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# **Gendering Illegality: Undocumented Young Adults' Negotiation of the Family Formation Process**

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## **Abstract**

Although previous scholarship demonstrates that gender profoundly impacts the immigrant incorporation process, few studies assess the role of gender in the lives of 1.5 generation undocumented young adults. Drawing on 92 in-depth interviews, I examine how gender and immigration status intersect to impact undocumented young adults' dating, marriage, and parenting experiences. Although all undocumented young adults face the same structural limitations, I argue that their gendered social position leads men and women to experience and negotiate their illegality differently. Gendered expectations make immigration status relevant in different ways throughout of the family formation process, and affect undocumented young adults' ability to negotiate the limitations associated with their immigration status. As a result, undocumented young men are less likely than women to fully participate in family formation and move toward social incorporation. These findings suggest that gender plays a significant role in shaping experiences of illegality and that navigating gendered expectations is an important micro-level process within immigrant incorporation.

## **Keywords**

Illegality, gender expectations, undocumented immigrants, family formation

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There's social norms in terms of guys being the providers, guys taking the girl out on a date. ... [For] a guy who's undocumented, they feel disempowered from fulfilling those social norms ... because they don't have a car, they can't drive girls around. ... I think it shies them away from putting themselves out there.

– Lili Moreno

Lili is one of 11.7 million undocumented U.S. immigrants, one-fifth of which, like her, are 1.5 generation young adults who entered before the age of 16 and are currently under 35 (Passel, Cohn, & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2013). Explaining how her immigration status has limited her dating life, Lili pointed to how it prevented her from obtaining a driver's license. However, she quickly added that gendered dating expectations made this barrier more consequential for her two undocumented brothers because they are expected to drive and she is not. Lili's observation suggests that gendered expectations differentiate how illegality influences the family formation experiences of undocumented young adults.

Scholars have established that undocumented status limits the incorporation of 1.5-generation young adults and some contend that it is a “master status” that eclipses other social locations (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012; Gonzales, 2015; Terriquez, 2015). However, this framing does not account for the ways in which social locations, like gender, influence immigrant incorporation. In contrast, other studies show that gender impacts the experiences of documented and undocumented first-generation immigrants (Abrego, 2014a; Golash-Boza & Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2013; Itzigsohn & Giorguli-Saucedo, 2005; Menjivar, 1999; Salcido & Menjivar, 2012; Schmalzbauer, 2014; Smith, 2006). Although some studies about 1.5 generation undocumented young adults include discussion of gender differences (Abrego, 2014a; Gonzales, Suárez-

Orozco, & Dedios-Sanguinetti, 2013), we know relatively little about how gender influences their everyday experiences of illegality.

In this article, I compare the experiences of 1.5-generation undocumented young men and women to argue that they negotiate illegality differently given their gendered social positions. Using data from in-depth interviews, I find that although undocumented young men and women similarly struggle with the structural limitations related to their immigration status, gendered expectations make the limitations relevant in different ways and in different phases of the family formation process. Further, diverging opportunities for agency contribute to gendered differences in the long-term consequences that immigration status has on family formation and social incorporation. Therefore, gendering illegality improves our understanding about short and long-term immigrant incorporation.

### **Conceptualizing Illegality and Considering Gender**

The concept of illegality centers on how laws have created and sustained an undocumented immigrant category, and highlights how immigration status has become an increasingly consequential source of social stratification (Massey, 2008; Menjivar & Kanstroom, 2014; Ngai, 2004; Waters & Gerstein Pineau, 2015). Undocumented 1.5-generation youth occupy a unique form of illegality wherein they experience both inclusive and exclusion because various laws and policies have granted them access to specific rights, allowing them to participate in some social institutions, such as schools, but not others, such as work (Gonzales, 2015). Various governmental policies produce and sustain illegality. The threat of deportation promotes a constant state of hyper-vigilance and fear that encourages undocumented immigrants to limit their social participation (De Genova, 2002). They cannot legally access employment, which forces them into jobs where they are underpaid and exploited (Donato & Sisk, 2012;

Fussell, 2011; Gleeson, 2010). Laws also limit undocumented immigrants physical mobility since many states, including California at the time of data collection, deny undocumented immigrants access to state-issued driver's licenses (NILC, 2015). This forces individuals either to rely on public transportation or risk of being caught driving without a license and facing steep fines, vehicle impoundment, and/or potential detention (Armenta, 2017; Gabrielson, 2010). Further, not having a state-issued ID can limit social participation as they can be denied entry to age-restricted spaces, identified as "other," and feel stigmatized.

