ but they’re *American* — you know what I mean? ... I think a lot of ‘em are made to feel guilty, almost, and I don’t think that’s fair.²⁵⁸

Scott acknowledged that his Latinx (or ‘Hispanic’) peers were *literally*, ethnically Latinx, but this, to him, was not who they *truly* were. The immutability of their ethnic markers notwithstanding, they were Americans — just like him. And he wasn’t alone in this contention.

The tone in Patrick Johnson’s voice wasn’t subtle; he was trying to convince me. With twenty-three years of immigration law enforcement under his belt, he felt as though if anyone knew ‘*the*’ Latinx immigration agent, it was him. Throughout our conversation that morning, he extolled the Latinxs he worked alongside as the most steadfast, and dedicated public servants he knew. When I asked if he thought those agents’ ethnic identities shaped how they did their jobs, he responded assertively: “These guys are *real* Americans, not ‘Mexican,’ or anything like that — they’re *Americans*.”²⁵⁹

The Model-Latinx Agent

Above all else, the most common description non-Latinx agents provided of their Latinx peers was that of the ‘model-Latinx’ agent. Here, those agents were presented as ‘model-minorities’; they were ‘the good Latinxs,’ who epitomized not only the right way of immigrating to the country, but the virtue that came from so doing.²⁶⁰ Moreover, the ‘model-Latinx’ agent

²⁵⁸ Interview with Scott Prater (2015).

²⁵⁹ Interview with Patrick Johnson (2015).

²⁶⁰ For introduction to idea of the model-minority in American racial and ethnic politics, see Kim (1999).

was often described as resentful of their shared ethnic heritage with ‘criminal’ clientele, and even harsher on co-ethnic migrants than any other agent (or group therein). For thirty-three percent of the subsample (13 total agents), this was how they perceived their Latinx counterparts.

Heather Jessop, 28, was part of this group. With six years of experience in immigration law enforcement, she was still something of a rookie. In her short time with the agency, however, she had come to appreciate just how important a role her Latinx counterparts played — not simply in her office, but for the agency overall. To her, they were a yard-stick against which to measure the agency’s less-than-virtuous clientele.

[They’ve] been through the immigration system — having that on your workforce is priceless, because they know, and they can be like, ‘Hey, man, look...’ You know? There’s an honest conversation that happens there — and they have the experience to back them up. Somebody that was talking to me about their family up here was saying that their dad saved up money — and you had to have a ridiculous amount of money to start a business. So he came [to the United States], started a business, saved up. He said he was fourteen or fifteen, or something like that, and they all moved, and they all paid for their papers, and they worked really hard. He remembered helping him...he said it was hard, but it was rewarding. [S]o the fact that his dad gave him that experience, he feels like anybody should have that motivation to do that.²⁶¹

To Heather, her Latinx counterparts were a model — a prime example of the promise of the legal immigration process; and as such, they were perfectly suited for their roles in immigration law enforcement. Living proof that *anyone* who wished to come to the United States could do so with enough hard work and perseverance, they were, Heather thought, the least likely to show any kind of empathy for those who chose to do things ‘the wrong way.’

Harris James, 31, was of the same opinion after five years with the agency; except from his perspective, his Latinx peers were much more aggrieved. When I asked him about the Latinx agents he worked alongside on a daily basis, like Heather, he was quick to point to the virtues of his peers and contrast them with what he perceived as a misplaced sense of entitlement among

²⁶¹ Interview with Heather Jessop (2015).

their clientele. To the Latinx agents he knew, the audacity of those with whom they came into contact on a daily basis was a personal affront.

“They came here legally and don’t commit crimes. And they get more upset than anyone who was born here because it took them all of the trouble to do it legitimately, and now these other people just cross illegally and think that they deserve amnesty, or citizenship, or whatever it may be.”²⁶²

This wasn’t an opinion shared by rookies alone, however. When I sat down to talk with Oscar Stokes, 50, who had spent the last twenty-four years of his life working alongside Latinxs in immigration law enforcement, he provided a similar assessment —albeit a bit more brash.

[T]he ones — the lot that I’ve known have been, you know — they never felt a kinship with the illegals [sic], you know — like, ‘F them! They’re coming here, you know, I came here legal, or I was born here, whatever!’ So they’ve, you know — the ones that I’ve heard kind of talking that way, there’s that group who are just like, they don’t see them as brothers, or that kind of thing.²⁶³

Much like Harris, Oscar described his Latinx peers as far removed from the clientele. They weren’t “brothers,” as he put it, or kin. On the contrary, the undocumented population with whom they dealt were considered by the Latinx agents as an insult not only to who they were, but to everything for which they had worked so hard.

For some of the non-Latinx agents with whom I met, the frustration their Latinx counterparts experienced with respect to the clientele did not remain internalized; it manifested, as described, in ‘*harsher*’ treatment of the migrants they encountered. Michelle MacDonald, 47, offered just such a description of her Latinx peers. In her seventeen-years in immigration law enforcement, that is, she saw a significant difference between the Latinx agents and everyone else.

