UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

# U.S. Citizen Children, Undocumented Immigrant Parents: How Parental Undocumented Status Affects Citizen Children's Educational Achievement

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts

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Latin American Studies (International Migration)

by

Oscar Ramos

Committee in Charge:

Professor April Linton, Chair
Professor Hugh Mehan
Professor Ana Celia Zentella

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The Thesis of Oscar Ramos is approved and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

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# DEDICATION

Sería imposible dedicar este tesis sin empezar agradeciéndoles a mis padres por todo sus sacrificios y los esfuerzos que han hecho durante toda mi vida. Los cerros, la migra, el miedo- nada pudo negarles el logro de una vida digna y el orgullo que ustedes tengan por mí  no compara al que yo siento por ustedes.

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To all the San Diego community organizers who helped me and to the families who participated in this study: I am humbled by the trust that you put in me, allowing their children to share some of the most sensitive family information with practically a total stranger. I hope that our immigration policy will eventually recognize these immigrants' valuable contributions to our society and reward them for raising educated American adults.

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There are over 3 million U.S. citizen children being raised by undocumented immigrant parents, with little known about how these parents' undocumented status affects their children's educational achievement. This study seeks to understand how Mexican immigrant parents' undocumented status informs their U.S. citizen children's development of ethnic self-identity and how the expression of this ethnic identity justifies the adoption of behavior conducive or detrimental to educational success.

Eleven U.S. citizen children from ten families headed by undocumented Mexican immigrants in San Diego County were interviewed between September 2006 and March 2007. Students answered a questionnaire, followed by a transcribed, qualitative interview. Students were asked to discuss their awareness of their parents' struggles as undocumented immigrants and to what extent those struggles were relevant to their own educational experiences.

While is no direct relationship between parental undocumented status and U.S. citizen children's educational achievement, children tend to develop identities that identify with their parents' struggles. The behaviors that these identities permit vary, depending on a variety of family circumstances. Some families are better able to shelter their children from the effects of parental undocumented status, or able to shape how their children internalize the meaning of the parents' undocumented status, while parental undocumented status exacerbates already negative circumstances in other families. Yet all families headed by undocumented immigrants face the possibility of parental deportation, which has the potential to completely undermine the family's ability to raise educationally successful American citizen children to adulthood.

**Chapter I:** Research Question: How Does Parental Undocumented Status Affect their Adolescent Citizen Children's Performance in School?

Throughout the lead-up to the November 2006 American midterm election, immigration was at the forefront of local and national political debates. The Sensenbrenner Bill, HR 4437, sought to criminalize all undocumented immigrants and called for the creation of a triple fence spanning the entire U.S.-Mexican border. While the Senate worked toward a more comprehensive bill, the House bill prompted hundreds of thousands of immigrant supporters to rally in major cities throughout the country in March, followed by a May 1 national immigrant boycott. While the federal government debated throughout the summer over the ideal kind of immigrant legislation, local governments preempted action by enacting their own anti-immigrant ordinances. Vista, California, passed a June ordinance requiring day laborer employers to register with the city, while nearby Escondido passed an October ordinance banning landlords from renting to undocumented immigrants, which was later overturned. These local debates over how to counter the effect of undocumented immigration reflected the national debate, in that they largely focused on the economic effect of undocumented immigration. Meanwhile, various Southwest border states sent their state national guards to join the border patrol and Minuteman volunteers in securing the U.S.-Mexican border. Arguments for and against the regularization of undocumented immigrants' status have tended to focus on national security issues and these immigrants' effect on the U.S. economy and national culture. More recently, attention has been drawn to the situation of the 3.1 million U.S. citizen children that

depend on undocumented immigrant parents for economic support and guidance. In one 2006 case that drew national attention, Elvira Arellano sought asylum in a Chicago church while her 8-year old U.S. citizen son went to Washington to plead her case to remain in the country. She was deported to Mexico in August, 2007. This situation highlights the challenge that families headed by undocumented immigrants with U.S. citizen children pose: we do not know the long-term results of having citizen children raised by parents who are socially and politically marginalized and who run the daily risk of deportation.

Discussions about undocumented immigrants' general economic effect, national security, and national identity can all present undocumented immigrants and 'the American nation' as two separate entities and make a case that the former presents a burden or threat to the latter, the often-proposed solution simply being to remove undocumented immigrants and prevent them from returning. It is important for U.S. citizen children to enter the undocumented immigration discussion, as they present a situation in which citizens' interests are essentially intertwined with those of undocumented immigrants. The continued presence of undocumented immigrants is central to the upbringing of future citizen adults, as parents secure resources for their children, such as housing (which root children in a school district), food, clothing, and healthcare. Families also provide a frame of reference by which children learn about their place in society. It is generally believed that, for better or for worse, a child's education starts at home.

This study seeks to understand the effect of parental undocumented status as a factor in influencing adolescent citizen children's educational performance by

examining two processes: 1) how citizen children make sense of and incorporate their parents' legal status into their own identities, and 2) how the expression of these identities affects their educational performance and aspirations.

Since U.S. citizen adults cannot be legally deported, political rhetoric that focuses on deportation as the solution to undocumented immigration ignores the long-term consequences of creating up to 3.1 million children who are orphaned or raised outside of the United States and its school system. With a view towards the long-term benefits for the U.S., with respect to citizen children of undocumented immigrants, this study makes three assumptions. First, that it is best for the U.S. as a whole to have a more educated and participatory/civically minded adult citizen population. The opposite situation, that of having an uneducated adult citizen population unaware of how the American civic and legal system works, is not in the best interests of the country, from neither an economic nor a cultural perspective. Second, that U.S. citizen children are more likely to be acculturated/assimilated if they are raised in the U.S. They are more likely to pick up American English and American norms through the educational system if they are raised in the U.S. than if they are raised in other countries. Thirdly, that it is more likely to benefit a child to be raised by his/her family than to be raised in foster care, with the obvious exception of domestic abuse or neglect. One can assume, then, that it is best for U.S. citizen children to be raised in the U.S. by their parents, considering foster care or the deportation of the entire family (citizen as well as non-citizen members), as the two other options.

I first discuss the historical background of Mexican immigration to the U.S. and major immigration legislation since the nineteenth century, focusing particularly

on California and recent San Diego area ordinances. I then discuss the current state of the Mexican undocumented immigrant community, with a focus on mixed-status families and the limitations of the term in describing the relationship between children's integration and parental undocumented status. I then review the literature on immigrant children's integration, placing segmented assimilation theory's context of reception within the discussion of social identity development. I follow with a proposal of how to better understand what is happening in families of the most extreme mixed status and end with a brief discussion of how the federal government may use this knowledge to create an immigration policy that works towards the benefit of American society as a whole.

*Mexican Immigration in a Historical Context*

Mexican immigration has a relatively long history in California, dating to soon after its transfer to the U.S. from Mexico in 1848. After the U.S. formally excluded Chinese and Japanese workers in the late nineteenth century, employers sought migrant Mexican workers to do agricultural labor in the Southwest (Massey 1995). Despite being recruited by American employers prior to 1924, Mexicans constituted a minor percentage of the early twentieth century wave of immigrants, largely dominated by southern and eastern Europeans, but still suffered from nativist backlashes against immigrants. The 1924 Immigration Act largely put an end to European migration to the U.S., and the Great Depression stimulated even more anti-immigrant sentiment, including the deportation of 400,000 people of Mexican descent.

World War II created a large enough demand for Mexican migrant labor that the U.S. and Mexico agreed to a formal labor agreement. The Bracero Program brought generations of Mexican migrants to do agricultural work in the U.S. and laid the foundations for later social networks that would sustain the waves of documented and undocumented immigration from Mexico after the end of the program in 1964 (Joppke 1998).

The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act was instrumental in stimulating the rise of undocumented migration from Mexico. It gave all Latin American countries, including Mexico, a 20,000 yearly visa limit, far less than what the demand for Mexican migrant labor was. Instead of giving a higher visa quota to Mexico, given the structural demand already set in place after twenty years of bracero labor, it ensured that migration from Mexico would take place outside of the official immigration procedural infrastructure, allowing it to remain undocumented. As result, Mexicans continued to take advantage of the lightly patrolled U.S.-Mexico border throughout the 1960s and into the 1980s (ibid.). By 1985, there was an estimated 3 million undocumented Mexican immigrants in the U.S. (Passel 1985).

The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) was the culmination of the federal government's effort to integrate the country's burgeoning undocumented immigrant population and ensure that it would not resurge in the future. Millions of undocumented immigrants received amnesty, while the government passed employer sanctions laws to discourage the employment of future undocumented immigrants (Cornelius 1989). However, business lobbies watered down employer sanctions provisions, only making it illegal for employers to *knowingly* hire undocumented

immigrants. A national identification card provision failed to pass, making it more difficult for a person to verify his/her citizenship. In the end, the 1986 IRCA failed to implement disincentives for hiring future undocumented immigrants and the number of undocumented immigrants, easily finding employment in a booming 1990s U.S. economy, increased.