Given the severe consequences of undocumented status for immigrant incorporation, some scholars have argued that it is a master status that eclipses all other social characteristics in its effect on individuals' lives. For example, Gonzales (2015) writes that "by the end of their twenties [undocumented young adults] viewed illegality as the most salient feature of their lives, trumping their achievements and overwhelming almost all of their other roles and identities" (178-179). Although they acknowledge that other attributes, like race and class, contribute to inequality, they suggest these are overshadowed by undocumented status. In contrast, my prior work suggests that immigration status does not function as a master status, but works in conjunction with race, class, gender, and first-generation-to-college statuses (Enriquez, 2016a). Few other studies have paid explicit attention to how 1.5-generation young adults' experiences of illegality are mediated by another social location.

Previous research on gender and immigration emphasizes the experiences of first-generation adults and reveals the critical role of gender in shaping immigrant incorporation. Scholars show how gender and illegality influence a wide variety of migration outcomes: individual and household decisions to migrate, migration journeys, legalization patterns, settlement experiences, initial and long-term labor market experiences, parenting of children in

sending and receiving countries, transnational activities, and return migration patterns (Abrego, 2014b; Donato, 1993, 2010; Donato & Gabaccia, 2015; Donato, Wagner, & Patterson, 2008; Dreby, 2010, 2015; Flippen, 2016; Hagan, 1998; Hamilton, 2015; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Nobles, 2011; Parrado & Flippen, 2005; Smith, 2006). Recent work on first-generation undocumented adults also suggests that gender roles and expectations influence when, where, and how undocumented individuals experience the limitations associated with their immigration status (Abrego, 2014a; Golash-Boza & Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2013; Salcido & Menjivar, 2012; Schmalzbauer, 2014). Scholars have also established that there are significant generational differences in experiences of illegality (Abrego, 2011; Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012). Thus, building on these prior studies, I investigate the micro-level mechanisms through which gender influences the incorporation of 1.5 generation undocumented young men and women.

### **Gendered Expectations in the Family Formation Process**

Gender schemas – the frameworks that individuals use to organize cultural understandings into gendered associations (Bem, 1983) – are a micro-level mechanism through which gender and undocumented status intersect to structure experiences of illegality. The migration process exposes first generation immigrants to new gender ideologies that are negotiated and reconciled with pre-existing ones from countries of origin (Abrego, 2014b; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Montes, 2013). In contrast, 1.5 and second generation children of immigrants acculturate to U.S.-based middle-class gender schemas (Coltrane, Parke, & Adams, 2004; Segura, 1994; Smith, 2006). Although specific gender schemas may be mediated by class, ethnicity, and sexuality (Carrillo, 2004; Itzigsohn & Giorguli-Saucedo, 2005; Menjivar, 1999), 1.5 generation immigrants negotiate gender schemas and ideologies distinct from those held by first generation immigrants.

Undocumented 1.5 generation young adults negotiate U.S. middle-class gendered expectations while attempting to date, marry, and parent. This includes gendered family expectations of women as dependent and nurturing caregivers and men as economic providers and protectors (Glenn, Chang, & Forcey, 1994; Ray, 2008). As such, men expect to plan, drive, and pay for dates and assess self-worth based on their socioeconomic position and ability to provide (Eaton & Rose, 2011; Townsend, 2002). Women occupy caretaker roles as they take primary responsibility for children and perform core household tasks (Hochschild, 2003; Sullivan, 2011). Although gendered expectations are in flux in the United States, most people encounter and grapple with traditional expectations as they participate in family formation (Jaramillo-Sierra & Allen, 2012; Katz-Wise, Priess, & Hyde, 2010; Vespa, 2009).

Structural limitations related to socioeconomic status may limit the ability to live up to gendered expectations. For example, low socioeconomic status often necessitates that women work, which may impede their performance of traditional mothering roles, or lead men to delay marriage because they cannot provide economically (Edin & Reed, 2005; Landry, 2000; Segura, 1994; Smock, Manning, & Porter, 2005). Despite attempts to reimagine gender norms in light of structural limitations, some may still use dominant expectations to evaluate or criticize them (Abrego, 2014b; Ladd-Taylor & Umansky, 1998; Townsend, 2002).

### **Data and Methodology**

I draw on 92 interviews with 89 Mexican-origin and three Guatemalan-origin undocumented young adults, ages 20-34. Participants are 1.5-generation immigrants, who entered the United States before the age of 16 (approximately 40 percent before age six and 40 percent between ages 6 and 10). This purposive sample was designed to include equal numbers of men and women from a wide range of education levels. Table 1 displays demographic

information by gender and reveals few differences between men and women. The one exception is for relationship status; men were more likely than women to be single or cohabitating, and less likely to be currently or previously married.

