Before we can appreciate cinema’s century-long pattern of stereotypical representation, we need to have a more precise understanding of what stereotypes and stereotyping are—in general and as they appear in the media. I address these fundamental issues in this chapter by focusing first on social scientific theory (surveying mainly psychological and sociological perspectives) in order to clarify some of stereotyping’s more prominent features and develop a working definition of it. In the process, I gradually introduce notions of the representation of Otherness in the media from cultural studies. In this way, I synthesize a theoretical framework for my critical investigation of Latino stereotypes in cinema.

The first thing to note is that for all the worthwhile research done on stereotypes and stereotyping, stretching back over decades, social scientists have yet to agree on a definitive meaning for either term. The research and theorizing reflect different approaches and interests, and consequently, as one recent surveyor of the stereotyping literature commented, “A single and unified concept of stereotype cannot be found.”

Even so, there is much to be gained by reviewing the ideas of various researchers. For one thing, examining many perspectives presents an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the process of stereotyping. For another, the lack of a consensus on a single definition allows us the freedom to forge one of our own.
COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVES:
PROCESSING THE INFLUX OF INFORMATION

For some cognitive psychologists, stereotyping describes a value-neutral psychological mechanism that creates categories and enables people to manage the swirl of data presented to them from their environment. This categorizing function was recognized in 1922 by Walter Lippmann, who first coined the term “stereotyping.” For him, this was a necessary, useful, and efficient process, since “the attempt to see all things freshly and in detail, rather than as types and generalities, is exhausting, and among busy affairs practically out of the question.”

With this cognitive conception of stereotyping we can pause to consider some critical implications. The first is that in the sense that stereotyping means simply the creation of categories based on the recognition of gross difference(s), we all stereotype. Furthermore, this sort of stereotyping is not “wrong,” nor is it something that only bad people, or prejudiced, ignorant, or racist people, do. We all do it, and—if cognitive psychologists are right about how the human brain perceives, processes, stores, and recalls information—we need to. It is important to accumulate experiences and be able to distinguish a door from a window, a male from a female, a snake from a twig. And if we all create categories, then we are all, potentially at least, in a position to take the next step and imbue those categories with value-laden—that is, positive or negative—connotations.

This sort of negative generalizing is in fact what we usually mean when we think of stereotyping—not simply value-neutral category-making. For most of us, stereotyping is the act of making judgments and assigning negative qualities to other individuals or groups. The question then becomes, How does stereotyping evolve from being a value-free process to being a value-laden one?

For this kind of “bad” stereotyping to develop, I believe two crucial elements need to be added to plain category-making. One is ethnocentrism, classically defined as the “view of things in which one’s own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled or rated with reference to it.” Adhering to the circular logic of stereotyping, the out-group (“Them”) is compared to the standard defined by the in-group (“Us”). By this measure, and not surprisingly, “They” are always incomplete and imperfect.

The second necessary ingredient that transforms neutral categorization into a discriminatory practice is prejudice: judging Others as in-
nately inferior based on ethnocentrically determined difference. Prejudice holds that They are inherently not as good (not as clean, civilized, righteous, religious, intelligent, trustworthy, respectful of life, decent, hardworking, honorable, etc.) as We are because They are different from Us (in the foods they eat, their religion, skin color, language, nationality, etc.). Judging the Other as inherently inferior is a key feature of prejudicial thinking, and its most troubling one in that it indicates the intransigent view that They cannot change. Later we will see what disastrous results can result from such extremely biased and rigid judgments about the out-group.

To sum up, stereotyping in the negative and derogatory way the term is usually applied can be represented thus:

category making + ethnocentrism + prejudice = stereotyping

A stereotype is the result of this process and can be defined as a negative generalization used by an in-group (Us) about an out-group (Them). Lippmann called these mental constructs “pictures in our heads.”

ELEVEN THESES ABOUT STEREOTYPES

Before we continue with sociological, psychological, and psychoanalytical approaches to stereotyping, there are a number of important characteristics common to all stereotypes—individual or collective, mediated or not—that merit our attention, if only briefly.

Stereotypes Are Applied with Rigid Logic

According to one view, stereotyping is triggered by a reductive, all-or-nothing logic, by which stereotypers place anyone identified as an out-group member into the stereotyped category, then assign the stereotypical traits to that individual. “If you are ___________ (fill in name of group),” the thinking goes, “then you must _______________ (fill in predictable traits, characteristics, behavior, etc.).” As Homi K. Bhabha says, fixity is a key component “in the ideological construction of otherness.”

There is a degree of psychic comfort in fixing the Other—and the world—in this way, as if once named and defined they could be con-
tained once and for all. This attempt to control the world beyond the self by taxonomy is what Edward Said shows is at the heart of the scientific aspects of Orientalism.

Of course, the flaw in such thinking is that the world, the self, and the Other are organic, dynamic, and ever-changing, and attempts to freeze them can only lead to frustration. Indeed, stereotypes exist partly to cope with this confounding inconstancy. A primary function of stereotypes, says Richard Dyer, is “to make fast, firm and separate what is in reality fluid.”

Stereotypes May Have a Basis in Fact

There may be some correlation between the stereotype and lived experience, the “kernel of truth” aspect addressed by psychologist Joshua Fishman. For Fishman it was the “kernel of truth” that explained why large numbers of people agreed on many stereotypes; he posited that changes in stereotypes occurred in response to changes in political, social, and economic conditions. But “kernel” is an unfortunate choice of terms, since it means the core or best part of the grain. In the case of the stereotype, any real-life correspondence between a group member’s behavior and a quality said to be characteristic of the entire group is only an isolated part of a much larger story, and usually far from the whole truth. Yes, there indeed were and are Mexican bandits, lazy African Americans, and Italian American gangsters. But banditry, laziness, and criminality are not culture specific, nor do those qualities represent the group’s complete experience.