Since the passage of the 1994 North American Free Trade Act between Canada, Mexico, and the United States, the tide of undocumented immigration from Mexico has swelled to unprecedented levels (Passel 2006), despite U.S. efforts to build a less permeable border and take away social benefits from non-citizens. California's 1994 Proposition 187, while later overturned, was overwhelmingly passed with the hopes of banning undocumented immigrants from receiving public services, education and health care included. Operation Gatekeeper was enacted that same year, fortifying the San Diego-Mexico border, which would discourage immigrants from making the trip to the U.S. through the desert in southeastern California and Arizona. The Clinton Administration passed the 1996 PROWRA, or Welfare Reform Act, denying Medicare to many legal and undocumented immigrants.

With the lack of federal decisiveness on undocumented immigration, local pressure against undocumented immigrants continues to grow. In San Diego, California, Minuteman volunteers launched a series of protests in 2006 in canyons where many undocumented immigrant agricultural workers were camping. Vista, California, passed an ordinance requiring employers of day laborers to register with the city; while Escondido, California, passed a 2006 ordinance prohibiting landlords from renting to undocumented immigrants (under pressure, the same city council later

voted not to enforce the law). Despite these efforts, an estimated 12 million undocumented immigrants now reside in the U.S., half thought to be from Mexico. Since the various border fortification projects have encouraged more undocumented immigrants to prolong their stay (Cornelius 1998), the population is likely to continue to grow.

The emphasis on the individual person's status as legal or undocumented obscures the reality that the undocumented immigrant population is not totally distinguishable from the legal immigrant or citizen population. In fact, their experiences and well-being are often intertwined. A 2006 Pew Hispanic Center report found that approximately 3.1 million U.S. citizen children live in families headed by at least one undocumented immigrant. (Passel 2006). It is likely that immigrants with children over twenty-one years old would now be residents, as they could have qualified for the 1986 amnesty. Undocumented immigrants began to arrive in increasingly large numbers by the late 1980s and especially in the early 1990s. The earliest of these immigrants would have had children born in the U.S. who are just now on the brink of adulthood, so one can assume that the vast majority of the 3.1 U.S. citizen children of undocumented immigrants are minors.

These families represent the most extreme of mixed-status families, which are comprised of at least one non-citizen parent and at least one citizen child. A mixed-status family could conceivably include a citizen parent and a permanent resident parent with U.S.-born children. Such a family hardly shares the same obstacles to raising their children than one in which both parents face work restrictions and are subject to deportation. Current law states that undocumented immigrant parents are

subject to deportation, regardless of whether their children are U.S.-born citizens. In a case where a citizen girl was subject to female genital mutilation if she were deported to Nigeria with her undocumented immigrant mother, the court found that “an alien parent who has no legal standing to remain in the United States may not establish a derivative claim for asylum by pointing to potential hardship to the alien's United States citizen child in the event of the alien's deportation” (Manson 2004). Parents who are subject to deportation must decide whether to take their citizen children with them or leave them under foster care. Furthermore, a House Subcommittee on Immigration, Border Security and Claims in 2003 considered denying citizenship to children born in the U.S. whose parents are neither citizens nor permanent residents (Manson 2004). Such a measure has yet to gather widespread support, but many who favor strict immigration control measures hope to see the Supreme Court review the issue. In the meantime, children of undocumented immigrants are integrating into American society under a particularly tenuous domestic situation. The way in which these children respond to their living situation will have far-reaching repercussions, considering that they have comparatively less room for error than children of wealthier, more stable families whose errors in adolescence may not limit their life opportunities.

**Chapter II:** Literature Review and Methodology

*Literature Review: What Do We Know about How Mexican-Descent Children Adopt Behavior Conducive to Their Educational Success?*

The educational achievement gap in the U.S. between Latinos on one hand and Asian and white students on the other (Chubb and Loveless 2002) suggests that Latinos, the majority of whom are of Mexican descent, are not developing behavior in grade school that is producing academic success, while other ethnic groups are. If one dismisses arguments about the innate academic superiority of certain ethnic groups over others, then one must consider how best to alleviate the effect of those factors that help produce under-performing students who may grow into adult burdens on society. This study focuses on the effect of parental undocumented status on the academic experience of U.S. citizen children.

In 2000, 47% of all school-age children in California were children of immigrants (Fix and Capps 2005). Children of undocumented immigrants make up an increasingly large proportion of this demographic group and as of 2006, 3.1 million U.S. citizen children live in households headed by undocumented immigrants (Passel 2006). Since the Pew Hispanic Center reports that only 1/3 of the total undocumented population has lived in the U.S. for over ten years, one can infer that the majority of such children are minors, if not pre-adolescent. It is in the interests of the American educational system and society as a whole to study how this situation, in which the obligation of raising a U.S. citizen child falls upon a parent who is socially

marginalized and legally and economically vulnerable, will affect the integration of these children as they become adults.

Given that most children of undocumented immigrants are likely minors, a study of their integration is most appropriate focusing on their educational performance, a strong indicator of their future life opportunities. I will review the literature written on the educational experience of Mexican American children along two lines: (1) on the extent to which ethnic self-identification – particularly on the behavior that one adopts when developing a social identity– plays a role in Mexican American children's educational performance; and (2) on the factors that influence ethnic self-identification among Mexican American children. I then discuss the role of context of reception within the theory of segmented assimilation, in this case having undocumented immigrant parents who face certain obstacles to providing basic necessities for their children, and how it shapes the behavior that their U.S.-born children associate with their ethnic self-identity.

For the purpose of clarity, I wish to distinguish between the identity labels that I use in describing the subjects for this study and the labels that they use when self-identifying. This study's focus is to understand the behaviors that adolescents link with their self-invoked identities. The identities that adolescents use are neither permanent, nor does the same label necessarily mean the same thing to each person that invokes it. Furthermore, there will be variation according to a variety of factors, including geography, situational context, family influence, and personal preference. The labels that I use in describing this study's subjects are for the purposes of contextualizing their comments. In using the term "cholo," I mean to describe a

subject who can be either U.S. citizen of Mexican descent or an immigrant from Mexico (or from any Latin American country, but for the purposes of this study, "cholos" refers to students of specifically Mexican descent) who dresses in the general fashion of street gang members, regardless of his/her gang affiliation. Such fashion can include long t-shirts, long shorts or Dickies, high white socks, low sneakers, a short buzz haircut, and a variety of tattoos or religious symbols that can signify gang affiliation. I use the term "Mexican American" broadly in this study to refer to any U.S. citizen of Mexican descent, as opposed to "Mexican," by which I mean to describe a Mexican immigrant. The boundaries of these ethnic labels can be very complex, but my goal is to limit their use to descriptive purposes and explore how my subjects discuss the link between the labels they invoke and the behaviors they associate with these labels. Understanding how their parents' experiences inform these adolescents' expression of identities will contribute to the discussion of whether regularizing these parents' legal status will improve their ability to raise educationally successful American citizen adults.

*Ethnic Identity and School Performance among Mexican Americans*

Ogbu (1992) presents a framework for studying how community forces influence the choices that minority youths make that affect their educational performance. His four forces are (1) the cultural models that a minority group has with regard to U.S. society and education, (2) the minority group's cultural and language frame of reference, (3) the degree of trust or acquiescence minority groups have for white Americans and the societal institutions they control, and (4) the educational

strategies that result from the first three forces. Nagel (1994) more explicitly adds an external factor in the formation of ethnic identity, being "external social, economic, and political processes and actors that shape and reshape ethnic categories and definitions." Parental undocumented status, along with external factors like public policies and rhetoric directed towards immigrants, gives families headed by undocumented immigrants an exclusionary frame of reference, as parental figures are represented publicly as outlaws and a drain on the public, deserving of incarceration or deportation. Such anti-immigrant rhetoric can serve as a symbol around which people develop a sense of their own identity, even if they are not immigrants themselves, i.e., the U.S. citizen children of immigrants. Children may grow up with a sense of ambivalence towards American institutions, as they may or may not be embraced at school by their teachers or administrators, who represent American institutions, while these children may be aware of publicly aired anti-immigrant sentiment. Depending on how these children express their ethnicity as part of their social identity, they may accept or reject behavior that would be conducive to academic success.