*[Table 1 about here]*

My analysis focuses on heteronormative family formation between men and women. Almost every respondent desired, or had begun to form, a family through marriage and/or childbearing. Of the three-quarters of participants who were not married or cohabitating at the time of the interview, all but one aspired to find a partner and most expected to or had children. Forty-eight individuals were single, 22 were dating someone with relationship lengths ranging from months to years, 6 were cohabitating, and 16 were married or in a permanent relationship they understood as married. Of those in a relationship, 27 were partnered with U.S. citizens, 14 with undocumented individuals, and 3 with legal permanent residents. Of the 29 parents, ten were mothers who were the sole caregiver and two were fathers who shared parenting responsibilities. Children's ages ranged from 0 to 15 years, with half under age four.

As low-income Latinas/os, my participants grew up and lived in racially and economically segregated neighborhoods. This residential segregation shaped their social networks and produced a Latina/o dominated marriage market. Most reported meeting partners within Latina/o-dominated social spaces such as school or work; community organizations and churches; clubs or bars; and through friends and family. In addition, many stated a preference for Latina/o partners because of their shared cultural background and belief that Latinas/os would be more understanding of their immigration status. Thus, only 17 of the 92 participants had previously dated a non-Latina/o and only two of the 44 individuals in a relationship were partnered with a non-Latina/o. Although they were present in mixed-immigration status spaces,



those who pursued higher education were more likely to develop broader social networks, access dating markets with larger concentrations of citizens, and express explicit preferences for citizen partners (see Enriquez, 2016b).

Interviews were conducted between November 2011 and August 2012 in Southern California. I initiated snowball sampling by selecting twelve individuals, with varying levels of education and separate social circles, from the extensive networks I built through four years of previous research with college- and community-based undocumented youth organizations. All participants received a \$20 incentive for being interviewed and an additional \$10 incentive for referring others, usually extended family members, neighbors, former classmates, co-workers, and friends. Participants chose the interview language and all but five were interviewed in English. Spanish-language interview quotes were translated into English but Spanish terms used in English interviews were retained with translations provided. All respondents were assigned pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.

Interviews lasted an average of two hours and were directed by a semi-structured interview guide that included questions about general expectations, past and present experiences, and future anticipations for dating, marriage, and parenting. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using open coding techniques to identify the range of potential experiences and feelings about family formation. I then developed discrete codes and compared responses across gender and education to assess their effects on family formation. These comparisons revealed significant differences by gender. Although education influences family formation patterns, comparisons across educational attainment and enrollment status did not reveal differences in gendered aspects of family formation.

### **Without a Driver's License or ID: Negotiating Different Aspects of Illegality**

At the time of data collection, California and most U.S. states did not allow undocumented immigrants to obtain a state-issued identification card or driver's license – documents held by approximately 95 percent of adults in California (DMV, 2013).<sup>1</sup> There were two distinct consequences in the context of dating. First, participants did not have a state-issued form of identification to prove their age. Forced to use a passport or consular ID from their country of origin, they risked being denied services and facing stigmatization. Second, without a driver's license they must drive without a license – facing steep fines and/or the threat of deportation – or use some other means of transportation. Although undocumented men and women were equally unable to obtain this document, not having a license affected their ability to ascribe to contemporary U.S. gendered dating scripts where women are dependent participants and men plan and drive on the date (Eaton & Rose, 2011). These gendered expectations made immigration status relevant in different ways and structured the level of agency exerted in their presentation of self (Goffman, 1959).

Prior to a date, men exerted more agency to select activities in line with their structural limitations while women were forced to negotiate their lack of a state-issued ID on the date. Cruz Vargas explained that gendered expectations allowed him to reduce the risk of being limited by his immigration status: “I’m very good with words so I’d just work my way around it. ... Let’s say some girl wanted to go somewhere. I’ll just be like, ‘I heard the place is wack. ... I know a better place.’ ... And then I’ll just convince them ... [to go where] I know I can go.” Cruz, and most male participants, embraced their gender role as courters and used this to privately manage not having an ID and increase their successful participation in dating activities. Alternatively, women’s dependent gender role placed them in situations where they risked being rejected for

lacking an ID. They creatively managed their limitations in the moment to avoid revealing their status – shielding their ID from their dates or suggesting alternative activities. Thus, gendered expectations limited their agency and contributed to anxiety. Julieta Castillo described the negative thoughts that emerge as she prepared for a date:

[I think]: Are they going to take my passport? Are they going to give me crap about it?" ... It's an anxiety. ... The embarrassment it's going to cost. ... How are you going to explain, "Oh wait, I can't go in." [Answering questions like,] "Why don't you have a California ID?" So I hate it! I hate it! I really do.