²⁶² Interview with Harris James (2015).

²⁶³ Interview with Oscar Stokes (2015).

I have to tell you, the Hispanic agents are always so much meaner, and stricter, and tougher on aliens, yes, than white people, or black people...I don't know why, but they *always* are. I don't know if they feel like they *have* to be that way, or, 'my people did it right, and *you* didn't' — I don't know what it is. But I've always noticed that they are so much more harsh.²⁶⁴

She couldn't explain the difference with any level of certainty, but to her, the Latinx agents were “*always*” much tougher on the clientele than any other agent, or group therein; of that much, she was certain. In her thinking through an explanation for this pattern aloud, however, she touched on something I found quite telling — she wondered whether the Latinx agents felt like they *had* to be a certain way.

On Survival and Signaled Identities

Michelle raised an interesting question during our conversation: do Latinx agents feel like they *have* to behave a certain way? Rather, insofar as they act like every other agent, irrespective of race or ethnicity, or they reject the inherent connection between themselves and the co-ethnic migrants they encounter, or they are ‘harsher’ with their clientele than any other group of agents, do they do so because they feel as though they *have* to? The argument put forward in this chapter would suggest that the answer to this question is yes — *yes*, they do. To avoid the stigma (and implications thereof) of being seen as *too* Latinx, or *too* close to criminalized co-ethnic clientele, Latinx agents selectively deploy, and perform, identities that they believe might position them both closer to their non-Latinx peers and further away from co-ethnic migrants (see e.g., Waters 1999; Kim 1999). The incentive therein, the argument follows, is basic survival; because as some agents — like Jorge — have found, the price for being seen as *too* close can, in fact, be quite steep (and just as life-altering as taking a job with ICE might have been). The evidence provided herein, however, portends a somewhat more measured conclusion.

²⁶⁴ Interview with Michelle MacDonald (2015).

The extent to which Latinx agents feel that they *have* to be a certain version of themselves in front of non-Latinx peers is an admittedly difficult claim to substantiate given available data. As this was not a specific topic, or question, covered in my interviews of Latinx agents, it would be irresponsible — if not, alone, difficult — to infer motive from any kind of behavior not described by the agents themselves. However, while the extent to which Latinx agents feel like they *have* to be different remains unclear, there is certainly evidence here to suggest that they do, in fact, behave differently from one context to another.

Insofar as the interviews at the center of this chapter present a true image of Latinx immigration agents as they exist in the presence of their non-Latinx peers²⁶⁵, they suggest that there is, at least, some validity to the argument proffered at the beginning of the current chapter — that co-ethnic immigrants see one ‘side,’ or version, of Latinx agents while their non-Latinx peers see another. Whereas the Latinx immigration agent described by their non-Latinx counterparts exists in much of the same way as they have been previously theorized by extant scholarship — far removed from ethnic identity, resentful of their connections to co-ethnic clientele *and* the stigma they ostensibly engender for the broader ethnic group (see e.g., Heyman 2002; Correa and Thomas 2015; Garcia Hernandez 2012) — Latinx agents, themselves, offer a much different depiction of the role of ‘*who they are*’ in ‘*what they do*.’ The end result of what, at this point, only appears to be the selective deployment of uniquely un-ethnic identities in the presence of non-Latinx peers is that Latinx agents maintain both a strong sense of, and attachment to, their ethnic identities, *and* their positive image in the minds of non-Latinx peers, where they exist as model-Latinxs — or, palatable minorities. Beyond this, however, they ensure their continued membership, and good-standing, in a ‘club’ in which their ethnic identities are considered both commodities and liabilities.

²⁶⁵ The question of the validity of these ‘images’ is addressed in the following chapter, *Chapter 6*.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: CAUGHT BETWEEN (IMMERSED WITHIN) TWO CAMPS

Even *he* described it as a crazy story; but crazier, still, was that he *actually* believed it.

Cesar and I sat opposite one another on a pair of couches in his living room, a small coffee table between us. It was a nice place, and, as he was quick to note not long into our conversation, quite a step up from the houses in the neighborhood in which he'd grown up as a kid — a mere two streets down from me, actually. We didn't know each other — a few rounds of questions about schools and circles of friends bore that out; but we weren't necessarily strangers either. As we sat there talking that evening, in fact, we found that we'd actually had rather similar upbringings; but in our respective ways out of the neighborhood, we'd taken different paths.

Cesar flailed a bit after graduating high school — even he would have admitted to that.²⁶⁶ By the time he was twenty-four, though, things were back on track; he had landed a fairly stable job working contract security and had begun taking some classes at a local community college. That was when the INS called.²⁶⁷

The opportunity was just too good to pass up, he explained as he laughed. It was a chance to be a '*federal agent*'; it was salary, benefits, the opportunity for 'serious' overtime pay, and all without a requisite college degree. He took the job without a second thought, and in short time, he was (by choice) working forty-plus hours a week, and experiencing his first taste of financial independence. By then, college was, to him, just an impediment to working longer hours, so he left it behind.