Stereotypes Are Simplified Generalizations that Assume Out-group Homogeneity

A stereotype is the part that stands for the whole. But since any group’s history is vast, complex, and variegated, stereotyping grossly simplifies that out-group experience by selecting a few traits of the Other that pointedly accentuate differences. These traits are then applied to all members of the group, an operation that assumes out-group homogeneity. Ultimately, however, although similar in some aspects, individuals in groups (both out-group and in-group) are just that—individuals—and therefore exhibit heterogeneity, not homogeneity. Stereotypes flatten, homogenize, and generalize individuals within a group, emphasizing sameness and ignoring individual agency and variety.
Stereotypes Work at Far Too General a Level to Be Worthwhile Predictors

A simple category has some value as a forecasting tool. However, stereotypical categorization based on ethnocentrism and prejudice is not only an unfair generalization but a very poor predictor. Knowledge of actual out-group experience, their history, culture, traditions—to say nothing of knowing actual out-group members—forces one to recognize the group’s overall heterogeneity. Knowledge furthermore belies easy, homogenized generalities and forces exceptions to stereotypes and, all other things being equal, to their eventual breakdown. Unless, that is, stereotypers refuse to let go of their prejudice. In that case, they will likely remain attached to their stereotypical beliefs, completely disregarding contradictory information about the Other.

Stereotypes Are Uncontextualized and Abistorical

Being gross generalizations, stereotypes are conveniently ahistorical, selectively omitting the out-group’s social, political, and economic group history. An excellent example is the stereotype of the Mexican bandido. As I pointed out at the beginning of this book, the power of stereotyping is demonstrated by our ability to summon up a fairly specific mental picture in our heads of the bandido stereotype. Indeed, after my experience with the Fulbright scholars I have found el bandido to be such a common mental image that when lecturing I routinely let students describe the main characteristics of the bandido image rather than doing it for them. And they routinely bring up the same details I listed in the introduction almost by reflex: the unkempt appearance, the weaponry and bandoleras, the funny-looking sombrero, the sneering look.

Together these elements form the cinematic sign of el bandido, one that is instantaneously read and comprehended by experienced film viewers. He is quickly and economically set apart from the Anglo cowboy hero and looks, in comparison, slightly ridiculous—recognition, differentiation, and devaluation being key functions of the cinematic stereotype. Beneath the stereotype does lie a kernel of truth—some Mexicanos did in fact look like this once upon a time, and violence was part of their life. The stereotype fails to convey, however, a number of crucial facts about them.

For instance, most of the men who dressed like this were not bandits—they were rebel soldiers who fought in Mexico’s Revolutionary
War of 1910–1920. For starters, then, Hollywood’s usual placement of these figures in the American West of the 1880s is historically inaccurate and anachronistic. Furthermore, in the Mexican experience, these men were the “good guys” who fought against the despotic dictator Porfirio Díaz under leaders like Pancho Villa (who once was a mountain bandit) and Emiliano Zapata (who was declared one by Díaz). Moreover, under the command of Villa and Zapata, who had no formal military training, these soldiers redefined modern warfare. By horseback and train, they covered great distances quickly, maintained the element of surprise over Díaz’s larger and better-equipped but slower forces, struck without warning, and ultimately defeated them. The rebel horse soldiers’ mobility was enhanced in no small measure by the fact that they carried their ammunition with them in the form of *bandoleras* across their chests. Even their sombreros have a positive signification, in that they were ingenious adaptations to a harsh environment allowing the wearer to “carry” his shade with him. All of these important historical details are either omitted or completely recast in the stereotype.

As a sort of shorthand, stereotypes necessarily preclude such background information. Instead, stereotyping creates facile abbreviations that, by virtue of their regular repetition, create their own history. Two dangers arise when in-group members have little exposure to out-group members or knowledge of out-group history. The first is that the virtual (stereotypical) history can replace the actual (lived) one. The second is that the stereotypical images can become familiar to the point that they eventually seem normal, even “natural.”

**Repetition Tends to Normalize Stereotypes**

This book is part of a fairly new critical approach, representational studies. But it could be argued that Hollywood rarely claims that the characters in its films are meant to be taken literally (and therefore seriously), or ever meant to be representative of entire social groups. Rather, this line of argument goes, Hollywood is simply telling stories, and the characters within its films serve a narrational function, not a representational one. According to this logic, in the film story called *Clear and Present Danger* (1994) it just so happens that the villain (Joaquim de Almeida) is a Colombian drug lord and the hero (Harrison Ford) an Anglo male. If that were the only or a rare instance of a Latino being the bad guy in a U.S. movie, there might be some validity to this argument. But de Almeida’s character is a descendant of a long line of Latino movie antagonists, stretching back to silent-era “greaser” bandits. Seen in that
light, the Colombian drug runner is an updated version of el bandido. With repetition, therefore, narration becomes representation.

A “vicious cycle” aspect to repeated stereotyping arises because expressing learned stereotypes reinforces and to that extent validates and perpetuates them. Stereotypes are false to history, but conform to another historical tradition—namely, the history of movies and movie stereotyping. They begin, over time, to become part of the narrative form itself—anticipated, typical, and well nigh “invisible.” Ironically, then, representation becomes narration: we expect el bandido to appear in a Western set in the Southwest—he’s part of the landscape—and when he does, we expect him to be villainous and to act in predictably despicable, criminal, and inhumane ways. Far from being surprised by this, we are instead more likely to be surprised when it doesn’t occur.