Like Julieta, most women reported feeling anxious about their date's response to their immigration status and/or being unable to participate in the planned activity, suggesting that gender makes immigration status relevant in different ways.

Although women's lack of agency in managing their self-presentation created anxiety, it had few consequences for romantic relationships. No women respondents reported being rejected by a partner. Mercedes Velez recounted an experience in which her ID was rejected at a bar during her first date with a citizen man who eventually became her boyfriend: "I think it showed a lot about him ... [that] even though I got denied he was like, 'Well let's go somewhere else.' ... I think that's what made me get more attracted to him." Despite creating anxiety and potentially forcing them to reveal their immigration status, undocumented women were largely able to date. In most cases, male partners tended to react supportively, like Mercedes' date. Although these experiences reinforce unequal relationships, they also suggest that illegality does not prevent undocumented women from dating because their structural limitations are in line with traditional gendered dating expectations.

On the other hand, men often took on the risks of driving without a license to meet gendered expectations. Omar Valenzuela explained, “[My girlfriend’s] like, ‘I don’t know where you’re taking me, so you drive.’ It’s kind of like the man’s role.” As a result, Omar suffered consequences – he was pulled over and given a thousand dollar ticket for driving without a license. Although tickets and fines represent deep economic risks for undocumented young adults with limited financial resources, Omar’s situation could have been even more expensive if his car had been impounded, and potentially catastrophic if he had been detained for immigration officials. Despite Omar’s desire to avoid driving and the fact that his citizen girlfriend knew about his immigration status and could legally drive, unquestioned gender roles encouraged him and others to risk driving without a license. At times this was because not meeting these expectations risked ending relationships. Erick Godinez explained, “[Girls,] they ask me, ‘Why don’t you get a car?’ ... I don’t want to do it because I don’t want to risk it. ... They get tired of going in a taxi or a bus or all that.” Erick reported that fights about his refusing to drive led women to break up with him. Thus, in my sample, gendered expectations forced undocumented men to choose between the risk of driving without a license or sacrificing a potential relationship. This finding may be specific to Southern Californian urban sprawl, an area that largely relies on private automobiles rather than public transportation. Living in areas with public transportation may increase undocumented young adults’ flexibility to (re)negotiate gendered expectations.

As they entered more stable dating relationships, some men tried to renegotiate gendered expectations. Cruz Vargas tried asking his citizen Latina girlfriend to drive: “I don’t wanna feel like this [insecure and unsafe] every day. [I tell her,] ‘You can drive. You can actually legally drive. So why don’t you just drive.’ She’s like, ‘Oh. Well, I’m tired. I don’t wanna drive.’ So I’ll

drive.” Although Cruz and other men attempted to adapt their dating activities given their undocumented status, they often found that partners would not permit a complete reversal of gender roles, making it impossible to completely avoid these risks. Although many participants suggested that Latina/o citizen partners were more understanding of their immigration status than non-Latinas/os, some, like Cruz, reported that they were not necessarily willing to fully disrupt prescribed gender roles. Alternatively, women participants did not report conflict or worry about transportation issues, regardless of their partner’s immigration status. Elena Loera explained the situation between her and her citizen boyfriend who lives forty-five minutes away, “I’m pretty sure there’s couples that alternate, like I’ll go see you, you come see me. I can’t do that. *Does he come and see you every weekend?* Yeah. . . . He’s never complained.” While Cruz had a difficult time convincing his girlfriend to drive and was constantly negotiating gendered norms to fit his immigration status, Elena’s arrangement happened seamlessly as her boyfriend willingly drove. This suggests that the limitations imposed by undocumented status align more easily with women’s dependent gender role, leading to less relationship conflict for undocumented women.

### **Financial Uncertainty: Illegality in Different Phases of Family Formation**

Undocumented young adults also face limited and uncertain finances because they do not have valid social security numbers with which to legally obtain employment. As a result, undocumented status generally restricts people to low-income jobs where they have inconsistent and/or limited hours and little opportunity for upward mobility. Although my sample is not representative, trends among participants shed some light on how undocumented status restricts financial situations. Approximately three-quarters of the sample reported holding minimum-wage, service-sector jobs, such as restaurant workers, salespeople, and administrative assistants. Employed participants earned an average annual income of slightly more than \$16,000. Notably,

gender and educational level appears related to the type of work and annual income of participants (see table 2). On average, women earned about \$1,600 less a year than men due to working an average of four hours less a week and sometimes holding jobs that paid less than men with comparable levels of education. Educational level is also related: college graduates, particularly women, were more likely to occupy lower-level management positions or salaried employment.