If he regretted that decision, whatsoever, he certainly didn't show it. He was proud of the career he had built with the agency, noting at several points throughout our conversation the

²⁶⁶ We shared this, too.

²⁶⁷ He had applied months prior at the suggestion of a family friend who worked for the agency at the time.

various operations he'd been a part of in his fifteen years between INS and ICE. Most notable among them, the infamous Postville, Iowa raid in 2008 — the largest single-day immigration enforcement operation in U.S. history.²⁶⁸ Of all of the stories he shared with me that evening, though, the most stunning was unrelated to his role as immigration agent.

Cesar didn't deny that his roots were Mexican, or that he was, himself, 'Hispanic'; but there was no mistaking that he saw himself removed from the migrants he encountered on a daily basis. *His* family, crazily enough, never actually had to immigrate to the United States:

You know what, I'll tell you something very funny, ok. So, I don't remember exactly how far back, but I've been told this story — and it is a *true* story — I've been told numerous times. So, my father's ancestors lived in Mexico, ok? Right along the border — right on the river bank on the Mexican side, ok? I don't know the time frame, and I'm not sure what dates, but there was a storm. So, the river rose, ok? It went very high [and] when the river — the water deteriorated and eroded a lot of land — and when the water, and the river settled, the river had circumvented their property, [and] literally pushed them [to] the north side. Can you believe that? It's *crazy*. The river went around the property, and they were now joined to the northern border, right? So, I don't know how or who or what, but they were then declared U.S. citizens.²⁶⁹

• • •

Insofar as there exists a Latinx immigration law enforcement agent, singularly conceived, that agent is marked by a level of complexity for which scholars have heretofore failed to account. As discussed in detail in *Chapter 2*, extant scholarship dedicated specifically to Latinxs in immigration law enforcement has consistently dismissed agents' ethnic identities as largely irrelevant; not only to how they view themselves, but how they behave, and exercise their discretionary authority, in their capacities as agents of the state (see e.g., Heyman 2002; Correa and Thomas 2015; Garcia Hernandez 2012). Here, the Latinx agent is seen as uncommitted to, if not resentful of, ethnic identification, far removed from the immigrant-experience, and

²⁶⁸ Hsu (2008); see also Sampaio (2015).

²⁶⁹ Interview with Cesar Cardenas (2015).

dismissive of any implied connection between themselves and ostensibly criminal, co-ethnic clientele. To explain the decisions and behavior of the Latinx agent, these authors ultimately contend, they must be understood as they understand themselves; not as ‘Latinx,’ or ‘ethnic,’ but in terms associated with those identities rooted in (or simply reinforced by) agents’ institutional roles (i.e., ‘citizen,’ ‘soldier,’ ‘insider’). In arguments of this kind, scholars like Heyman (2002) and Correa and Thomas (2015) are not alone.

In the foundational texts focused on the decisions and behavior of analogous state-agents, or ‘street-level bureaucrats’ (i.e., police officers, school teachers, welfare administrators, and military personnel), Lipsky (2010 [1980]) and Wilson (1989) suggest similar dynamics. For them, regardless of the degree to which agents hold positive attachments to extra-institutional identities like race or ethnicity, the socializing power of institutional norms and cultures ultimately subordinate those identities, and agents essentially ‘*become*’ their uniforms (see e.g., Lipsky 2010 [1980]; Kaufman 2006 [1960]; Wilson 1989). As Heyman (2002) and Correa and Thomas (2015) suggest of Latinx immigration agents, under this premise, it is not race or ethnicity that shapes the decisions and behavior of state-agents, but those identities derived specifically from institutional membership (i.e., ‘ICE agent,’ ‘federal law enforcement officer,’ ‘state-agent’). A common example of this argument is most often found reflected in popular characterizations of police officers not as black, white, or brown, but ‘*blue*’ (see e.g., Weitzer and Tuch 2006).

Between these two threads of inquiry, the Latinx immigration agent, as theorized, exists as ‘Latinx,’ or ethnic, in name only. Even if, for instance, scholars like Heyman (2002) and Correa and Thomas (2015) are incorrect in their assessment of those Latinxs who elect to work in immigration law enforcement — that is, they *do* identify in ethnic terms, *do* have some kind of connection to the immigrant-experience, and *do* recognize themselves as connected to co-ethnic clientele — the arguments put forward by bureaucracy scholars suggest that those same elements

of agents' identities ultimately would be suppressed by the socializing power of the institution. So argued, *the* immigration law enforcement agent, no different than the municipal police officer, is not black, white, or brown, but (to borrow from the Border Patrol) '*green*.'