Bernal et al. (1991) describe three assumptions in their discussion of how ethnic identity influences notions of positive and negative education-related behavior. In their framework, they assume that (1) adolescents divide their world into in-groups and out-groups, (2) they strive for a positive self-concept which is derived from their membership in their in-group, and (3) their potential positive or negative interaction with other groups is partly dependent on how they evaluate their in-group relative to the out-group. They base their study on Matute-Bianchi's (1986) study of Mexican-descent children who claim various self-identity labels and how various labels allowed

for corresponding sets of school behavior; *cholos,* for example, almost by definition underachieve academically. It is unknown whether parental undocumented status represents an in-group/out-group boundary for the children of undocumented immigrants. It is unlikely, due to the low likelihood that children would know the legal status of their classmates' parents and form peer groups based on a positive "self-concept" of their parents' legal status.

While literature on ethnic identity tends to focus on white ethnics and African Americans, with comparatively less literature on Hispanics and Asian Americans (Phinney 1990), more recent literature has increasingly focused on this newer wave of immigrants. Literature written on Mexican American ethnic self-identity and education agrees that there exists a significant relationship between ethnicity and academic performance, but the nature of the relationship is disputed. Huntington (2004) posits that Mexican American youths' poor academic record is one result of their lack of assimilation into American society, characterized by their continued use of Spanish, the tendency to self-segregate into Mexican-oriented friendships and marriages, and their non-willingness to convert to Protestantism. While many scholars disagree with Huntington's characterization of the Mexcian American population's assimilatory experience, he raises an interesting question as to whether one's expression of ethnic self-identity shares a relationship with one's academic performance; in his article, a Mexican-oriented identity is strongly associated with poor academic performance.

Bernal et al. (1991) attribute school failure among Mexican American children to low socioeconomic family background and early academic failure (first to third

grade). They note that while Mexican American children tend to display relatively higher levels of academic failure than children of other ethnic groups, children of Mexican immigrants tend to perform better than their latter-generational counterparts (3rd generation Mexican Americans, for example). They determine that the problem of academic failure lies less in the fact that children are Mexican-descent than in the cultural discontinuity that exists between school and home and in the way that Mexican American children adopt identities with corresponding sets of behaviors that undermine their educational achievement. However, despite the cultural discontinuity that immigrant parents experience, many are able guide their children to academic success with a strong authoritarian parenting, filtering what they perceive as the negative influences of American society by restricting their children's time outdoors or by emphasizing the sacrifices they make in order to provide for their children's education (Ceballo 2004).

Middle school teachers are taught to be aware of ethnic self-identities among their students and the effect that they have on their academic performance. It is known that students will "try on" various ethnic identities throughout their adolescence as they explore what race and ethnicity means to them (Gay 1994). Aside from affecting how they approach school, ethnic and racial identity is instrumental in how Mexican American children choose their friends (Kao and Vaquera 2006). Generally, ethnic identity is more significant than race in selecting friends among Hispanic students. When teaching minority students, teachers are advised to be aware that changes in student behavior may stem from exaggerated notions of what it means to belong to an ethnic or racial group. Since teachers are legally not supposed to know (or care) about

students' legal status, much less that of their parents', it is unlikely that educators can observe behavioral differences between children of legal and undocumented immigrants.

Matute-Bianchi (1986) finds that ethnic self-identification is important among sub-groups of Mexican-descent students in distinguishing themselves from each other. "Mexicanos" and "Mexican Americans" distinguish themselves from "Chicanos" and "Cholos" through their behavior at school. These identities are part of strategies that are the result of how students perceive their chances at academic success and an extension of their realistic aspirations as adults. Her qualitative group profiles in Central California in the 1980s agree with Rumbaut's later study of Mexican-descent students (1995), in which he also finds that different sub-groups of Mexican-descent students display different types of behavior. In general, "Mexican Americans," U.S.-born children of Mexican immigrants, tend to experience greater academic success than Chicanos and Cholos, who tend to be U.S.-born but reject behavior that is conducive to academic success; and Mexican immigrants and Mexico-oriented students, who are born in Mexico and tend to experience more cultural difficulties in integrating into American schools than U.S.-born children of Mexican immigrants.

Matute-Bianchi and Rumbaut's qualitative analyses point to the need to study the heterogeneity of the Mexican-descent population. Rumbaut does not explore the self-identification of Mexican-descent students; his categories are determined through interviews with teachers and students who described other social groups, as opposed to students labeling themselves. His quantitative conclusion that Mexican identity is associated with lower academic performance does not discuss any variation with

respect to academic performance across differing subgroups of Mexican-descent students.

Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco also conclude that children of Mexican immigrants tend to display signs of stress that can lead to academic failure more frequently than that of third generation Mexican Americans (1995). They find that children of immigrants experience American society in fundamentally different ways than their immigrant parents or non-Latino white children. In their psychological study, children of immigrants were more likely to express a sense of hopelessness and to be more concerned with failure than the other groups tested. However, they do not discuss whether these children of immigrants were comprised of students from various sub-groups that Rumbaut and Matute-Bianchi identified as Mexican American, Chicano, or Cholo. Interestingly, their study does not agree with others that single out children of Mexican immigrants as more likely to be more academically successful than their immigrant and third-generation counterparts (Bautista de Domanico et al. 1994). It could be that elementary-aged children have yet to reconcile the cultural differences that they perceive between school and home and use their immigrant communities' culture and values as resources for academic success, which they might later do in middle and high school.

Kao's study of ethnic self-identification's effect on academic and professional aspirations (2000) shows that self identifying with one's ethnic group, or at least acknowledging the stereotypes associated with one's group, influences students' academic and professional aspirations. She uses the Markus and Nurius' concept of 'possible selves' (1986), the notion "of self-concept that functions as incentive for

behavior toward future goals, and provides an interpretive context for one's current view of oneself." Possible selves take three essential forms: the hoped-for self, the expected self, and the feared self. By their logic, group images of Hispanics in the U.S. should affect the way Hispanic students create their conceptions of success. However, to what extent anti-immigrant obstacles and rhetoric shape citizens' conceptions of success is not explored.

Kao finds that, among various groups of students, the Hispanic population is associated with the Spanish language, manual labor and lack of high professional aspirations. Hispanic students are aware that people link them to such jobs like gardening and housekeeping. Many feel pressure to speak Spanish socially, as those who predominantly speak English are thought to be ashamed of their identity. She does not address to what extent undocumented immigrant status plays a role in identity expression.

Kao finds that the Hispanic population's hoped-for and feared self tends to revolve around the predominant stereotypes that exist for their group. Many students expressed that they hoped to work in an indoor office position and feared having to work in the stereotypical position of manual laborer. It is clear that Hispanic students in Kao's study have internalized common stereotypical images for their group and they orient their goals accordingly. In a setting like San Diego in recent years, where undocumented immigration has become a polarizing issue closely linked to the Mexican population, it is likely that Mexican-descent students are orienting their behavior and/or aspirations in reference to the rhetoric associated with undocumented immigration. However, it is unlikely that students will readily describe themselves or

their parents as undocumented as an attempt to create a positive self-identity out of this legal status, as claiming such an identity publicly can have deep repercussions, such as parental deportation.

Bautista de Domanico, et al. (1994), find that the most well-adjusted Mexican-descent students, thereby the most likely to perform well in school and meet their aspirations, are those that are bicultural, as opposed to those who are monolingual Spanish speakers or even monolingual English speakers. Bicultural identity among Mexican American youth is positively related to self-concept and negatively related to psychosocial discomfort, a finding that supports previous research on Cuban American youth. Bicultural youth seem to adapt U.S. cultural behavior while retaining their own traditional values, which help them relate to both their U.S. and Mexican counterparts. Monocultural participants tend to exhibit lower self-esteem and greater levels of anxiety and unhappiness, likely due to their inability to navigate the cultural waters of either the Mexican or U.S. community. As a result, monocultural students tend to feel less empowered than their bicultural counterparts. Their conclusion agrees with Gibson's study (1997), which finds that minority youth do better in school when they feel strongly anchored in the identities of their families and communities while acculturating into American society. Portes and Fernandez-Kelly contribute to this research on the success of selectively acculturated children of immigrants by illuminating the importance of external factors, such as "significant others." In their research, they found that highly educationally and professionally successful children of immigrants shared common experiences with significant mentors, particularly with co-cultural teachers, and with educational outreach programs, like AVID, which

helped direct their aspirations towards college and helped them develop their academic skills to achieve their educational goals. The positive impact of these mentors, along with a strong sense of cultural memory and parent-driven selective acculturation, overshadowed the negative influence of low socioeconomic status. However, in order for a student to benefit from these mentor relationships and educational outreach programs, one must be geographically stable, which highlights the destructive potential of parental deportation or residential eviction due to parental undocumented status, which will be explored later.

Research on Mexican American children's group identification and preference is mixed, some showing higher group identification than white or black children while others show lower group identification (Porter and Washington 1993). Such studies have tended to have small subject pools and do not control for regional or economic variations. Again, studies on Mexican American children's self-esteem is mixed; some show lower levels of self-esteem than black and Asian children, while others show higher levels. Future studies need to specify whether "Mexican American" is a label of choice among subjects or a label assigned to them by researchers, otherwise it is difficult to determine whether there is a causal relationship between being Mexican American and one's self-esteem, as compared to other groups.