Stereotypes Are Believed

There is a body of research literature that holds that stereotypes are not simply frames of mind, but actual beliefs.\textsuperscript{14} Gordon Allport, for in-

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stance, theorized that an attitude toward a group is usually bonded to a belief about the group. Of the two elements, the attitude is the most important, most lasting, and the most resistant to change. It is the attitude that fixes the belief, and not the other way around. “Beliefs,” Allport writes,

have the slippery propensity of accommodating themselves somehow to the negative attitude which is much harder to change. . . . Thus the belief system has a way of slithering around to justify the more permanent attitude. The process is one of rationalization—of the accommodation of beliefs to attitudes.\(^15\)

To the extent that they are believed, stereotypes have a psychological power that affects both in-group and out-group members. For the in-group individual, the belief associated with stereotyping colors encounters with the out-group. “Once formed,” Allport writes, stereotypes “cause their possessor to view future evidence in terms of the available categories.”\(^16\) One series of experiments may indicate how early those attitudes are formed. In order to determine young children’s racial attitudes, researchers presented youngsters with a black doll and a white doll and asked them questions about which were “nice” and which were “bad.” Most of the young white children picked the white doll as looking nice and the black doll as looking bad.\(^17\)

Stereotyping has an effect on out-group members as well. Black children presented with the dolls also labeled the black doll as not nice but bad, though not to the degree that the white children did. “The most common interpretation of the findings from the numerous doll studies,” one team of researchers has noted, “is that whites reject and negatively evaluate blacks, and that blacks reject and negatively evaluate themselves.”\(^18\) While this interpretation has not gone undisputed, my points here are that (1) stereotypes affect both in-group and out-group members, and (2) the resulting effect may well be linked to beliefs.

And beliefs can lead to actions. As one researcher put it, “When members of one group think about members of another as intrinsically different—as categorically bad, unworthy, despicable—they are capable of inflicting great harm upon them.” Stereotypes, in this view, can become programs for action or “sanctions for evil” and “may induce or justify acts that would be unthinkable to commit against members of one’s own group.”\(^19\) This is the kind of thinking that precedes racial violence and lynchings,\(^20\) the kind of mind-set that led to the reprehensible genocide perpetrated against Jews by the Germans during World
War II. Indeed, Daniel Jonah Goldhagen’s extensive study of the Holocaust, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, concludes that anti-Semitic stereotypical beliefs held by the German people as a whole were the prime cause of that nightmare:

Germans’ antisemitic beliefs about Jews were the central causal agent not only of Hitler’s decision to annihilate European Jewry (which is accepted by many) but also of the perpetrators’ willingness to kill and brutalize Jews. ... Antisemitism moved many thousands of “ordinary” Germans—and would have moved millions more, had they been appropriately positioned—to slaughter Jews. Not economic hardship, not the coercive means of a totalitarian state, not social psychological pressure, not invariable psychological propensities, but ideas about Jews that were pervasive in Germany, and had been for decades, induced ordinary Germans to kill unarmed, defenseless Jewish men, women, and children by the thousands, systematically and without pity.

Stereotypes can be believed and can lead to actions—sometimes of the most savage and reprehensible kind.

**Stereotyping Goes Both Ways**

The kind of stereotyping we have been discussing assumes a dominant in-group that creates the stereotype of a subordinate out-group. But even in this unbalanced situation, stereotypes can go the other way, from the subordinate minority to the dominant majority. However, concerning mediated stereotyping, clearly the mass media is the dominant’s media and routinely reflects dominant attitudes. Furthermore, mass media reaches the widest audience. Where mass media is concerned, therefore, one can say that stereotypes generally go one way: from the dominant to the disenfranchised in the margins.

**Stereotypes Are Ideological**

Stereotypes don’t just derogatorily depict the Other—they also indicate a preferred power relation. One way of thinking about the ideological component of stereotyping is to consider stereotypes as vestiges of the colonial system. Within that regime, once the native is “known” (i.e., set and defined by the colonizer in stereotypical terms), “discriminatory and authoritarian forms of political control are considered appropriate.” It is one way the dominant in-group continually convinces itself...
and the Other that it is morally superior, more civilized, and in all ways finer than the Other, and therefore ought “naturally” to be in control. And stereotypes illustrate why They, the subordinate out-group, based on their obvious inferiority, ought not, indeed could not, control anything. As Richard Dyer puts it, through stereotyping ruling groups attempt “to fashion the whole of society according to their own worldview, value-system, sensibility and ideology.”

Inasmuch as it operates to identify, justify, and support mainstream (Anglo) beliefs, then, ideologically stereotyping is hegemony, the subtle, naturalizing way the ruling class maintains its dominance over subordinate groups. The normalization of stereotypical images through repetition that I mentioned earlier can now be seen to have an important ideological function: to demonstrate why the in-group is in power, why the out-group is not, and why things need to stay just as they are.

The creation and circulation of stereotypes in the media function to maintain the status quo in yet another way: by defining the Other. Media stereotyping establishes the terms by which the Other can be known and situates the Other within dominant discourse. Consider the implications of a term in general usage today, “illegal alien,” which offers a baseline understanding of Latino immigrants as criminals (rather than as people who have migrated here for a complex set of historical, political, and economic reasons, some of which involve U.S. business interests). In the cinema, the fact that Hispanics are depicted as variations of bandits and buffoons, whores, Latin lovers, and dark ladies defines them first and foremost as outside the mainstream. The stereotypical definition of Others, therefore, has powerful ideological consequences, simultaneously marginalizing Them and establishing and maintaining an explicit Us-Them boundary. “The most important function of the stereotype,” writes Richard Dyer, is “to maintain sharp boundary definitions, to define clearly where the pale ends and thus who is clearly within and who is clearly beyond it.”

The In-group Stereotypes Itself

A curious feature of stereotyping is that it is applied within the dominant by in-group members to other in-group members. Examples of what the dominant finds unacceptable within its own ranks include dumb blondes, Neanderthal jocks, socially inept nerds, hayseed rednecks, and rich snobs, to say nothing of the stereotypes of children, the aged, the poor, the infirm, obese, disabled, or mentally ill. There exists, then, a different class of stereotype, the kind the dominant in-group
CATEGORIZING THE OTHER

makes of itself. These stereotypes delimit the boundary from inside the fence, so to speak, ostracizing “flawed” in-group members who, for one reason or another, fall short of dominant ideals. These are whites who do not possess the requisite amount of the in-group’s superior characteristics, those WASPs who, in Richard Dyer’s phrase, have failed “to attain whiteness” and are consequently excommunicated.