The evidence presented in the preceding chapters reveals a much different picture, however. While there are, indeed, Latinx agents who fit the mold put forward by extant scholarship — such as Cesar, for instance, who (however absurdly) sees himself as disconnected to the immigrant-experience, by no less than a tall-tale-worthy act of God — the majority appear to break with such conventions. That is, for most Latinx agents, ethnic identity not only remains beyond enlistment and institutional socialization a persistent self-concept (and/or mode of identification), imbued with meaning and value, but given particular contexts, it manifests as a potent behavioral frame.

In *Chapter 3*, for instance, interviews with Latinx ICE agents present a challenge to what I term here the 'self-selection thesis' (see e.g., Heyman 2002; Garcia Hernandez 2012); they suggest that the decision to enter immigration law enforcement on the part of Latinxs is not indicative of the irrelevance of ethnic identity to those individuals so much as the diminished salience of such considerations relative to agents' pursuits of instrumental, economic self-interest in that particular moment in time. Contrary to the claims of extant scholarship as described above, my conversations with Latinx agents suggest that a majority maintain a strong tendency to identify in ethnic terms (pan-ethnic, and country of origin-specific), and recognize themselves as connected to both co-ethnic clientele *and* the immigrant-experience.

The most significant challenge to the arguments put forward by extant scholarship in this dissertation, *Chapter 4* addresses *how* Latinxs work in immigration law enforcement — or rather, the role of Latinx agents' ethnic identities in the performance of their institutional duties. Whereas extant scholarship, to include that related specifically to Latinxs in immigration law enforcement (Heyman 2002; Correa and Thomas 2015; Garcia Hernandez 2012), and that more

broadly related to analogous state-agents (see e.g., Lipsky 2010 [1980]; Wilson 1989), contends that Latinx agents' ethnic identities are irrelevant to their decisions and behavior as state-agents, the stories provided by the sixty-one Latinx ICE agents with whom I met across Texas, Arizona, and California suggest a much different set of dynamics. Therein, agents' ethnic identities not only persist (as made clear in *Chapter 3*) but in encounters with metaphorical 'broken mirrors' — or rather, reflections of themselves (and their families) in the faces, voices, and stories of co-ethnic migrants — those identities are activated and made salient such that they engender tension with agents' institutional identities and ultimately shape their behavior, and force accommodation of some kind.²⁷⁰ More than half of the Latinx agents who participated, in fact, reported that their ethnic identities in some way shaped — for better or worse — the way they performed their duties, or approached their roles, as immigration law enforcement agents.

While *Chapter 5* appears to move, to some extent, in a different direction from preceding chapters — focusing on non-Latinx agents' perceptions of their Latinx peers — this chapter serves to more fully address the fluidity, situational-salience, but most importantly, performative aspects, of Latinx agents' ethnic (*and* non-ethnic) identities. *Chapter 5*, thus, focuses on the extent to which Latinx agents selectively perform uniquely non-ethnic identities in the presence of non-Latinx peers (see e.g., Waters 1999). Drawing on interviews with thirty-nine non-Latinx ICE agents across the same field sites, this chapter provides evidence to (at least) preliminarily support the claim that insofar as Latinx agents 'appear' to reject ethnic identification, 'appear' far removed from the immigrant-experience, and resentful of implied ties between themselves and criminalized co-ethnic clientele, they do so because Latinx agents strategically deploy those 'versions' of themselves to avoid relative stigmatization, and other potentially costly consequences.²⁷¹

²⁷⁰ For a broader explanation of the 'broken mirror' metaphor, see *Chapter 2*.

²⁷¹ Such as the story of Jorge Gámez (see *Chapter 5*), who at the time of our interview, was facing possible termination for revealing to fellow agents that when he married his wife, she was undocumented.

Together, the preceding chapters present a much different image of the Latinx immigration law enforcement agent than that put forward by extant scholarship. Far from the uniform(ed), or monolithic, state-agent theorized by scholars like Heyman (2002), Lipsky (2010 [1980]), and Wilson (1989) — unburdened by extra-institutional, social identities and the tensions they might engender in the performance of agents' institutionally-prescribed roles — the Latinx agent revealed in this study confronts the pressures of liminality on a daily basis, and actively works to find balance between (and cope with) their overlapping, yet fundamentally contradictory identities both in *and* out of the uniform. In this concluding chapter, I address the theoretical contributions and policy implications of the central findings of this dissertation, discuss briefly the potential role of my own positionality during interviews of Latinx agents, and offer an argument for thinking about the liminal experiences of Latinx immigration agents as a metaphor for the minority experience in the United States.

Theoretical Contributions

Be it concerned specifically with Latinxs in immigration law enforcement (e.g., Heyman 2002; Correa and Thomas 2015; Garcia Hernandez 2012), or other analogous 'street-level bureaucrats' (e.g., Lipsky 2010 [1980]; Kaufman 2006 [1960]; Wilson 1989), extant scholarship related to the decisions and behavior of state-agents has heretofore remained incomplete — hamstrung by a basic, but fundamental misunderstanding (and consequent mistreatment) of the nature of identity.²⁷² When scholars, for instance, claim that ethnic identity is irrelevant to Latinx immigration agents — that it is ultimately subordinated by institutional identities (i.e., 'ICE agent,' 'federal law enforcement officer'), or others reinforced similarly therein (i.e., 'citizen,' 'soldier,' 'insider') — each of these assertions depends, absolutely, on a now widely-discredited assumption about the nature of identity. To believe *any* assertion, as offered, is to also accept identity as not only singular (or dichotomous) in nature, but unchangingly static.