*Factors That Influence Ethnic Self-Identification among Mexican American Children*

Being such a heterogeneous group, there are a variety of choices of self-identities for children of Mexican immigrants to choose from. As the relationship between the self-adoption of group labels like "Mexican American" and measurable

behavior like group preference, self-esteem, and academic performance is mixed, I will review a collection of studies that explore various factors that influence ethnic self-identification among Mexican American children.

Rotheram and Phinney (1987) define ethnic identity as being comprised of five different components: "(1) Ethnic self-identification – categorization, including grouping and knowledge of appropriate cues for the group, and labeling of oneself as a member of one's ethnic group; (2) Ethnic constancy – knowledge that one's ethnic characteristics are unchanging and permanent across time, settings, and transformations; (3) Use of ethnic role behaviors – engaging in the varying behaviors that reflect ethnic cultural values, style, customs, etc; (4) Ethnic knowledge – knowledge that certain behaviors, traits, values, customs, etc. are relevant to one's own ethnic group; (5) Ethnic preferences and feelings – feelings and preferences about being a member of one's ethnic group, and one's preferences for ethnic group members, behaviors, customs, language, and values." Within such a definition, there is much room left for varying self-definitions of one's self-identity, or the implications for the behavior that one equates with one's own self-identity. How one defines "appropriate cues for the group" or "behaviors that reflect ethnic cultural values, style, customs, etc." can vary according to a multitude of factors, including race/phenotype, language, family income, gender, religion, immigrant status, and generational cohort. As the Mexican American population is heterogeneous within all these categories, there is likely a variety of "ethnic choices," competing sets of behaviors, values, styles, etc., that are available to Mexican American youth. This raises the question: how does parental undocumented status factor into the development of ethnic self-

identity, along with so many diverse factors, among the U.S.-born children of Mexican undocumented immigrants?

Niemann and Romero (1999) agree with previous internal/external framework studies in finding that adults' expression of their ethnic identity tends to be a reaction to their experiences in the U.S., as well as a result of the pride they have in the culture of their native countries. Parents are also likely to instill ethnic pride in their children when they share their immigrant experiences with them (Quintana and Vera 1999). Ethnic identity formation begins quite early in childhood as children learn to distinguish behaviors that take place within certain groups and not others (Spencer and Markstrom-Adams 1990). Parents have an important role in teaching their children about experiences that are unique to their particular community. Among elementary school children, those with parents who were less acculturated with American society, had more Mexican items in their homes, and taught them about ethnic discrimination were more likely to show higher levels of ethnic knowledge, have higher levels of ethnic preference, and showed also higher grade levels (Knight and Bernal 1993). The more that children are aware of the differences between their families' experiences and those of non-immigrant families, the stronger their ethnic identity is likely to be.

Race continues to be a factor in the development of self-identity. While some race studies may focus on populations to which the idea of one race may be applied, such as African Americans or immigrants of African descent (Waters 2001; Levitt 2001), Mexican Americans are a racially mixed population do not fit neatly into the U.S.'s traditional black/white color line. Many Mexican Americans and other Latinos represent a new "non-black" population, which invite descriptions as "closer to white"

or “closer to black” (Lee and Bean 2004). Darker and lighter Mexican Americans often adopt strategies to manipulate popular notions of color and cultural identity in their favor.

Given the Mexican population’s history of racial heterogeneity, it is difficult to establish causal relationships between racial membership and economic opportunity.

It is easy to overlook the racial heterogeneity within the Mexican population – likely because of the obvious racial differences between most Mexicans and non-Hispanic whites – and the role of race in the development of ethnic identity among children of immigrants, particularly in a race-conscious society like the U.S. Mason finds that among the racially heterogeneous Mexican American population, race and phenotype are associated to both self-identification and annual income (Mason 2001). He finds that males with darker complexions and Indian features tend to receive lower annual earnings, while those with lighter complexions and European features tend to have higher earnings. Mexican Americans can compensate by establishing a Spanish-language identity rather than a racial identity, as a racial identity would tend to place them closer to African Americans on the social color spectrum. Lighter Mexican Americans are able to claim a white identity and thus avoid discrimination associated with being of Mexican descent. This is presumably easier to do among lighter-skinned, European-looking Mexicans who have non-Spanish surnames either through marriage or because their patrilineal ancestors were non-Spanish immigrants to Mexico. As children even within the same family may inherit widely differing racial phenotypes, race’s impact on other factors in the development of ethnic identity can vary by child.

The current wave of immigration creates a public perception that Mexicans and immigrants are one and the same. The sustained wave of new Mexican immigrants can cause an immigrant identity to be associated even with latter-generation (3rd generation or later) Mexican Americans, many of whom with lighter complexions than their recent-immigrant counterparts (Waters and Jiménez 2005). They conclude that Mexican Americans with Spanish surnames are unable to escape being associated with immigrants because of the growing immigrant population and the attention they attract in the media. However, it is not clear whether these latter-generation Mexican Americans self-identify as such or if they simply acknowledge their families' migrant history because of other people's assumption that they are immigrants because of their surname. The effect of this external identification may be varied: latter-generation Mexican Americans may develop behavior to distinguish themselves from new immigrants or they may react to this external identification with an exploration of their common heritage with newer immigrants. It would be interesting to focus on the factors that would produce such different reactions to the same external force.

Such external forces and symbols are important in shaping of people's self-identities. Keogan (2002) finds that in Southern California, where there are no positive symbolic immigrant monuments like the Statue of Liberty or Ellis Island, media representation of immigrants tends to be more negative than in New York, the U.S.'s historic immigrant-receiving city. In a comparison between *The Los Angeles Times* and *The New York Times*, immigration coverage in California "demonstrated an exclusive 'immigrant as threat' narrative," as opposed to New York, which treated immigrant in a more inclusive manner in their coverage. People in Southern California

who self-identify as Mexican American are likely aware of the often hostile rhetoric aimed at immigrants, particularly from Mexico. This awareness is particularly heightened in the wake of congressional legislation that sought to criminalize undocumented entry, the immigrant marches in early 2006 that followed its passage in the House of Representatives, the Minuteman protests, and so on. Of great importance is how this awareness has affected the way in which children of undocumented immigrants self-identify and the academic ramifications of their identities.

*Context of Reception as a Factor in Children's Ethnic Self-Identity*

Immigrant parents influence the assimilatory experience of their children in a variety of ways. Parents secure a certain level of economic support for their children, they teach them cultural and religious values which may label them "ethnic" in public, and they pass their genes onto them, which may physically distinguish the children from the general public. Segmented assimilation describes how a number of factors interact in directing various patterns of assimilation. Some immigrants will replicate the general experience of early 20$^{th}$ century immigrants and transition into mainstream America. For these immigrants, ethnic identity will be a matter of choice, to be invoked when convenient. Other immigrants may find that they are unable to shed their ethnicity and will be marked by it as they assimilate into an American underclass. Yet other immigrants will find their ethnicity to be a source of strength and will integrate into mainstream society while maintaining strong ties to their traditional culture and social networks (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). Various factors determine how immigrants' children assimilate into the American

mainstream, including the immigrant first generation's history and context of reception; parents' and children's pace of acculturation; parental education and social capital; race and phenotype; geographic location of residence, parental employment, and immigrant groups' and families' own notions of success, among others.

Portes and Rumbaut (2001) base their findings on the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS), carried out in San Diego, California, and Miami, Florida. The questionnaire asks questions according to various themes, including perceptions on the quality of education at students' schools; parental occupation; domestic living arrangements; housing; identity choices; time spent studying; professional aspirations, both ideal and realistic; self esteem; relationship with parents; etc. They find that Mexicans, due to a hostile reception by government agencies and a general antipathy towards them as a perceived threat to American culture, coupled with their low education levels, result in weak communities that are not equipped to support new members effectively. Mexicans, when controlling for education, knowledge of English, and occupation, earn approximately $2000 less than other immigrant groups. They conclude that the discrepancy is due to differences in mode of incorporation between Mexicans and other immigrant groups (2006). However, it is difficult to measure how undocumented status as a mode of incorporation affects the children of immigrants' incorporation into American society.