The Antidote to Stereotyping Is Knowledge

So as not to end this section on too disparaging a note, I mention what I believe to be a way out of the stereotyping morass: knowledge, both about the Other and about the stereotyping process. If, as Chicano historian Michael R. Ornelas has said, “stereotypes fill the void created by ignorance,” then more information about the Other makes the stereotype’s simplified generalities less and less applicable. In the best-case scenario, stereotyping breaks down as a useful category. “Experience, contact and maturity usually erase [stereotypical] images among reasonable people,” concludes Ornelas. The first beneficial result of learning about the process of stereotyping is that this knowledge makes it easy to detect stereotypes. The second is that once a stereotype is spotted, it becomes easier to see beneath its surface and understand how and why it works. Learning not only to see the stereotypical surface but also to understand what lies beneath stereotyping is the aim of this book.

SOCIOCLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES: STEREOTYPES AS RESULTS OF ACCULTURATION AND GROUP INTERACTION

Moving to sociological views of stereotyping allows us to shift from the individual instance to the case of stereotyping as a shared group phenomenon. As psychologist Arthur G. Miller points out, the concern about stereotypes is one of social consensus—if only isolated individuals stereotyped, stereotyping would be a far different sort of issue. “Stereotyping is a complex psychological problem,” Miller points out, that “is inextricably bound to a much broader social matrix. There are, in short, large numbers of people involved in stereotyping—both on the observer side and on the target side.”

One popular theory about how in-group members acquire stereotypes is that they do so through socialization. Ideas, including values and attitudes—and, hence, stereotypes—are conveyed to people by their culture as preexisting categories. These ideas are internalized as
part of the process of socialization. Once again, Lippmann was far-sighted. “In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world,” he wrote, “we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture.”

What the culture has already defined for us, however, is not neutral facts, objective rules of language, and cultural customs. The dark underside of socialization is that these come encrusted with attitudes and biases, which sometimes have dire consequences. Once again, Daniel Jonah Goldhagen’s study of German attitudes toward the Jews before World War II provides a horrific example. Goldhagen uses the socialization model to explain how Germans learned to regard Jews as pariahs; indeed, he locates the root cause of the Holocaust in what he calls the people’s “cognitive models,” prevalent beliefs and values acquired via socialization, which were
derivative of and borne by the societal conversation, linguistically and symbolically. When beliefs and images are uncontested or are even just dominant within a given society, individuals typically come to accept them as self-evident truths. . . . An individual learns the cognitive models of his culture, like grammar, surely and effortlessly.

The attitudes about what constitutes the norms of the society go more or less unquestioned (because those who question them risk being ostracized) and mark a boundary between what the society considers normal and socially acceptable and what it does not. Among the cognitive models that are learned are the placement of Others outside of the norm, a process assisted by stereotyping.

The sociological approach also addresses group interaction and stereotype formation. This gives us a way to establish a link between real-world social relationships and stereotyping. Just as social scientists have traditionally examined and interpreted the terms used by one group to describe and define another, I am analyzing the ways a dominant group, the American social mainstream, portrays and depicts an ethnic minority, Latinos, via the mass medium of the Hollywood cinema.

My analysis is based on the following foundational assumptions:

1. The socially, culturally, and ideologically dominant group exists in the American popular consciousness and is represented in the mass media as a more or less homogeneous monolith, despite the actual variability and heterogeneity of any group. Furthermore, the mainstream defines itself by its core values, its domi-
nant ideological norms, namely, as “monogamous heterosexual bourgeois patriarchal capitalists,” to use film critic Robin Wood’s succinct phrase. I would add the following as additional characteristics of the social dominant: nonethnic white, Christian (vaguely Protestant, though not Catholic), middle-aged, intelligent (excellent at problem solving, though not intellectual), healthy, and so forth. In short, the dominant ideal looks and acts like protagonists in Hollywood movies, like characters played by the likes of Harrison Ford, Kevin Costner, and Tom Cruise.

2. Hollywood studio films are the dominant’s cinema. In the main they positively represent—and through their narratives and resolutions they typically endorse—the prevailing or dominant ideology.

3. This is not to say that the system is not conflicted. There are constant countercurrents to the dominant ideology’s mainstream flow, caused mainly by the fact that very few, if any, can possibly be all the mainstream norm would have them be—monogamous, heterosexual, bourgeois, patriarchal, Protestant, white, nonethnic, healthy, bright, middle-aged capitalists who look like Tom Cruise. Friction within the dominant ideology starts where compliance fails—or is simply impossible to achieve.

4. Hollywood cinema is similarly conflicted and expresses various degrees of challenges to these dominant norms. A film like High Noon (1952), about the failure of a righteous frontier community to support its recently retired marshal (Gary Cooper), critiques the cowardly all-white majority. Similarly, the hero of Blade Runner (1982) ultimately turns his back on the corrupt white male power structure.

5. The overall process of stereotyping of out-group by in-group is roughly the same whether it takes the form of words used to describe the out-group (the focus of much social scientific research) or out-group images on a screen (the focus of critical analyses of representation). There are, of course, important distinctions between the two, as will be discussed in Chapter 2.

*Intergroup Relations*

To return to the matter of group interactions and stereotypes, sociologists have found that stereotyping is dynamic. It fluctuates based on
the social and power relationship between the in-group and the out-group. Depending on the power relationship between these groups, one of three different stereotyping scenarios can arise: cooperative, stratified, or oppositional.\(^34\)

First, groups may coexist peacefully in a mutually beneficial relationship. Such groups see themselves as working toward the same goals, and because they have to rely on one another, each group describes the other using terms such as “strong,” “hardworking,” and “friendly.” In the American instance, when the dominant group and another group have about equal power, they eventually cease being two distinct groups. The out-group assimilates into the mainstream, becoming virtually indistinguishable from it—the “melting pot effect.” When such social equilibrium is reached, the stereotypes diminish or evaporate altogether as a by-product of assimilation.