*[Table 2 about here]*

Although undocumented status limited the economic participation of both men and women, gender refracted financial limitations in a way that was most negative for men's participation in family formation. Although many men found ways to negotiate their role as financial providers while dating, these strategies lost effectiveness as they considered marriage and parenting. This is because the symbolic role of finances transformed into expectations that they be consistent financial providers. On the other hand, undocumented women were not limited by their financial situations until they transitioned into parenthood. Women's gendered expectations shifted from dependent provider to active caregiver, a shift that, on the one hand, offered them more flexibility to negotiate parental roles, but on the other, made it difficult to meet mothering expectations.

### ***“I Can't Really Offer Anything”: Men's Struggle with Marriage Transitions***

Prior to considering marriage, undocumented men find ways to negotiate their financial uncertainty because, as Noel Barrera noted, men are “expected to pay” when they go out on a date. Ivan Cardenas explained that he postpones dates if his immediate financial circumstances leave him unable to meet expectations that he cover costs: “If I get my paycheck and I already paid my bills and all I have left is fifty bucks, I'd rather tell her, ‘Let's go out next week when I

have more money.’ Or I say, ‘I can’t go out. I’m busy.’ Sometimes it’s a bad feeling when you go out and you can’t really buy everything you want because all you have is fifty dollars.”

Therefore, Ivan, a gardener with a limited and inconsistent income, cancelled dates rather than admitting he could not meet expectations. Many undocumented young men developed similar short-term strategies to situationally negotiate gendered provider expectations while dating.

Situationally negotiating financial limitations may lead some undocumented men to stop dating, effectively precluding their transition to marriage. Jesus Perez explained that his undocumented status forces him to remain in a low-level managerial job at a fast food restaurant and prevents him from having the financial stability to consistently pay for dates: “It makes me afraid. ... Let’s say my [hypothetical] partner wants to go out and she asks me to go out. I don’t want to say, ‘I don’t have any money.’ [It] makes me embarrassed I guess. I want to be the one in power of the situation.” Jesus noted that he had not been on a date in two years because he is unable to meet his own, and what he imagines are a potential partner’s, expectations that he be a financially-stable provider. Further, he suggested that this sense of financial uncertainty is distinct to undocumented young adults because citizen men are able to “use their credit cards” to make ends meet. Thus, it is not a surprise that men were more likely than women to report that their immigration status contributed to ending a relationship. Daniel Hernandez described how his immigration status, and the financial limitations associated with it, directly contributed to his girlfriend’s decision to break up with him:

The whole me not being independent thing just started becoming too much for her. ... [She’s] like “I’m investing more time in this than you are and sometimes more money.” Cause I’d be like, “Hey, I don’t have money right now.” ... I think

she realized that she might end up having to support me in some way ... So she's like, "No, it's over."

Other men reported similar experiences and in some cases noted that these breakups reinforced the notion that gendered provider expectations had to be met to successfully pursue relationships. Although some men recovered and were able to pursue other relationships, some like Jesus and Daniel avoided dating. This suggests that, for at least some undocumented men, persistent financial uncertainty limited involvement in family formation early in the dating phase.

Discussing marriage decisions, most men noted that they planned to delay, or had delayed, marriage until they could meet provider expectations, usually after securing relatively stable employment. Rafael Montelongo discussed his citizen girlfriend's marriage expectations: "She wants me to take her from her dad[']s house] to [our] house. I don't even have a house! She wants me to buy all the furniture and all that stuff. In my head I'm just seeing that as pretty much impossible right now. I can barely afford to live by myself [in a rented room] and pay for school." Rafael's two part-time jobs did not allow him to meet provider expectations, straining their three and a half year relationship because he was unable to predict when, or if, he would be financially stable enough to marry. Although some citizen men may face similar financial limitations, undocumented men feel uncertain about their ability to meet provider expectations and transition into marriage while remaining economically marginalized.

Some undocumented men found ways to navigate these limitations, either by renegotiating more egalitarian roles and/or meeting partners' specific gendered expectations. For example, eight women participants, mostly with lower levels of education, were permanently partnered with undocumented men. Nancy Ortega explained how immigration status and provider expectations informed her partner choice: "I knew his immigration status was the same



as mine, but I guess because he has a lot of willpower and he's not afraid to work for what he has. ... [Other guys I dated] they just assumed that because they were U.S. citizens, life would be easy on them, and it's not how it is." Like Nancy, several women noted that they believed undocumented men would be more economically stable partners than second-generation Latino peers, who faced high structural barriers to their educational and economic upward mobility. In this stratified context, undocumented men are sometimes perceived as more likely to perform traditional masculinity than citizen men.