For undocumented immigrants, context of reception greatly influences the extent to which parents can provide basic resources for their children, such as housing and income. Furthermore, while citizen children qualify for Medical, undocumented immigrant parents may not be willing to access these services for their children

(Capps, Kennedy, and Fix 2003). The amount of public rhetoric over undocumented immigration may also create awareness among children of undocumented immigrants that other Americans don't feel they belong in the country. Solis (2002) finds that parents' undocumented status does shape how citizen children perceive their own place in American society and this identification can be channeled towards the adoption of beneficial behavior. She based her study on La Organización Guadalupana, which was founded specifically to help Mexican immigrants, many of whom are undocumented, to organize themselves, defend their human and legal rights, and advocate for changes to immigration laws. The Organización educates its members about their rights, provides a safe place for them to convene, and fosters a sense of pride in working for positive change for themselves and others who would benefit from a general amnesty, which they are lobbying for. Solis argues that this center fosters the development of an "undocumented" identity which members equate with activism, justice, and pride. It also links these characteristics to their members' Catholic identity, which further reinforces the strength of their mission by linking it to a central component of many Mexicans' identities. These attributes, which the children of immigrants internalize, can have a more positive impact on their integration into American society than an "illegal" identity, based on fear, criminalization, and powerlessness. The March and May 2006 immigrant marches, which numbered in the hundreds of thousands in many cities across the country, indicate that even in the absence of centers like La Organización Guadalupana, many children of undocumented immigrants still identify with their parents' struggles and are motivated to engage in public behavior based on this identification. However, the

lack of such a center that can direct this identity towards developing behaviors that are conducive to positive integration may leave adolescents isolated in their search to make sense of their parents' legal struggles.

Ethnic awareness among children starts at a young age and depends in large part on parents sharing experiences with their children. Ethnic self-identification also tends to be stronger when children come from families in which the parents are less acculturated and are immigrants. Few studies have focused on the effect of parental undocumented status on the behavior of U.S.-born children, likely due to the fact that most U.S.-born children of undocumented immigrants are still minors and we have yet to see the effects of this increasingly common family arrangement in large numbers.

Louis DiSipio et. al. (2006) focus on parental undocumented status and naturalization's effect on the 1.5 and 2$^{nd}$ generation adult children of immigrants. They find that parents who entered the U.S. in an unauthorized manner tended to have children that are more likely to participate in community civic and political activities than other children. Their study focuses on children with parents who were likely to have naturalized during the 1986 IRCA amnesty opportunity. It also tends to focus on the political behavior of these immigrants' children as adults. They do not explore how current undocumented immigrant parents affect their current children. DiSipio concludes that today's children of immigrants may behave differently because many may still be young and live with parents that are currently undocumented. He speculates that current parental undocumented status may have an adverse effect on the educational performance of their U.S.-born children.

*Studying the U.S.-Born Children of Undocumented Immigrants*

The goal of this study is to explore how parental undocumented status affects their U.S.-born children in school. The focus of this study is on adolescents ages 13 to 17. The advantage of studying this age group is that they are not quite adults and so are still dependent on their parents, who are marginalized politically and economically. It is then possible to explore how their parents' marginalization affects them. They are also typically of middle and high school age, which means that their expression of their identity and the school-related behavior which it embraces affects their grades. These children's performance in high school will have a strong relationship to the opportunities they will enjoy in adulthood after graduation. The extent to which parental undocumented status helps or hiders their academic achievement will help determine whether these children grow up to become tax contributors or tax burdens on American society.

*Methodology*

I conducted a series of interviews between September 2006 and March 2007 with U.S.-born children of undocumented Mexican immigrants throughout San Diego County. I worked through various San Diego-based organizations with local leaders who would have the *confianza* (confidence/trust) of their constituents and access to sensitive personal information, such as legal status. These leaders introduced me to interview subjects through family networks, church networks, community organizations, and a housing project.

Most of the gatekeepers who eventually introduced me to prospective interview subjects were initially highly skeptical and suspicious of my intentions in conducting this study. Asking someone to disclose someone else's illegal status is highly dangerous to the well-being of undocumented immigrants and their families. This information, in the wrong hands, can be used to disrupt the lives of entire families; people are understandably protective over this information and it was only after sharing my own family's experience in the U.S. that I began to gain the trust of these gatekeepers. When these gatekeepers spoke with their undocumented immigrant friends about me interviewing their children, they invariably shared the fact that my interest in this study stems from own parents being undocumented immigrants and the effect that had on my brothers and myself, all U.S. citizens, prior to their amnesty in 1986. Some families decided against allowing me to interview their children, as the risk of speaking on record, despite all assurances and precautions to maintain confidentiality, were still too great. After being introduced to a number of families, I found that many did not match my criteria for this study: some had parents who once were undocumented but had since gained residency, others had children who were all also undocumented, and some children were much too young. After approximately 10 months (the interviews took place between September and March, but the lengthy process of finding subjects spanned between June 2006 and April 2007), I finished with 11 completed interviews from 10 families.

During the initial meeting process these gatekeepers contacted families who they believed might have children who match my criteria and brokered a meeting between us. I then first gained permission from parents and then met their children in a

location of their choice. Interviews took place in students' homes or in public, such as a library. The interview consisted of two parts. The first was a questionnaire survey used in the CILS conducted in San Diego, California and Miami, Florida (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). Although my pool sample was too small to be statistically significant or to draw generalizations in comparison to Portes and Rumbaut's population, it was instrumental in drawing out relevant topics about these students' domestic circumstances, which I was able to explore later. The second component of the interview was an in-depth transcribed interview, in which I explore the extent to which these adolescents feel that their parents' undocumented status has helped or hindered their academic and social development. I asked the subjects to discuss topics such as what obstacles their parents face due to their legal status; how these obstacles affect their own lives; how life would be different if their parents were legal residents; whether they were involved in the 2006 immigrant marches and in what capacity; the extent to which they perceive differences, if any, between different subgroups of Mexican-descent students at school; how they think non-Mexican student groups perceive them; how they self identify and what their labels of choice mean to them, etc. Their answers are valuable for a better understanding of how adolescents internalize their parents' experiences and how that informs the identities that they develop.

*Limitations of this Study*

The nature of a single-opportunity interview on the subject of parental undocumented status presents a number of limitations. Some parents' concerns about

maintaining subject confidentiality required an intermediate gatekeeper to broker a meeting between myself and their children, sometimes in neutral locations. In order to reassure parents their children's interviews would not be traced back to their families, I disposed of their contact information after each subject interview and did not pursue follow-up interviews with their children. If my study gained attention from immigration authorities, I would not be able to produce any identifying information. The possibility of not fully capturing students' best characterization of their experiences may be greater when interview opportunities are limited and the fact that students are specifically being asked to explore identity issues may result in overstating the significance of their opinions.

This study focuses solely on the experience of U.S. citizen children who are actually living in the U.S. with their parents. I did not interview children in foster care or U.S. citizens living in Mexico. The gatekeeper approach I used in order to find interview subjects limited my pool to children in families that are likely to require some kind of social services or be involved in community/political organizations. Since my study is skewed towards families that participate in community organizations, they tend to be more socially/politically aware and tend to be poorer. Educated Mexican immigrants who overstayed their work visas and somehow found well-paying work may not be integrated into the organizations I have sought help from. A comparative approach with students from families of different economic class, as well as from different sending countries, would be of great interest, but such a project is outside the scope of this study.

Finding U.S.-born children of undocumented immigrants is generally difficult. While there exist many efficient immigrant social networks that are conducive to snowball samples, there is no subnetwork specifically for undocumented immigrant parents with U.S.-born children. These particular families are interspersed throughout the immigrant community. Organizations that provide resources to undocumented immigrants and would therefore be knowledgeable about their clients' legal status, like Catholic Charities, also have their own confidentiality regulations and are unwilling to share such information. Given the sensitive nature of this study, one cannot go door to door or wait for volunteers to offer their participation. The fact that I am looking for children ages fourteen to seventeen means that the parents have been in the U.S. since at least 1992, in which case they may no longer be living in areas where recent migrants will tend to concentrate. At the same time, the fact that this particular group of families generally does not want their issues to be made public, nor can public schools or hospitals collect information on legal status, one can see how it would be to difficult to make policy that would address their needs.

*Predictions*

Common sense predicts that everything is harder when one is an undocumented immigrant. Securing work and shelter, moving around in public, and recovering from illness and injury all have obstacles that are only overcome with great risk to oneself and one's dependents. Yet while all undocumented immigrant parents face these similar obstacles, they experience different outcomes in their children's academic success, ranging from raising *cholos* with academic trouble, to very

motivated, academically successful students. For this reason, I predict that I will find that there does not exist a direct relationship between parental undocumented status and children's educational experience. Rather, parental undocumented status is an important factor among others which all influence how a child develops a sense of self with regards to his/her surrounding society. In some cases, undocumented parental status may exacerbate an already negative domestic situation, such as very low socioeconomic status, causing children to react against his/her perceived marginalization and assimilate downwardly. In other cases, children may excel despite the obstacles their families face (Ceballo 2004), using their disadvantage as a source of motivation. Other families may be economically better off than the poorest undocumented immigrants because parents have been able to secure steady work and provide more for their children, in which case parental undocumented status may not be associated with daily hardship. However, these families are never far from disaster in the form of deportation. The destructive effects of deportation on a child's academic attainment indicates the importance of geographical stability to a child's success, and yet that is the very thing that is most in jeopardy when one has undocumented immigrant parents.