In the last hundred years, a good example of such a case of out-group entering the in-group and the corresponding elimination of their stereotypes is the Irish. In that time, they have evolved from being a thoroughly denigrated immigrant group to becoming so mainstreamed that there have been two presidents of Irish descent. In silent and early sound cinema, the Irish were commonly stereotyped as irresponsible and pugilistic, and represented as the dumb cop or the drunken, good-for-nothing, unemployed father. By and large, those stereotypes have ceased to exist in popular American media. A telling example is Tom Cruise starring in the title role of Jerry Maguire, a character who is nothing if not “strong, hardworking, and friendly.” Jerry Maguire also exhibits the requisite qualities of the Hollywood hero—male, heterosexual, white, middle-aged, upper-middle class, possessing rugged good looks, and subscribing to American ideals and, by the film’s end, Christian morals. Nothing is made, one way or the other, of his ethnicity, presumably because it does not stand in the way of his espousal of mainstream values. In U.S. society and in the movies, the Irish, one of the most despised and stereotyped groups in U.S. history, have assimilated, subscribing to and endorsing dominant values and ideology. Stereotypes evolve as relations between groups change. “Far from being rigid and unaccommodating,” write three researchers who have focused on the connection between stereotypes and social reality, “stereotypes appear to be fluid and variable and to change with the social context.”\(^35\)

The bright side of stereotype evolution is that human consciousness can change and stereotyping can sometimes diminish and even be eradicated. The dark side is that time alone cannot be counted on to automatically end stereotyping. For example, consider the case of marginal-
ized groups who, unlike the Irish, do not have fair skin, do not share the dominant’s Christianity, and do not speak English. It has been considerably more difficult for Asians, Africans, natives, and dark-skinned Latin Americans to assimilate into the mainstream. Their experience falls under the two other group relationship categories.

Moreover, stereotype evolution is not always progressive, but can regress. Goldhagen’s argument posits that the treatment of Jews in pre-war Germany was built on preexisting, if relatively dormant, anti-Semitism. In the years following World War I, as life for most Germans became increasingly difficult, this slumbering prejudice was awakened, and more and more dehumanizing stereotypes of Jews appeared. In this case, stereotyping increased in ferocity and became more hateful, vicious, and, ultimately, lethal.

Before assimilation, groups are stratified and hold unequal power. In these cases, the dominant group will likely create stereotypes of the subdominant, clustering around two sets of characteristics: harmless (with out-group members portrayed as childlike, irrational, and emotional) when they pose no threat, or dangerous (treacherous, deceitful, cunning) when they do. Many film stereotypes and the Hispanic stereotypes I will delineate in Chapter 3 are clearly products of such a stratified case.

When the dominant group is threatened by the subordinate one, because it perceives itself to be competing for the same resources, the dominant’s descriptive terminology about the subdominant becomes more severely derogatory: “aggressive,” “brutal,” “corrupt.” The change is thought to be a convenient way for members of the group to rationalize “their own violent or ungenerous impulses.”

If these extremely virulent attitudes toward the subordinate group persist, there is a danger that the fear and hatred directed toward the Other will erupt into violence. Riots and lynchings are social explosions often ignited by such feelings, and the history of the U.S. Southwest includes numerous examples of violence directed at Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Just so, argues Goldhagen, was the Holocaust the logical outcome of a systematic and prolonged stereotypical demonization of Jewry in Germany. The economic and political chaos in Germany following its defeat in World War I led to the search for scapegoats. And the preexisting anti-Semitic discourse conveniently provided one. Jews were cast in increasingly dehumanizing terms, and the anti-Semitic rhetoric gradually shifted from intolerance to exclusion to elimination.

Similarly in the movies, there are times when vehemence against the Other results in their portrayal as irrational, maniacal monsters. The
casual bloodlust exhibited by Native Americans in scores of Hollywood Westerns is but one example. Others are the violent Mexican “greaser,” the cannibalistic African native, and the twisted Middle Eastern terrorist. In its extreme form, as Robin Wood has argued, in science fiction and horror films, this sort of stereotyping transforms the Other into an actual monster. The threat to the dominant by the Other is so fearful that the nightmarish stereotypes are produced, as I discuss further in Chapter 7.

**DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY: WHY WE STEREOTYPE**

The short answer as to why anybody or any group stereotypes is that they get something important out of it. What vital functions might stereotyping fulfill? Henri Tajfel lists five functions of stereotyping. The first two are at the individual level:

1. the *cognitive* function of systematizing and simplifying the environment
2. the *motivational* function of representing and preserving important social values

The remaining three are at the group level, where stereotypes contribute to the creation and maintenance of group beliefs, which are then used to:

3. *explain* large-scale social events
4. *justify* various forms of collective action, and
5. *preserve positive intergroup distinctiveness*, the tendency to differentiate the in-group positively from the out-group.

These last three especially touch on a deeper and profound utilitarian function involving identity formation, namely, the notion that the self is partly defined via the Other. In this sense, stereotyping serves, says Lippmann, as “the guarantee of our self-respect . . . the projection upon the world of our own sense of value, our own position and our own rights.” Mikhail Bakhtin, as transcribed by Tzvetan Todorov, makes the same point in elaborating his aesthetic theory of literature. “The other,” says Bakhtin, “is necessary to accomplish . . . a perception of the self that the individual can achieve only partially with respect to himself.” The self, he continues, realizes, “I cannot do without the other; I
cannot become myself without the other; I must find myself in the other, finding the other in me (in mutual reflection and perception).”

To begin our consideration of this complex process of comparative identity, let us review Sander Gilman’s theory of the psychological roots of stereotyping. He begins by positing that the core function of stereotypes is to act “as our buffer against those hidden fears which lie deep within us.” We need to separate and distance these fears from us, “for once they are separate from us we can act as if their source is beyond our control.” Gilman traces stereotyping to a process that “all human beings undergo in becoming individuals.” It begins in early development (from six weeks to six months), when the child first makes the distinction between self and the world. The child’s realization is accompanied by the dawning awareness of loss of control over his or her environment. In order to cope with this dwindling control, the developing child divides its psychological self into two parts: good (able to be controlled) and bad (unable to be controlled). Moreover, the child projects the qualities of the bad self onto the Other (bad world) in order to help preserve the illusion of maintaining power.