²⁷² For a more detailed discussion of these works, see *Chapter 2*.

Committed as such, the work (and theoretical contributions) of scholars like Heyman (2002), Lipsky (2010 [1980]), and Wilson (1989), are limited by a severely-restricted — if not wholly unrealistic — view of the social world. This dissertation, however, offers an alternative approach.

Drawing on social identity theory — and the corresponding assumption of identity as multiple, fluid, situational, and many times, contradictory (see e.g., Brewer 2009; Kreiner et al. 2006; Deaux 1991; Stryker 1987; Tajfel 1981; Mead 1934) — this dissertation responds to extant scholarship and argues that to understand the decisions and behavior of state-agents (here, specifically, Latinx immigration agents), they must be acknowledged as more than *just* their uniforms. That is, while I concede to extant scholarship the power of institutional cultures and socialization, as well as the salience of uniform(ed) identities derived therein²⁷³, I also maintain that Latinx immigration agents (and other analogous state-agents) — regardless of the adoption of identities rooted in institutional membership — remain subject to multiple, overlapping identities, dynamic and, most importantly, situational in nature. Under this premise, the salience, and potential influence, of agents' extra-institutional social identities (i.e., race, ethnicity, gender), are not, as theorized previously, foreclosed by the adoption of uniform, institutional identities; insofar as such identities matter and shape agents' lives prior to enlistment, they can (or should) be expected to retain the same potential afterwards. And the evidence presented in the preceding chapters would appear to support this thesis.

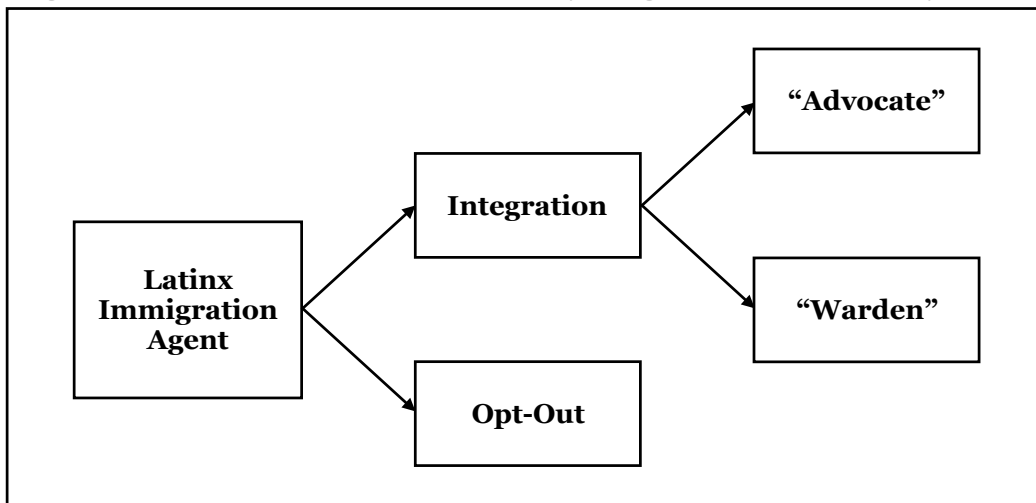
In routinized interactions with co-ethnic clientele, Latinx immigration agents come face to face with reflections of themselves in metaphorical 'broken mirrors.'²⁷⁴ Therein, the familiar faces, voices, and stories they encounter threaten the rigidity of cleavages (or metaphorical 'cracks' in the mirror) reinforced by agents' institutional roles (i.e., 'citizen/non-citizen,' 'immigration agent/undocumented immigrant,' 'law enforcement agent/ostensible law-breaker')

²⁷³ Consider, for instance, the socializing power (if not the mere idea) of the 'thin blue line' (see e.g., Skolnick 1966).

²⁷⁴ For more detailed explanation of this metaphor, see *Chapter 2*.

to reveal a reflection of ethnic identity, intact. In these moments, agents' ethnic identities move from potential (or passive) to *active* behavioral frames, and achieve levels of salience that engender tension with agents' institutional roles. To cope with these tensions, agents develop and deploy means by which to accommodate their overlapping, yet fundamentally contradictory, identities; for a majority of the agents who participated in this study, this entailed following one of two primary pathways (see Figure X).