*Conclusion*

Despite my prediction that parental undocumented status does not represent a direct link to a citizen child's educational performance, it is still worthy to explore how undocumented status helps or hinders the implementation of parents' plans for their children. The population of citizens who will have been raised to adulthood by

undocumented immigrants with few economic resources and little access to public benefits is sure to grow, barring immediate amnesty or earned citizenship law. It is in the best interests of the country to learn whether laws that marginalize undocumented immigrants also work to undermine the life chances of millions of future adults, who as citizens cannot simply be deported and barred from returning.

**Chapter III:** Perception and Realities of Having Undocumented Immigrant Parents

The eleven students interviewed for this study are U.S. citizen students living and attending public schools in San Diego County and are between the ages of thirteen and seventeen. All of the students are aware of their parents' legal status and all intend to live in the U.S. as adults but they by no means constitute a homogeneous group of children of immigrants. They represent a broad spectrum of experiences in the U.S. However, they do share a number of experiences by virtue of the fact that at least one of the parents with whom they live is an undocumented Mexican immigrant.[1] I first provide a profile of the students interviewed, noting certain individual and family circumstances that are relevant to their educational experience. I then discuss common barriers to these students' educational success stemming from their parents' legal status.

*U.S. Citizen Children of Undocumented Immigrants*

**Albert** is a 14-year old U.S.-born citizen living in Oceanside with his single mother, who is an undocumented immigrant. He is in an alternative high school as part of his probation, which is the result of his expulsion from middle school for fighting. He exhibits physical signs of being involved in gang activity, such as typical *cholo*

[1] When scheduling interviews with all my interview subjects, I first spoke to one of their parents, usually the mother, and informed them that I sought children in families in which *both* parents are currently undocumented. The parent acknowledged that this was the case and only during the course of the interview did the fact that one parent, usually the father, has some sort of legal status, from temporary resident to U.S. citizen. Three of the students interviewed had resident or citizen step-fathers. I explore the implications of these mixed-status families later.

attire and a triple dot tattoo between the bases of his right thumb and index finger. He displays a low self-esteem and does not have any realistic aspirations for himself. With his poor command of English, he talks about how he has never been out of San Diego County, due to his mother's fear of various checkpoints on Southern California interstate freeways.

**Angela** is a 16-year old junior in high school in Lemon Grove (See appendix for student summary table). She is the eldest of five children, all born in the U.S., while both of her parents are undocumented. Her father, a Honduran national, once had a work visa, but he overstayed its expiration. She remembers the hardship put on her family when he was deported for nearly a year before returning illegally. She has only been to see her mother's family in Mexico once and says that she has few real ties to the country. She has strong aspirations to graduate from college and become a criminologist. Her mom is heavily involved in her education, despite the obstacles that being in the U.S. illegally presents.

**Carlos** is Angela's 14-year old brother. He is in college prep classes and credits his mother for helping him be aware of his educational options and motivating him to do well in school. He is also on the football team, but he says that he doesn't have medical insurance. A football injury would present a large problem, since he doesn't go to the doctor or the dentist. He equates an American identity with being and acting white, which is something he doesn't want to be. He criticizes his parents for acting too white and not being proud of their culture. At the same time, he says that he belongs in the U.S., as opposed to Mexico. When his father was deported for a year, Carlos says that it affected him greatly in school, as he was out of control and his

grades dropped. He says it affects him that his parents don't have their papers, but he believes that they would be worse off if the *did* have their papers, explaining that they would not be as motivated to get ahead.

**Brandon** is a 16-year old 11th grade student in Oceanside. He lives with his mother, who is an undocumented immigrant from Oaxaca, Mexico; and an uncle, who is helping them because his mom cannot secure a place to live on her own. Brandon's father died a few years ago. Prior to his father's death, Brandon and his mother had returned to Oaxaca to live for four years, when Brandon should have been in grades 3 to 7 in the U.S. By the time they returned to visit his dying father, Brandon could no longer speak English well. He is now in an after school program at Oceanside High School in order to make up lost credits, as he is academically lagging. He has aspirations to graduate from high school and work for himself as a mechanic.

**Bianca** is a 16-year old student in City Heights. She lives with her mother, who doesn't work in order to take care of her younger brother, who is mentally retarded. Her mother has traveled to Mexico to see family and had to return illegally, which can be dangerous and/or expensive. Since her younger brother is also a citizen, her mom has access to government assistance on his behalf, which helps them pay for some bills. Bianca recently had door-to-door sales job in the past in order to make some money for her family. Her older brother was also deported to Mexico, as he was in the U.S. illegally as well. She says it affects them that her mother doesn't have her papers and she wishes she did have them.

**David** is a 15-year old streetwise Mission Bay High School student living in City Heights. He has the look of the stoic, Chicano *cholo*, sporting an oversized LA

Dodgers shirt and white socks stretched up to meet his long shorts. He never smiles or gives a hint of emotion, even when revealing more personal moments. He talks intensely about the effects of gang life and the discrimination that he sees directed at Mexican students. His mother is an undocumented immigrant and hurt her back on the job. David hires himself out as a bodyguard to nerds at school in order to make money. He says that it affects him mom that she doesn't have her papers because she can't visit her family in Tijuana. He wants to be a rapper and leave City Heights.

**Eric** is a 14-year old student in Chula Vista. He lives with his mother, who is an undocumented immigrant; and his stepfather, who has is a legal resident. His biological father is an undocumented immigrant. Eric's family's apartment indicates that they are economically more stable than the families of other students in this study, a result of his stepfather having a secure job. Eric's mother is very vocal about how her undocumented status affects her and the way she is able to raise her children, but Eric does not express a strong opinion on the subject. Aside from his family's relatively more secure economic situation, Eric stands out from the other students in this study because of his physical features. He does not obviously "look Mexican." That is, Eric looks to be of European descent, as opposed to other students interviewed, who are darker and have more indigenous or mixed features. For potentially many reasons, Eric does not think that his mother's legal status affects him much.

**Carla** is a 13-year old student living in City Heights with her mother and father, both of whom are undocumented immigrants. Her father managed to get a mortgage, with the help of his brother, who is a citizen and signed for the house. Carla

talks about the need to be proud of one's history and do well in the U.S., citing examples of friends who are not proud or who have gotten in trouble with drugs and/or the law. She feels she belongs in the U.S. and thinks that Mexicans have been disproportionately targeted by the immigration debate. She thinks things would be easier for her parents if they had their papers.

**Francisco** is a 14-year old middle school student. He lives in Logan Heights with his mother, who is undocumented; and his stepfather, who is a U.S. citizen. His biological father is undocumented. Francisco's home is nicely furnished with black leather couches, a nice home stereo system and a flat screen TV. Francisco's mother says that their economic comfort has shielded her children to the point that they don't know what it means to have an undocumented immigrant parent. Her first child was born in Mexico and is 18 years old and also undocumented. Francisco's father is still undocumented and his mother seems to have little hope that he will ever find his economic footing. Francisco was born in the U.S. and has lived here all his life, but he doesn't seem to speak English very well and seemed to have trouble understanding the questionnaire (he tended to peek over at the paper, which led me to believe that he may have tried to guess at some answers). He doesn't seem to have very strong opinions concerning immigration.

**Desiree** is a 13-year old girl who lives in Sherman Heights and attends a charter school. She lives with her mother, who is undocumented, and her father, who recently established his legal status. She is very academically motivated and credits a lot of her future prospects to the quality teachers at her school and to her mother, who is heavily involved in her education. She is very aware of her family's tenuous

position in the U.S. and says she is scared of what may happen to her if her parents were to be deported. She has no other family members in San Diego to rely on for help.

**Guillermo** is a 15-year old student who lives in San Ysidro with his single mother, who is undocumented; and his three siblings, all of whom are U.S. citizens. His mother does not work and is able to support the family with assistance from local community groups. Guillermo is scared of the Border Patrol, as his family lives not far from a local station and their proximity to the Mexican border means that there is constant patrolling around their neighborhood. He had a lot of trouble expressing clear thoughts regarding his family's experiences in the U.S.

Despite these students' broad life experiences and aspirations, they face a number of shared obstacles to their academic success, stemming from their parents' undocumented status. These students live in families in which their parents' undocumented status diminishes the family's income, which means that parents may have to work longer schedules in order to make ends meet and usually cannot provide their children with necessary school supplies. The possibility, or reality, of deportation means that the family can be (or has been) broken up, with emotional, academic, and economic repercussions. Parents' lack of a license to drive means that the most trivial of traffic violations can throw a child's life into disarray, which makes driving for work or school functions extremely risky. Parents' inability to secure housing on their own means that families give up an amount of their freedom to live in an area where their children can attend a good school. Students may also lack healthcare and live in

fear of legal authorities, situations that are detrimental to the development of a healthy, civically engaged adult.