All the world is correspondingly divided into “good” and “bad” objects. What is repressed within the self is thus projected onto the Other, and “the deep structure of our own sense of self and the world is built upon the illusionary image of the world divided into two camps, ‘us’ and ‘them.’” Gilman identifies two kinds of stereotyping, a normal, or benign, form and a pathological one. The benign case is a momentary coping mechanism that preserves “our illusion of control over the self and the world.” Benign stereotypers override an initial, generalized perception of an Other with a more sophisticated one. As a result, benign stereotypers are able to distinguish a specific individual from the crude category into which he or she might be automatically placed. In contrast, the pathological stereotyper “does not develop this [corrective] ability and sees the entire world in terms of the rigid line of difference” between self and Other. The pathological stereotyper’s sense of self-integration is threatened by the encounter with the Other, which triggers the adherence of the stereotypical category and the relegation of the Other to it.

Gilman goes on to link his developmental psychological theory to the analysis of texts. He argues that texts—structured systems of representation—are ideal sites to study the continually varying patterns of stereotyping. For Gilman, “texts function as structured expressions of the inner world in our mental representation,” and thus stereotypical structures “exist within all texts, since the creation of the text is an
attempt to provide an image of control.” Such systems of representation—whether in words or images—are constructed projections of our anxiety and are necessarily reductive, resulting in the creation of stereotypes.44

Using this projection process as a model for the social construction of cultural Others, as Robin Wood has done,45 allows us to think of stereotyping as society’s denial of its own negative tendencies by assigning them to an Other.46 From this perspective, it can be seen that stereotypes reveal nothing about the stereotyped and everything about the stereotyper. To paraphrase Gilman: from our social, ideological, racial, aesthetic desire we generate who we are. What the cultural critic interested in the textual analysis of stereotypes should be alert to, according to Gilman, is “not what actually went on in the culture, but what the culture wanted (or was unable to repress) in representing itself.”47

Robin Wood takes the discussion of the interpretation of texts—specifically popular horror movies—one step further by invoking the familiar analogy between dreams and films. In Freudian psychoanalytical theory, dreams are the embodiment of repressed desires, wishes, tensions, and fears that the conscious mind rejects. This raw material is transformed into a series of images—the dream—only when the censor that guards our subconscious relaxes in sleep. Even then, the desires emerge only in disguise as apparently random images and meaningless fantasies.

These ideas, Wood maintains, can be applied to films inasmuch as they are forms of popular entertainment: “One of the functions of the concept of ‘entertainment’—by definition, that which we don’t take seriously, or think about much (‘It’s only entertainment’)—is to act as a kind of partial sleep of consciousness.” To the extent that popular films may be thought of in this way, they can be approached analytically as simultaneously “the personal dreams of their makers and the collective dreams of their audiences—the fusion made possible by the shared structures of a common ideology.”48

Like a dream, then, a critic using the psychoanalytical approach can read the text on a number of levels: (1) the level of manifest content—the images that appear on the screen; (2) the level of latent content—what this manifest content is concealing; (3) the dominant ideology—the “dreamer” that structured the images. The sort of criticism I mean to practice in this book is one that interprets the images presented by this mediated “dream” by looking at all three levels of meaning. In the case of stereotypical analysis, I submit that the classic Latino stereotypes are radical transformations of real-life Latinos, mainly Mexican Ameri-
cans in the American Southwest, Mexicans along the border, and Latin Americans from South America, with the occasional depiction of the Puerto Rican in New York. The collective subconscious (the dominant ideology) produced these images of the Latino Other in order to symbolically mask what they represented—namely, threats to that ideology on a number of levels: social, political, economical, psychosexual, racial.

FEMINIST APPROACHES: FEAR, AMBIVALENCE, AND GUILT

The individual’s projection of the bad and absorption of the good is never fully successful. The very attempt is an acknowledgment that good and evil coexist within the individual. Melanie Klein theorized that in fact individuals oscillate back and forth between two positions. The first, the “paranoid-schizoid” phase, is the one Gilman describes in which the individual fears the bad and idealizes the good. Klein’s second position is the “depressive” phase, filled with guilt and regret.

We can generalize from this theory and extend that oscillation to group stereotyping and Hollywood filmmaking. This may help explain Hollywood’s “stereotypical ambivalences,” the fact that Hollywood films have historically demonstrated a repeated vacillation between the denigration of the Other and guilt over having done that. Generally, Hollywood films fall into three clusters along this denigration-guilt spectrum:

1. Those films that denigrate Latinos and present the stereotype in its “pure,” degenerate state. Many Westerns did this with their “greaser” or bandido villains and Chicana prostitute stereotypes. More recently, these villains have been updated into urban bandidos, either East L.A. homeboys (Falling Down, 1993) or Puerto Rican toughs in New York City (Badge 373, 1973).

2. Those films that denigrate, but whose stereotypes are subverted in some way. One classic subversion is watching a crafty Latina performer like Lupe Vélez find ways to transcend the stereotype she found herself trapped in (see Chapter 3).

3. It needs to be recognized that there are films that are obviously trying to “do the right thing” vis-à-vis Latino representation. Some of these films do succeed in breaking with typical Hollywood stereotyping, but others—despite their good inten-
tions—fail and end up being condescending instead. Many examples could be found during World War II when Hollywood participated in the U.S.’s self-serving Good Neighbor Policy promoting hemispheric harmony against common Axis enemies. Disney’s *The Three Caballeros* (1944) is perhaps the prime example of this effort, a travelogue that primarily patronized Latinos. On the other hand, a postwar film like *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948) might be seen as a more fair depiction of Mexico as well as a fable examining the U.S.’s imperialistic plundering of Third World resources.

Laura Mulvey’s appropriation of the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan in her landmark piece of feminist criticism, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” presents another way to think of these “stereotypical ambivalences.” In her article, Mulvey investigates the gendered nature of roles in cinema narratives. Males are active and powerful bearers of the controlling gaze. Within the film narrative, male protagonists structure what is seen by the spectator. Females are passive and impotent objects of the gaze. This results in women being made erotic objects both for characters “within the screen story . . . and for the spectator within the auditorium.”