Figure X: *Broken Mirrors* Identity Negotiation Pathways



As illustrated in Figure X, to mitigate the tensions engendered by their overlapping identities, Latinx immigration agents typically opt for one of two distinct options. Some agents, quite simply, ‘opt-out’; not of the agency, of course, but of particular units. Here, Latinx agents ‘opt-out’ of situations in which their ethnic identities are most likely to become activated — where the sympathies that emerge from their own connection to the immigrant-experience are less-easily managed (e.g., service-oriented, so-called ‘family units’).

Other agents, however, follow a separate pathway; most similar to that described by Watkins-Hayes (2009). Here, agents opt for an integration of their overlapping identities, and forge their own ‘professional identities,’ informed by considerations of both the goals of the agency *and* their extra-institutional identities and experiences (Watkins-Hayes 2009, 11). For a majority of agents, the nature of these integrated identities typically approximate one of two models — that of ‘advocate,’ or ‘warden.’ To both, ethnic identity is fundamental to the performance of their institutional duties; how those identities are manifest therein, however, is the point of contrast. For the ‘advocate,’ ethnic identity softens ‘the badge’; it is in this context that agents are more likely to exercise their discretionary authority (or go above and beyond prescribed duties) toward the benefit of co-ethnic clientele. For the ‘warden,’ however, ethnic identity does the opposite, in a way reinforcing the divide between law enforcement agent and ‘law-breaker.’ In addition to policing immigration violations, that is, these Latinx immigration agents see their role as that of in-group police — as wardens of the ethnic group, itself.

This dissertation opened with a set of questions: what does it mean to be caught between, yet immersed, within two distinct camps — part of both the police *and* the policed? The Latinx ICE agents whose stories mark the preceding chapters help to shed some light here; because contrary to claims that they have ‘self-selected’ into immigration law enforcement due to a lack of connection to their ethnic identity — or a lack of an ethnic identity altogether (see e.g., Heyman 2002; Correa and Thomas 2015; Garcia Hernandez 2012)²⁷⁵ — or claims that institutional cultures and norms subordinate the effective role of extra-institutional identities (see e.g., Lipsky 2010 [1980]; Kaufman 2006 [1960]; Wilson 1989)²⁷⁶, the stories shared here by one-hundred ICE agents suggest that Latinx immigration agents experience and deal with the pressures of liminality on a daily basis.

²⁷⁵ See e.g., Figure I.

²⁷⁶ See e.g., Figure II.

To deal with the tensions engendered by her overlapping, and inherently contradictory identities, for instance, Cecilia (see *Chapter 4*) incorporates her ethnic identity — her attachment to, and ownership of the broader Latinx community — into her role as immigration agent. Daniel, on the other hand, has managed to minimize the opportunities for the activation of his ethnic identity and resulting tensions by opting for units that limit his interactions with clientele altogether, where he can avoid encounters with ‘broken mirrors’; and Severo has found balance in some ground in-between, by opting for a unit that, for the most part, offers refuge from the activation of his ethnic identity, but still maintains an awareness of his connection to his co-ethnic clientele, and at times, acts on it.

All together, the agents discussed throughout the preceding chapters suggest that identity (broadly speaking) *matters*; that Latinx agents’ ethnic identities are persistent frames that shape the way agents see themselves, see their clientele, and conduct themselves as agents of the state. More than this, though, the stories shared by the agents herein suggest that to live at intersections like this necessarily requires the conscious accommodation, or balancing, of multiple identities; because the wholesale abandonment of one (or more) of those identities is a more difficult, and costly, exercise. Liminality, or intersectionality, in other words, is more than a theoretical construct, it is a lived experience.

Table X: Contribution of *Broken Mirrors* to Foundational Theories of State-Agent Behavior and Decision-Making

	Lipsky	Wilson	Cortez
Decisions are governed	By institutional and structural constraints, e.g., unattainable expectations, resource limitations. ^a	By commitment to rules and routines (cultures) established by institution.	In addition to critical environmental constraints, by negotiation of multiple, overlapping identities and commitments — social and institutional.
Origin of identities	Institutional/Professional ^b	Institutional	Institutional <i>and</i> extra-institutional
Nature of identities	Singular and static	Singular and static	Multiple, overlapping, dynamic, and situational
Role of identities	Extra-institutional identities are subordinated by institutional and structural constraints.	Institutional identities and commitments ensure decisions are made in concert with institutional interests.	Given particular contexts, identities become activated, jockey for greater salience, and shape the decisions and behavior of state-agents.
Potential for conflict	High; Professional commitments are often made untenable by structural and institutional constraints.	Low; Institutional identities and commitments reflect agency mission and culture.	High; Inherent contradiction between institutional and extra-institutional identities engenders tension that must be accommodated.

Source: Lipsky (2010 [1980]); Wilson (1989).

^a To “cope” with professional commitments — the desire to ‘do good’ — and such constraints, street-level bureaucrats also rely on ascribed client ‘worth,’ or ‘deservingness.’ Examples of such behavior abound, most recently in the work of Schram et al. (2009) and Soss et al. (2011).