Although undocumented women in my sample had comparable or lower incomes than the men, no women discussed limited funds as a reason not to date. Many, like Elena Loera, simply explained that "the guy pays." Yet, some expressed more egalitarian gender scripts saying that they prefer to split dating costs. Edith Sandoval described the evolution of her expectations: "[My mom] always said, 'The guy has to pay.' ... [But now] doing this 50/50 thing makes me feel so much better." Although some women held alternative gendered expectations, their financial burden was half that of men's and they were able to selectively adhere to their own egalitarian scripts because men did not expect them to pay. Thus, when an undocumented woman's uncertain finances prevented her from paying for her share of a date, she was more likely to allow the man to pay rather than postpone dates (as men did). This suggests women's dependent gender role creates positive spaces of agency given uncertain financial situations.

Unlike men, women were able to continue their situational navigation of financial limitations, which did not terminate relationships or disrupt transitions to marriage. Most participants held gendered expectations that women would be somewhat financially (inter)dependent on their husbands, either by working to contribute to family income or as stay-at-home wives and mothers. Although most women expected to work, most men believed that

they should provide for their family's financial needs on their own. Abel Leon explained, "I want to offer something. That's how I see myself. I have money. I want to have ... probably an apartment. ... Something secure. And that's the reason I don't want to get married, I can't really offer anything." While men focused on what they could provide before considering marriage, women insisted that their own financial situation would not influence marriage decisions. Tanya Diaz believed that her immigration status and its financial limitations could cause tensions if she were to marry and become a financial burden to her future husband: "I'm going to be a financial struggle to them if my car gets taken away. ... I get no social security, I can't contribute as much." Despite concerns about how this may affect relationship dynamics, she did not intend to delay marriage because her dependent gender role did not require her to alleviate her partners' financial burdens. Although undocumented men and women worried about building a financially stable home, women's gender roles did not require them to actively address this limitation. As a result, the financial instability associated with illegality did not influence women's marriage decisions in the same way it did men's, even when women believed it could subsequently influence married life.

### ***"Taking Care" v.s. "Buying Something": Women and Men's Struggles in Parenthood***

Motherhood shifts women's gender role from dependent participant to active caregiver, leaving undocumented women to negotiate the financial limitations associated with immigration status. Most mothers felt that they were meeting parenting-specific gendered expectations because they cared for and spent time with their children. For example, Sylvia Cortez saw herself as a good mother to her toddler son because "[I] take care of him, raise him as a good boy [to] be respectful with other people, ... be there for him when he is sick." Notably, she focused on her son's socio-emotional development rather than the economic barriers she faced from earning

\$1,200 a month. By doing so, Sylvia capitalized on caretaking expectations that were compatible with both working outside the home from 9am to 5pm and her moderate income. In general, most mothers felt that their undocumented status did not prevent them being caretakers and all spent significant time with their children even – even though all but five<sup>2</sup> worked outside the home.

Yet, immigration status prevented some women from meeting gender roles if their employment situation did not allow them to perform key caretaker responsibilities. Sara Romero, a single mother to a toddler, recounted how her job created perceptions that she was a “bad” mother: “Sometimes my mom would be like, ‘You’re a bad mom because all you care about is work and on your days off all you want to do is sleep.’” Sara struggled to meet the gendered expectations set forth for mothers because her undocumented status forced her to take the only stable job she could find – working nights at a bar and getting home at 3:30 am. As a result, she was unable to put her toddler son to bed and struggled to wake up with him in the middle of the night and early morning. Consistent with other studies on working mothers (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Landry, 2000), Sara attempted to reimagine herself as a good mother by focusing on her ability to financially provide but she often could not meet others’ expectations which led to negative feelings about parenting. In this way, for a few undocumented women, employment restrictions related to undocumented status emerged – often for the first time – as a limiting factor in their family formation experiences.