But in Mulvey’s psychoanalytical schema, the female figure poses a fundamental problem to the dominant male. “She connotes something that the look continually circles around but disavows: her lack of a penis, implying a threat of castration and hence unpleasure.” The male unconscious has two ways of dealing with this castration anxiety, both of them strategic uses of the male gaze. The first is voyeurism, watching and investigating her so as to demystify her mystery. Here the male’s pleasure lies in devaluation, punishment, and the assertion of control. The other avenue is fetishistic scopophobia, placing the female on a pedestal, building up her beauty and transforming her into something wholly satisfying, thus containing her threat by making her “safe.”

By extrapolation, we can apply these ideas to stereotyping in film. “Ultimately,” Mulvey writes, “the meaning of woman is sexual difference” and women pose a threat to male power structures by their very presence. Similarly, the meaning of Latinos is cultural—and to some, racial—difference, and their very existence creates anxiety for the Anglo power establishment. Much of Hollywood cinema’s treatment of Latinos reveals the same two responses that Mulvey suggests. As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, Hollywood’s stereotyping of Latinos ranges from devaluation (in the case of *el bandido*, the harlot, the
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male buffoon, and the female clown) to fetishization and overvaluation (the Latin lover and the dark lady). And, as we will see, there is a range of nonstereotypical American filmmaking as well that needs to be discussed.

LATINO CRITICS ON STEREOTYPING

Let me conclude with a brief review of critical approaches to Latino stereotypes in film. It might be helpful to relate this history of criticism by noting its various stages, much as I do with the brief history of Chicano cinema that I present at the beginning of Part 3. And as I do in that survey, I will focus primarily, though not exclusively, on Chicano criticism because of the way that the early critical agenda on Latinos in cinema was set by Chicano filmmakers.

The beginning of Chicano film theory and criticism was closely tied to the development of Chicano filmmaking, and evolved in relation to it. Initially, Chicano criticism developed on the same track; later it split off and took a separate but parallel path. Phase I (1969–1982) was the period of radical criticism in which the filmmakers themselves were the principal theoreticians and critics. In a sense, this criticism was all about Latino stereotypes in Hollywood film, and the criticism presented a polemical argument for reacting against them. The militant manifestos authored by Cine-Aztlan, Francisco X. Camplis, Sylvia Morales, and Jason C. Johansen exemplify this stage, in which Third Cinema in the Third World, specifically Cuban documentaries, were cited as exemplars for a burgeoning Chicano film aesthetic. The audience for this initial criticism and theory building was nosotros, and its goals were to: (1) reveal the pattern of stereotyping of Chicanos and other marginalized groups in the dominant media, (2) sustain el movimiento (the Chicano Movement) and clarify Chicano cinema’s relationship to it, (3) define a separatist Chicano filmmaking aesthetic resistant to assimilation into mainstream practice, (4) support and endorse Chicano filmmakers, and (5) aid in the development of a Chicano film culture. The political film theory and criticism that resulted provided the impetus for an impressive alternative cinema.

Phase II, the academic validation stage, began in the 1970s and early 1980s. José Limón’s piece “Stereotyping and Chicano Resistance: An Historical Dimension” (1973), was the prototype for a systematic, scholarly investigation of issues surrounding Chicanos and film. The Chicano film scholarship that followed was pioneered by Chicano aca-
demics such as Cordelia Candelaria, Carlos Cortés, Rolando Hinojosa-Smith, David Maciel, and Alex M. Saragosa. Together with a number of other, similar, works produced around the same time by Allen L. Woll, Randall M. Miller, and Arthur G. Pettit, Chicano and now Latino film criticism—the analysis of Chicano- and Latino-related issues in media—began gathering an interpretive critical mass.

Here, the audience was conceived of in broader terms, and the criticism reached out to anyone interested in cinema. Just as important as diversifying its readership, however, was phase II’s need to legitimize itself as a valid scholarly enterprise. On this front, the main theater of operations was the academy. If phase I was agit-prop criticism, providing the philosophical and political rationale for a contestational Chicano filmmaking aesthetic, phase II consisted of intellectual guerrilla actions, fought on a broad academic front, one course offering, one journal article, and one conference paper at a time. The goal of phase II criticism was to create a space in scholarly discourse for the examination and criticism of Chicano cinema. This required everything from challenging and reshaping the curriculum (petitioning for courses that could and should be taught) to demanding a forum in journals, a voice on conference panels, and representation in professional organizations. It also involved the overhauling of the academic system so that tenure and promotion review committees might recognize and properly credit research on Chicano and Latino culture. By endorsing Chicano cinema as a valid form of cultural production and recounting the otherwise ignored history of Chicano filmmaking, phase II criticism sought to counteract the American academy’s Eurocentric bias as well as the stultified tradition of film scholarship that together had marginalized Mexican American culture and trivialized its analysis. These initial efforts were largely undertaken by scholars in noncommunication fields like history, anthropology, art, literature, and Latin American studies, and because of them Chicano film and its criticism were placed on the academic map.

Of these phase II pioneers, one, Carlos Cortés, deserves to be singled out. Cortés began working on Latino and ethnic representation in media before it was fashionable, and those of us working in the field today are the fortunate beneficiaries of his pioneering research. Cortés’s work helped set the agenda in several ways. First, by example: His thoughtful and thorough methodology illustrated the kind of careful work that needed to be done around the core issue of the representation of Latinos in the media. It wasn’t gripeing, it was analysis, and to do it, one needed to engage with the history of media representation, and to observe and reflect upon a large body of texts. And it wasn’t political grandstanding.
either, it was grappling with the complexities of media. Second, his work confronted key research questions, obvious ones that needed to be answered in order to lay the foundation for any future work. For example, how should we go about the analysis of ethnic images? And, how does a viewer even know the ethnicity of film characters?