These common obstacles do not necessarily lead to a common end, however. The extent to which these obstacles hinder these students' life chances depends on students' individual and family circumstances, which I explore later. Some of the students interviewed seem to be succeeding despite their families' tenuous position in the U.S., while others seemingly may assimilate into the underclass of American society. Despite various successes, students admit that parental undocumented status looms in the background of their families' lives.

### *U.S. Citizen Children's Perceived Impact of their Parents' Undocumented Immigrant Status*

#### *Income*

Limited income is the most common student response when asked how having parents who are undocumented immigrants affects them. Carla's response is typical: "Well, probably my mom would be getting more money and probably helping my dad with the house. Probably my dad wouldn't have that much stress for the house. And probably my dad would be better for his heart." Her perception is that one of the most fundamental aspects of managing a family, earning income, would be improved if her parents' legal barrier to many jobs were removed. Furthermore, she equates her parents' legal obstacles to their stress and potential health problems, noting that there might be less stress in the house if both of her parents could work. Angela's comments also indicate a sense that her parents' undocumented status interfere with their ability

to provide for her: “I had to wait three years in high school, begging my father to get [a computer] because I had to drive- well I didn’t have to, not myself- but yeah, I had to go different places so I can use the computer to get simple jobs done at school.” These students perceive that their actual living conditions are worse off than what they would otherwise be if their parents were at least legal residents.

Perception of income is subject to individual interpretation, however. Carlos, Angela’s brother, believes that he would be worse off if their parents were legal residents, arguing that they would not be as motivated to work so hard to provide for the family. Carla, while associating her parents’ limited earning power to their legal status, points out that she still has food and clothes, so she is not really affected. How these students judge the extent to which their parents’ legal status affects their income, these students still describe their parents’ earnings as a reaction *to* the legal limitations that undocumented status represents. They describe an adversarial relationship between the implementation of government policy (parental undocumented status precluding many types of employment) and their families’ strategies to circumvent it for their own well-being. These students are invested in their parents’ struggles and do not identify with American society, as represented by the government.

*Driving*

After income, the ability to drive was the most common student response when asked how having undocumented immigrant parents affects them. There is a heated debate in California over whether or not to allow undocumented immigrants to have driver’s licenses. Supporters argue that undocumented immigrants are positive contributors to California and the country’s economy, while opponents argue that such

a law would reward lawbreakers with an official form of identification, to be used to further integrate themselves into society illegally. Meanwhile, little attention has been given to how the ability to drive legally affects parents' ability to raise their U.S. citizen children.

Parents' ability to move throughout the city affects the well-being of their children mainly because it facilitates their ability to earn income. In places like California, particularly southern California, driving allows for more flexibility in searching for work opportunities. That parents are traveling to work for the purpose of earning income in order to raise their U.S. citizen children properly does not enter the discussion about the pros and cons of giving undocumented immigrants driver's licenses, but their children understand what it means to have parents that are able to drive. Guillermo says, **"**If [my mother] had [her papers], she could get her driver's license and have a car. And we wouldn't have to like, we wouldn't have to walk as much to school or to get groceries or buy stuff that we need." The ability to drive also means that parents can access healthier food sold in other wealthier parts of San Diego. Many of the children interviewed express worry over what may happen to their parents if they are pulled over while driving. Eric explains, "[My mother's] afraid of getting pulled over by the police 'cause I don't know, something like, if they find out that she's not a resident she might be sent back to Mexico." His worry is not unreasonable, as many cities are considering passing ordinances that would give police officers the authority to transfer automobile drivers to immigration officials if they suspect they are undocumented immigrants. These students' perceptions are that their families must avoid the government in order to survive.

Non-income earning parents also drive in order to contribute to their children's upbringing by driving to school. Angela and Carlos' mother is heavily involved in their education and attends every school meeting possible, a fact that her children appreciate. "Yeah, [our education is] pretty much her main thing right now. She's there as much as she can, she's there for us 100%." It is not possible for her to take public transportation to these school meetings, as some are as far away as La Jolla, where one of her younger daughters is attending a charter school. The impact of the mother's involvement in Carlos' education is evident by listening to him talk about the importance of taking college prep classes.

> She's been like, she's been involved with school and all that and she's been trying to get involved and she wants to really be part of this country, you know. Like she goes to all the school meetings, you never see her miss a school meeting. She's always at school, she's always behind me to see, she knows more than me about taking required classes for college. You know, she's the one who pushes me to just keep taking the right classes and succeeding in high school.

While Angela and Carlos' mother cannot contribute monetarily to their education, she makes sure that she is involved by being present at their schools and by learning how the educational system works. Yet she risks the possibility of being pulled over and potentially being handed over to immigration. This is a risk that Eric's mother shares, although Eric himself doesn't seem to grasp the significance of her efforts. In effect, this is a risk that all these students' parents face when they choose to drive for whatever purpose, and their children are generally aware of this risk.

Some parents choose not to drive. Desiree's mother does not like to drive, so she takes public transportation throughout San Diego. As Desiree tends to get sick often, her mother travels to and from her doctor and pharmacy by bus, which can be

time consuming. Desiree also attends a charter school, which means that participating in her education takes valuable time away from her mother being home with the children while her father works. In the case of an emergency, Desiree is aware that the lack of transportation could pose a serious problem for her family.

*Deportation*

The worst thing that can befall any of the families of the children interviewed is the deportation of either parent and they generally are aware of it. In a dual-income family, the loss of one income earner can mean that the family defaults on the mortgage or misses the rent. In a single-income family, even the deportation of the non-income earner (usually the mother) means that there is no one home to look after the children, since the fathers work long hours and tend not to have many day-to-day child rearing or domestic responsibilities. It costs thousands of dollars to smuggle an immigrant across the U.S.-Mexico border, which poses a significant expense to low-income families. Furthermore, the death of a parent, a real risk related to crossing the U.S.-Mexico border illegally, cannot be quantified.

The perception of deportation is based on reality for some of the children interviewed. Two families have children that have experienced the effects of parental deportation or return migration to Mexico. As mentioned earlier, Angela and Carlos' father was deported when Angela was in seventh grade and Carlos was in fifth grade**.**

> Angela: It was just that it was kind of like a slap in the face for all of us because we all had to kind of see what it was like without my dad being here. He wasn't here to work for us, buy us everything that we wanted and you know mom's a little cheepo, so I couldn't run to my dad and ask him for something. It was my mom and my mom, yeah, she lost a

> lot of weight- I don't know what happened now, I don't know- but she was out there breaking her back and you know even I asked her, "so what was it like working, you know, now that my dad," I was asking her, *"¿y cómo te fue ya que tuviste que trabajar en lugar de mi papá?*" *y* "*ni muerta regreso a trabajar así como trabaja tu papá*," ["and how was it now that you had t o work in place of dad?" and [she responded] "not even dead will I return to work like that, the way your dad does"] you know? And it's true. Because I've gone to work with dad a couple of times. I will never do it. Never if I had to choose between, you know, eating my leg and working like my dad does every single day. I wouldn't do it.

The effect on Carlos is one that he remembers well:

> I was messing up in school, too. I don't know, I was mad at the world… I don't know. I just didn't care about anything. But when he came back I was good in school. It was because when he was gone, see, he had the control in the house. He could tell me, "oh, stop, or I'll you know." And my mom, was you know, the lady of the house. She can't control a guy, you know. Cause I'm a young man and my dad could control me and she couldn't. So I was you know, a little bit, my crazy side.

Their father was deported for approximately eight months. At the time, the family was renting in another location in San Diego. They correctly perceived the root of their family's trouble to be the loss of their father. If their father were to be deported now, the family could default on the mortgage and lose the house. Whatever negative effects the children would experience in school now would taint their transcript, affecting where they could realistically apply for college.

In the case of voluntary return migration, dependent children may follow their parents. Brandon had no choice but return to Oaxaca, Mexico, with his mother, as his father was an alcoholic. They remained in Oaxaca while he should have been in grades three through seven**.** During this time, he forgot how to speak English. Since their

return to the U.S., prompted by the death of his father, Brandon has struggled in school, but retains the hope to graduate and study auto mechanics.

While return migration is technically different than deportation, in the case of undocumented immigrants with children, they may be forced to return because they cannot support their family in the U.S. In Brandon's case, his mother returned to Oaxaca when he was around eight years old. One can only speculate how Brandon's life may have differed had his parents been legal residents, but legal status would have opened up more options to his parents in order to keep raising him in the U.S. and avoid interrupting his education.