Fathers also struggled with gendered parenting expectations as financial providers. Therefore, their immigration status influenced parenting experiences in similar ways as it did marriage decisions. Most fathers felt negatively about their parenting because they struggled to financially provide for their children. Adán Olivera was one of a few who felt he was a “good”

father because: “I take them places like Disneyland, to the park; I buy them anything that I didn’t have. ... Every time we go out we’ll just buy them something.” Adán internalized this paternal provider role and found that he was able to live up to expectations because he secured work as a salaried office employee despite lacking a social security number. He admitted that it would be significantly harder to be a “good” father if he had a minimum wage job similar to his undocumented friends, “because it would not be providing me enough money.” In fact, most men, regardless of if they were already fathers, believed that their jobs did not pay enough for them to consistently provide for children. Further, some fathers faced heavy criticism and developed negative self-conceptions when their undocumented status prevented them from meeting other’s gendered expectations. Ray Guzman explained that he felt judged for not having a job that allows him to financially provide for his children:

As a father, I feel worthless. ... I’m 28 and when I go apply for something for my kids or [at their] school, they want to know what I’m doing [for work]. They look at me a lot different. They tell me, “Oh, well you’re not doing nothing. How do you provide for your family?” I do side jobs. And they say, “Well you don’t have a stable income.”... I feel like I’m handicap[ped] in some way.

Despite attempting to redefine himself positively by spending quality time with his children, Ray still felt negatively because he could only find intermittent work as a handyman. These concerns are reflected in his belief that he was also a less than ideal partner given that his children’s mother was the one who covered rent and bills. Although Ray’s circumstances were more dire than most, many similarly struggled with financial limitations associated with illegality and felt constrained by gendered parenting expectations.

The intersection of gendered parenting expectations and economic limitations led to divergent consequences for parenting experiences as women and men negotiated different levels of financial demand. In particular, fathers focused on the relatively high costs of consistently providing for basic needs while mothers emphasized lower costs that limited their caregiving. Compare how Luis Escobar and Aida Mendoza discussed the effect of their financial limitations on their children:

*Luis:* I'm still [supposed to be] perceived as this male provider [who's] strong.

And the fact that we lost our place and now I'm [living] with my in-laws and it's hard to find a great paying job. And I have this uncertain future for myself. ... It makes you feel guilty that you have a family and that you have a baby.

*Aida:* Just recently he got very sick. He needed a humidifier and we had to look around with people that we knew to see who could lend it to us [because we could not afford to buy one]. ... It breaks my heart that I can't do anything for him.

While Luis and Aida both reported negative consequences of their financial limitations, they confronted different levels of financial need with divergent frequency. Luis had to consistently muster over a thousand dollars a month to cover the cost of rent and bills, while Aida struggled to afford a one-time relatively small expense of approximately \$30-40. Despite the difference, mothers and fathers conducted a considerable amount of emotional work as they felt guilty about the limitations that their immigration status placed on their children (Enriquez, 2015). However, fathers experienced these negative feelings on an almost daily basis in response to broader provider demands while mothers noted isolated incidents related to caretaking expenses. In part,

this is because there are few resources that help undocumented fathers afford basic expenses like rent and bills, while undocumented mothers may access a variety of social programs, like Medical and WIC<sup>3</sup>, or low-cost after-school activities, that help them care for their children. This suggests that undocumented status differently shapes men and women's parenting experience because their gendered expectations require them to mobilize different amounts of financial resources with varying consistency. While fathers were most disadvantaged, mothers also struggled to meet expectations if they did not have the flexibility and/or resources needed to reimagine and perform caretaking roles.

### **Conclusion**

Despite facing the same structural barriers, gendered expectations lead undocumented young men and women to experience and negotiate their illegality differently. Specifically, when dating, men are limited by not having a driver's license and women are limited by not having a state-issued ID. Because gendered expectations shift over the course of a relationship, undocumented young men and women face immigration status limitations at different phases in their life. For example, men face the highest barriers when transitioning from boyfriends to permanent partners/husbands and women when transitioning from dependent girlfriends/wives to mothers. Finally, gendered expectations also influence the agency that individuals exercise when negotiating limitations related to immigration status. For instance, men's gendered role as courters allows them to exert agency by selecting activities in line with not having a state-issued ID but limiting their ability to negotiate the financial and physical risks associated with driving without a license. Diverging opportunities to exercise agency to meet, reimagine, or (re)negotiate gendered expectations make it likely that undocumented young men are not fully participating in family formation.

These findings may shed light on the potential long-term consequences of undocumented status. If sustained, they suggest that men's gender roles are more incompatible with barriers related to immigration status, which in turn prevents them from pursuing and successfully committing to dating relationships, marriage, and parenting. Such negative consequences are more likely when individuals and/or their partners are unable to negotiate undocumented status limitations or unwilling to (re)negotiate traditional gendered expectations to align with these limitations. Place may play a critical role in facilitating the agency necessary to negotiate immigration status (Schmalzbauer, 2014) and minimizing long-term consequences. Specifically, the urbanity and large (undocumented) immigrant population in Southern California creates spaces where alternative IDs, such as passports or consulate ID cards, are readily available through country of origin consulate offices and often accepted at stores, bars, and restaurants. Thus, place can mediate long-term consequences by influencing the production of illegality and providing opportunities for flexibility and (re)negotiation.