^b To be clear, Lipsky does not deny the existence of extra-institutional identities, but brackets them, essentially, as inconsequential within the institutional context.

Table X illustrates where this dissertation fits within (and how it contributes to) foundational scholarship in political science related to state-agents, or ‘street-level bureaucrats.’ Set alongside Lipsky and Wilson, the current dissertation suggests an alternative role for extra-institutional identities like race and ethnicity in the decisions and behavior of state-agents (i.e., immigration law enforcement agents). Acknowledging the nature of identity as multiple, overlapping, dynamic, and situational, this dissertation suggests, contrary to conventional theory, that the decisions of state-agents are governed by more than simply the pressures and constraints

associated with their membership in the institution. Here, rather, agents' decisions and behavior are shaped by both institutional *and* extra-institutional commitments. Whereas both Lipsky and Wilson maintain that extra-institutional social identities are ultimately subordinated by institutional norms, cultures, and socialization, this dissertation suggests that given particular contexts — namely encounters with metaphorical 'broken mirrors,' wherein the hardened cracks (or cleavages) that distinguish agents from clientele are softened such that they recognize themselves in that clientele — agents' extra-institutional identities not only become activated, but in jockeying back and forth for greater salience than their institutional identities, and engendering tension therein, shape their decisions and behavior. Ultimately, this dissertation calls not for a dismissal of conventional theories, merely an amendment to them.

Implications for Policy

There are two central policy implications to be drawn from this dissertation. The first pertains to a longstanding field of inquiry among political scientists: the representative bureaucracy. Here, insofar as a more representative bureaucracy is, as theorized by scholars, more responsive to the broader communities of which it is a reflection (see e.g., Meier 1993; Meier and Stewart 1992; Mosher 1982; Kranz 1976), the evidence presented in this dissertation paints a rather bleak picture. That is, given the fact that Latinx agents most empathetic to the plight of co-ethnic clientele appear to opt-out of positions from which they are capable of exercising their authority to the benefit of that clientele, the representativeness of agencies like ICE and Border Patrol appears to benefit the agencies, themselves, more than their clientele. The findings outlined in the preceding chapters suggest, then, that descriptive representation within the bureaucracy may only produce substantive benefits to the community insofar as agents' institutional and extra-institutional identities are not inherently (or prohibitively) contradictory.

The second implication for policy stems from the context in which the interviews of Latinx agents were conducted. By acknowledging the fact that agents' responses were, to at least some extent, conditional on the operative policies of the time of our conversations, we can speculate as to how agents might respond to changes to those policies. For instance, the priority enforcement program (PEP), which epitomized the immigration law enforcement policy of the Obama administration — described by the President, himself, as a focus on “felons, not families”²⁷⁷ — provided a great deal of ‘cover’ for Latinx immigration agents. That is, for those agents who opted-into units where their ethnic identities were more manageable — a consequence of the fact that their clientele in those units could be easily dismissed as “criminals” — the internalization (or accommodation) of the tension between ‘*who they were*’ and ‘*what they did*’ was made simpler by the policy of the moment. Future changes to policy that might, for instance, move toward a focus on the removal of *all* removable undocumented migrants — to include those who qualified for deferred action under the Obama administration — would leave Latinx agents, in a sense, ‘exposed.’ Without the relative safety of units in which co-ethnic clientele can be characterized as criminal ‘others,’ we might expect to see more agents following the lead of Daniel Mireles (see *Chapter 4*), who opted-out of client-contact altogether.

The Liminality of Latinx Immigration Agents and the Minority Experience

From DuBois to Anzaldua, the racial and ethnic minority experience in the United States is a story of simultaneity — of multiple, overlapping identities and conflict²⁷⁸; it is the struggle for belonging somewhere, while lacking full membership anywhere. For Anzaldua, this struggle was rooted in the quest for balance between indigenous and European identities; for DuBois, it was in the quest for balance between being both black *and* American. In both cases, to move too far in either direction is to deny a part of the self, while remaining in the middle portends a

²⁷⁷ “Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Immigration,” November 20, 2014. <<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/11/20/remarks-president-address-nation-immigration>>

²⁷⁸ See Dubois (2003 [1903]) and Anzaldua (2012 [1987]).

segmented membership, or belonging, in both. Articulated as such, the liminal existence of the Latinx immigration law enforcement agent (writ large) is a fitting metaphor for this experience.

While Latinxs who elect to work in immigration law enforcement, as illustrated in *Chapter 3*, largely do so in service of economic self-interest, their entry into such agencies simultaneously signals a claim on belonging in the United States rooted in political (and national) obligation, and an (at least) *symbolic* relinquishment of ethnic identity. This claim, however, imposes a cost: liminality, or segmented membership both in an ethnic community within which they are seen as having turned their backs (see e.g., Paredes 1990), and in an American mainstream where ascriptive markers (i.e., skin color, skin tone, language) relegate them to a perpetual state of otherness (see e.g., Sampaio 2015; Zhou and Lee 2007). Even among agents like Cesar, who put up walls (however absurdly) between themselves and the co-ethnic migrants they encounter — and, to an extent, their ethnic identity altogether — they remain, as exhibited by some of their non-Latinx peers, inherently suspect.