Third, far from being an ivory tower scholar, Cortés sought to find practical ways to connect his ideas on media representation with actual media users, in particular students, teachers, and parents. In fact, in his role as a public intellectual, consulting with government agencies, running countless workshops for educators, writing on ways to incorporate media into school curricula, Cortés has probably affected more viewers than any other Latino media scholar. The culmination of his work blending media, multiculturalism, and education is his most recent book, *The Children Are Watching: How the Media Teach about Diversity*. In it he offers succinct, precise, and helpful discussions of many of the concepts covered in this chapter. In a chapter entitled “Struggling with Stereotypes: Uses and Abuses of a Critical Concept,” for example, Cortés makes critical distinctions between stereotypes and generalizations, which is close to the difference I stressed earlier between “benign” stereotyping, stereotyping as a value-neutral category-making process, and “malign” stereotyping, derogatory and rigid group generalizations.

In phase III, the poststructuralist stage (1985–2000), contemporary cultural and film theory is being employed by Chicano and Latino critics. This was foreshadowed in some of the pieces of Gary Keller’s *Chicano Cinema: Research, Reviews, and Resources* (1985) and was developed shortly thereafter in the published articles by Yolanda Broyles-González, Rosa Linda Fregoso, Kathleen Newman, Chon Noriega, Lillian Jiménez, Ana López, Angharad Valdivia, myself, and others. It came to its fullest fruition in the anthology edited by Noriega in 1992, *Chicanos and Film: Representation and Resistance*. These essays went far beyond the “images of” analysis of Latinos in films and began looking at how Latino images functioned within cinematic structures of narrative and genre.

While phase III criticism aimed to continue phase I’s validation of Chicano filmmaking and phase II’s validation of Chicano criticism, it also sought to demonstrate that Chicano/Latino critics could “do” cultural theory. By applying structuralist and poststructuralist approaches to ethnic issues in cinema or to Chicano cinema itself, Chicano critics could partake of the rarefied—but intellectually sanctioned and academically certified—discourse of film criticism and theory. As part of a process of gaining credibility for ourselves as critics as well as for the
Latino/Chicano films we analyze, we became, if you will, card-carrying members of the cultural studies club—precisely what was needed if we and the object of our research were to be taken seriously in the academy.

A subset of this critical tradition is work that continues to deal with Latino stereotypes. Besides myself, there have been a handful of critics who have focused specifically on Latino stereotypes: Carlos Cortés, as I mentioned above, Gary D. Keller, Christine List, and Chon Noriega, and their contributions need to be highlighted. (Angharad Valdivia has also dealt with stereotypes in her analysis of the qualities of Rosie Pérez’s characters in film, as I discuss in Chapter 4.) Keller approached the problem historically and empirically. In his *Hispanics and United States Film: An Overview and Handbook*, he surveyed films from the first decades of U.S. twentieth-century filmmaking to create a list of eleven Latino types, and then charted their evolution across time. It is akin to the shorter list of six Latino stereotypes that I first delineated in 1988 and have revised and incorporated into Chapter 3, and which was itself indebted to Arthur G. Pettit’s typology in *Images of the Mexican American in Fiction and Film*. The point, it seems to me, is not to quibble about which author’s list of stereotypes is best or most complete. Rather it is to note the dramatic similarities among our findings. When you boil it all down, what the three of us discovered in our individual studies of American film was a steady repetition of the same basic traits assigned to Latino characters in the form of recognizable stereotypes.

For Christine List, Latino stereotypes provide an important context for the analysis of Chicano self-representation in feature filmmaking. As she has written,

> As Chicano and Chicana filmmakers embark on the difficult task of constructing their own cinematic identity they necessarily inherit the baggage of Hollywood stereotypes. Some directors confront the Hollywood legacy by creating positive Chicano hero figures. Other Chicano directors have opted to construct complex characters using techniques of psychological realism. Cheech Marin has taken the unusual route of using the very same Chicano stereotypes entrenched in Hollywood and turning them on their head through subversive comic techniques.

List helps us see that Hollywood’s Latino stereotypes are one pole of a filmmaking dialectic for Chicanos. Hollywood stereotyping was the Thesis, if you will, and Chicano filmmakers, from their ideological short films and documentaries of the late 1960s and 1970s to their more re-
cent forays into mainstream studio cinema, are busily creating the Antithesis.

And it is the initial counterhegemonic reaction by Chicano filmmakers in the late 1960s that is the subject of Chon Noriega’s impressively comprehensive study, *Shot in America: Television, the State, and the Rise of Chicano Cinema.* In it, Noriega marshals a mountain of evidence to make clear that Chicano activists’ protests against demeaning stereotypes were a central motivating factor in the birth of Chicano cinema. In 1968 Chicano groups in Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., and San Antonio protested against advertisers, television networks, and film studios that disseminated “derogatory stereotypes against Mexican Americans, Mexicans, and other Latino groups.” They were particularly incensed at depictions of “Mexicans as ‘stupid, shiftless, dirty, immoral, and lackey-bandido types.’” 67 By 1970 the protests had spread to the Academy Awards, industry guilds, and television stations, and, as two activists, Armando Rendon and Domingo Nick Reyes, put it, “Chicanos no longer will stand to be stereotyped—the days of the ‘bandido’ and the sleepy Mexican caricature are gone. We are making demands of every institution of society and every agency of government.” 68

As Noriega so convincingly shows, stereotypes became a major site of struggle for the Chicano Movement, and the Chicano activism on Latino representation took dead aim at the structure and practices of the commercial broadcasting and film industries. The assumption was that the racist discourse within the larger society, and the resulting social relations, were to a great extent shaped by media stereotypes. According to Rendon and Reyes, the mainstream media were “destructive forces” in the Chicano community. 69 By the early 1970s, Chicano cinema had become an integral component of the broader Chicano social movement. 70 This counter-stereotyping rationale, then, formed the roots of Chicano filmmaking and of Chicano film theory and criticism, and this activist legacy continues to influence filmmakers and critics to this day.

Therefore, in order to better understand Chicano cinema and criticism, it is worthwhile to look at the actual stereotypes in Hollywood film that caused the initial furor. But before describing and analyzing the basic Latino stereotypes (in Chapter 3), I will discuss how stereotyping operates in films and how the stereotyping process is embedded within Hollywood film language and the norms of “good filmmaking.”