Undocumented young adults' family formation experiences reveal that gender plays a significant role in experiences of illegality. This challenges previous conceptualizations of illegality that imagine undocumented status alone as a "master status" that eclipses all other social locations (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012; Gonzales, 2015; Terriquez, 2015). Although I show that undocumented status is a source of social stratification that substantially limits family formation, I also demonstrate that gender significantly modifies experiences of illegality. Future work should systematically engage in gendering illegality in other institutional contexts by exploring within-group differences and/or engaging in intersectional or relational analyses (see Abrego, 2014a; Enriquez, 2016a). These types of analyses capture the complexity of illegality

across different social locations, and will reveal important variation in undocumented immigrant experiences.

My findings also suggest that negotiating one's own and others' gendered expectations is a significant micro-level process that differentiates immigrants' social incorporation. Future work should continue exploring the significance of this process for incorporation and assimilation. To do this, we need to better understand how gendered expectations are formed and negotiated among 1.5 and second generation immigrants and the extent to which they are associated with larger incorporation patterns. Although previous work has focused on the experiences of first generation immigrants and the importance of gender schemas from the country of origin (Gonzalez-Lopez, 2005; Hirsch, 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Parrado & Flippen, 2005), the 1.5-generation participants in this study largely reference U.S.-based hegemonic gender norms. Their only exposure to gendered expectations from countries of origin derive from parents' expectations, which are modified by their own incorporation experiences. Future research should investigate what informs the gendered norms and expectations developed by the children of immigrants and how differences in gender schemas may influence how gender mediates incorporation and assimilation patterns.

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## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> This has changed since data collection. Undocumented young adults who received Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status, a federal prosecutorial discretion program begun in 2012 for a select group of undocumented youth, became eligible to receive a state-issued ID or driver's license. Additionally, California began issuing driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants in 2015.

<sup>2</sup> At the time of the interview, three were unemployed by choice because they were caring for their young children and two were looking for work.

<sup>3</sup> Medi-Cal, or the California Medical Assistance Program, is California's Medicaid program serving low-income individuals. It provides health insurance to low-income citizen children of undocumented parents and pregnant undocumented women for the duration of their pregnancy. WIC, or the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women Infants and Children, is a federally-funded program that provides supplemental food to pregnant women and children up to the age of five.

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<b>Table 1: Participant Demographic Information by Gender</b>			
<b>Demographic Information</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Age at interview (years)</b>			
Average age	25.5	26.0	25.8
Age range	20-34	20-33	20-34
<b>Age at entry (years)</b>			
Average age at entry	6.8	6.9	6.8
Range of age at entry	0-15	0-16	0-16
<b>Relationship status (number of participants)</b>			
Single, never married	16	24	40
Single, previously married	6	2	8
Exclusive dating relationship	14	8	22
Cohabiting relationship	1	5	6
Currently married	12	4	16
<b>Current partners' immigration status (number of participants)</b>			
Citizen	14	13	27
Legal Permanent Resident	3	0	3
Undocumented	10	4	14
<b>Have children (number of participants)</b>	21	8	29
<b>Yearly income <sup>a</sup> (in dollars)</b>			
Average income	15,218	16,836	16,027
Income range	4,800-50,400	4,800-48,000	4,800-50,400
<b>Level of education (number of participants)</b>			
Did not complete high school	8	7	15
High school diploma	10	6	16
Some college	7	7	14
Currently enrolled in 2-year college	8	8	16
Currently enrolled in 4-year university	7	8	15
Bachelor's degree	9	7	16

<sup>a</sup> Does not include the ten respondents who have no income and the sixteen respondents who did not report their income. Respondents reported average monthly earnings that I converted to annual income. I use the median amount for those who reported an income range.

<b>Table 2. Average Income and Hours Worked Per Week by Gender and Education Level</b>				
	Annual Income (\$)		Hours Worked Per Week	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Did not complete high school	14,400	15,000	45	39
High school diploma	12,690	17,400	37	42
Some college	18,600	18,240	46	47
Currently enrolled in 2-year college	11,040	18,600	30	29
Currently enrolled in 4-year university	9,480	15,257	24	38
Bachelor's degree	23,726	17,040	33	41