Ultimately, Latinx immigration agents are a reflection of the broader experience of ethnic and racial minorities in the United States who, lacking the ability to claim whiteness, and benefit from the political power derived therein (i.e., the Irish of the 19th century²⁷⁹), find themselves caught between two worlds. Examined as such, the Latinx immigration agent as presented in this dissertation reveals not only the pressures of identities that individuals, themselves, claim, but those imposed (and policed) by others (see e.g., *Chapter 5*).

On the Positionality of the Interviewer

In the process of collecting and analyzing the data utilized in this dissertation, a number of questions and concerns inevitably surfaced. None appeared as important, however, as that covered herein. It was not long into the data collection process that I began to notice an emergent trend; many of the Latinx agents with whom I met (very obviously) recognized me as a

²⁷⁹ See e.g., Ignatiev (1995); Erie (1990).

co-ethnic. This was evident not only in the way that they talked to me about their connection to co-ethnic clientele, and personal (familial) ties to the immigrant-experience — wherein agents seemed to imply that, given who I was, I should be able to understand their dilemmas — but also in the intermittent transition on the part of agents between English and Spanish during our conversations. This, needless to say, raised flags in my head on a number of fronts. On several occasions, in fact, I wondered whether my relative positioning vis-à-vis the Latinx agents who participated might be affecting the way agents responded to my questions.

What if, for fear of offending *me*, someone they acknowledged as a co-ethnic, Latinx agents were lying about the intersection between ‘*who they were*’ and ‘*what they did?*’ What if in order to placate *me*, a researcher — someone they might have assumed wanted to hear that they were compassionate people — they misrepresented who they were? What if their true selves were those described by their non-Latinx peers — uncommitted to ethnic identity, resentful of their connection to co-ethnic clientele, and accordingly harsher on them? It was not an unthinkable idea. Scholars in the last fifty years have, in fact, spent considerable time exploring if, and how, interviewer race or ethnicity might shape the responses of research subjects (see e.g., Reese et al. 1986; Cotter et al. 1982; Hatchett and Schuman 1975-76; Welch et al. 1973; Schuman and Converse 1971). While it has been theorized that Latinxs might play-up, or ‘overreport’ ethnic ‘behavior’ in the presence of a co-ethnic interviewer (see e.g., Reese et al. 1986), such hypotheses have lacked substantiating empirical evidence. With respect to Latinx respondents, in fact, scholars have found the contrary; if Latinx respondents do adjust their answers, or levels of openness when being interviewed, they are more likely to do so when interacting with non-Latinx, or ‘Anglo,’ interviewers (see e.g., Reese et al. 1986; Welch et al. 1973).

Unsupported by empirical evidence, the notion that Latinx agents might have been performing for me ultimately did not pass the ‘smell-test.’ That is to say that such an argument

failed to answer a pivotal question: what is the rationale for lying to someone like *me*, when from all other possible vantage points (see e.g., *Chapter 5*), it would appear that there existed (and exists) a greater incentive to lie to their non-Latinx counterparts? What ultimately made more sense was that Latinx agents' interactions with me were, in fact, an informal test of my central thesis — that in the presence of co-ethnics, ethnic identity is not only activated, but becomes a relevant behavioral frame. Given that I made all attempts to downplay my own ethnic identity in my encounters with Latinx agents — going so far as to familiarize myself with agency acronyms and shorthand references to prevent my dismissal as an outsider — I was intrigued to find that many agents still felt as comfortable as they were both recognizing and treating me as a co-ethnic.

In Closing

Latinx immigration law enforcement agents are, themselves, a battleground. They are a site of contested identity rooted in questions of belonging (e.g., “¿*Quien soy?*” [“Who am I?”]), where the answer (e.g., “*Soy alguien*” [“I am *someone*”]) is a firm claim of belonging one way or another. In the case of Latinx immigration agents, the decision to enter such positions is a claim on both territorial and cultural American belonging. But if in this way the Latinx agent is a chessboard, they also exist *on* the board. As coercive arms that control the movement of pieces across the plane, their role is that of referee. They police the space and boundaries between the chess pieces, enforcing and, via discretionary decision-making, remaking the rules of the game as they go along. Simultaneously ruling over, yet subject to the boundaries of ‘who belongs,’ Latinx immigration enforcement officers are, in essence, a threat to themselves; but in no way a threat to themselves, alone. Their determinations of who they acknowledge as co-ethnics, who they deem deserving of discretionary action, in fact, carry immense weight beyond abstract conversations of identity. Their stories, in fact, make clear that liminality beyond a mere

theoretical construct, is a lived experience; it is an ongoing process that requires the conscious accommodation of internal contradictions, because the wholesale abandonment of one or more identities is a more difficult and costly exercise.

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