*Healthcare*

While U.S. citizen children are eligible for public healthcare through Medical, they need the cooperation of their parents in order to access doctors. Parents need to be willing to approach public institutions, fill out paperwork, and take their children to the doctor, often by driving. Some parents may be familiar enough with the workings of public health care to access it for their children, but their own undocumented status may discourage them from taking their children to the doctor.

Parental undocumented immigrant status' perceived effect on family health care is mixed. Since citizen children qualify for Medical coverage, some parents are willing to access healthcare for their children, which may contribute to a lower perception of how parental undocumented status affects children.

Most of the children interviewed in other families reported that they go to the doctor and the dentist regularly, some noting that they have Medical coverage.

Bianca's mother even receives welfare on behalf of her other son, who is mentally retarded. However, while most of the U.S. citizen children interviewed reported that they do go to the doctor when they are sick, many do not recall that their parents go to the doctor. Medical care use among undocumented immigrants tends to be lower than the population at large (Berk et. al 2000), primarily because undocumented parental legal status means that parents cannot access public healthcare. Desiree's mother does not have health insurance, but until now it hasn't been a problem. "[My mother] doesn't really get sick a lot. I don't really remember like, if she gets like a cough or something, she just rests and then it's over," Desiree explains. However, in the event that her mother does get sick, the family would face a large bill. Her mother's situation represents how families are exposed to the dangers of sub-par health coverage. While children may receive medical attention, they depend on their parents' ability to provide for them, which is done best while parents remain healthy.

Some parents do not access health care for their children even if the children are entitled to it, which may lead to a higher perception of parental legal status' limitations on health care coverage. Angela and Carlos' family best represents this scenario, in which parents refuse to take their children to the doctor because of their own legal status. Carlos' mother will not take him to the doctor because she fears that the family will be on record for taking public assistance while being in the U.S. illegally. However, because Carlos plays school sports, he is in constant danger of seriously injuring himself. He had to falsify information on his health waiver form in order to play on his school's football team. Carlos says that his mother hopes that he doesn't get too much playing time during football season so that he won't get hurt.

When he gets sick, his mom gives him natural Mexican remedies, usually teas. If he does get injured playing football, the family has no insurance for him and would potentially have to pay for any care out of pocket. The fact that his parents do not have their papers means that they cannot even take advantage of cheaper health costs in Tijuana, a discovery that other Americans are increasingly taking advantage of.

*Fear*

During the course of interviewing students, fear consistently comes up as a topic of conversation. Many students express that they have fear or anxiety about their families' future, singling out the border patrol or the government in general as an antagonistic to their families' interests. This tendency to view their position in society in opposition to the government or public institutions may contribute to an oppositional identity, which is counterproductive to becoming fully integrated, contributing adult members of society.

Many students report that they afraid that the government will take away their parents, noting that they would not know what to do such an event. Angela says, "It's scary. I mean, I don't know, like if they get deported, I don't know what's going to happen to me, you know? My life is here, school is here, friends are here, everything I know is here." Desiree explains that she and her mother have discussed the topic before:

> Sometimes, when, at times when there were a lot of immigration people walking around, my mom told me, like when I watch the news, my mom told me that one day she, if, I thought that one day I could come back from school and she wouldn't be there because they would have taken her. Because my mom always went, like to get our medicines, she

> always goes to pharmacies, so she's always in the bus. She doesn't know how to drive very well. She always has to be on public transportation, so sometimes I thought maybe she's not going to be here when I come home. Maybe they're going to take her. And she always told me like not to worry, but I did. Because my mom, she's the one who motivates us, always.

Albert, who lives with his single mother, says he would have to go to Mexico with her if she were to be deported. As mentioned before, Brandon did return to Mexico with his mother, hindering his educational progress tremendously.

Students do not readily tell people, even close friends, that their parents are undocumented. Even the younger students interviewed understand the implications of having such sensitive information fall upon malicious ears. Carla describes a situation in which she accidentally told her friends that her parents were undocumented:

> Carla: Once it slipped out 'cause a friend when the marches were, she called me and she told me that we were going to meet at school. My mom told me that I could go, but if it came out to be all bad, if it started to be a fight, then to get into school. But I just left, 'cause the principal, my vice-principal went with us. 'Cause she told me, "are your parents illegal?" And I'm like, "yeah." And then she's all like, "oh, well do it for your parents." And I was like, "ok." And my mom told me, "What did you just told her?" "That you were illegal." She was like…
>
> Investigator: So how come you don't tell people more often?
>
> Carla: 'Cause my mom and my dad said to not tell them so that's why I don't say it.

Parents tell their children not to make their undocumented status known, as gossip can travel to people who may have ill will towards their family for whatever reason. In any potential confrontation, revealing one's legal status exposes one's ultimate weakness in the U.S. David says that students at his school were deported because too many people found out that they were undocumented. Eventually someone called

immigration on them and they were deported, which meant they were clearly taken out of school. Whether the story is true or not, the message is clear: it is dangerous to reveal your parents' undocumented status. Even though the children interviewed for this study are U.S. citizens, the fear of having their parents deported is real.

This reticence towards talking about people's legal status made finding children to interview extremely difficult, as participating families were not willing to divulge the legal status of their close friends and relatives without talking to them first. In many cases, people did not know the legal status of their friends- for the very reason above- and they were not comfortable asking their friends about their status for the purpose of passing that information to a third party. This taboo makes addressing the needs of the most extreme of mixed status families difficult to address.

San Diego's proximity to Tijuana is a primary reason for why students fear their parents being pulled over or detained by the border patrol. Guillermo worries constantly because he and his family live very close to a border patrol station. He says his mother is scared even to go outside. Angela explains that her mother drives, even though she may have to pass through border checkpoints on the freeway. "Just as long as you don't show them fear, you're cool," she says. Angela's quote is representative of many other students' tendency to describe their families' relationship with the U.S. in diametrically oppositional terms. What this "us/them" dichotomy in describing their own position in American society means to how these students approach their own education is will be explored in the next chapter.

*Shared Real Obstacles to Life in the U.S. when Raised by Undocumented Immigrant Parents*

The families of undocumented immigrants to the U.S. are subject to similar obstacles and challenges. The children perceive similar hardships that affect their parents' abilities to provide for their families. Yet they differ greatly in terms the identities and behaviors that they develop in relation to these obstacles. How these adolescents react to these obstacles during their high school years will have long-lasting consequences for their academic and professional trajectories.

Portes and Rumbaut (2006) find that in 1999, the median household income and poverty rate for Mexican immigrants was $36,004 and 28.9%, respectively, ranking them 30$^{th}$ out of 31 immigrant groups in both categories. Mexican families were earning nearly $2,000 less annually than other immigrant groups. This is the result of Mexicans' disadvantageous context of reception in the U.S, particularly the significant population of undocumented immigrants with low education.

While undocumented legal status alone is not a primary factor in how children assimilate to life in the U.S., it strongly shapes the circumstances in which families struggle to make a living and raise their children in the U.S. Parental undocumented status affects all aspects of daily life that influence a child's upbringing and exacerbates any existing problems. In this sense, undocumented parental status factors strongly in immigrants' context of reception and needs to be studied further, in concert with other factors.

*Family Finances*

Parents' ability to finance their families affects nearly every aspect of domestic life. Parental income determines where the family lives, the resources parents can secure for their children, and it affects relationships between family members. Having undocumented immigrant parents presents families with obstacles to obtaining well-paying work, as discussed earlier. It is unknown how differently the families covered in this study would be living if the parents were legal residents. However, being relieved of the obstacles that being undocumented presents would surely improve the experience of living in the U.S. for many parents. The simple act of driving can lead to deportation, with disastrous effects for parents and children alike. Yet it is not clear whether families would be more complacent if their presence in the U.S. were not so precarious. This is an idea that is not lost on many children.

Children have varying responses as to how having legal resident parents would affect them. Some children believe that their lives would be easier if their parents had their papers, citing the fact that having parents earn more money, be able to drive, and no longer needing to fear the border patrol would relieve the family of unnecessary stress. Other children believe that if their parents had their papers, they might actually be worse off than they currently are, as their parents might not feel the need to work so many extra hours and push the children so hard in order to compensate for their disadvantaged situation.

These varying opinions on a hypothetical question ("How would your life be different if your parents had their papers?") indicate differing assessments of children's own current state of living and their parents' efforts to raise them well.

Children like Carlos, who feel that their families would be worse off if their parents had their papers, look to the achievements that they have made despite the hardships they have faced due to their parents' legal status. They can cite their parents' undocumented status as a motivating factor that has contributed to their success to date. Other children, like Albert, look to their comparatively harder life experiences and blame their parents' undocumented status for their families' troubles. They can also project their parents' status onto themselves and discuss why they themselves do not belong in society. Other students, such as Eric and Francisco, who have little opinion one way or another, about how legal status affect their lives, have not had to deal with the hardship of having undocumented parents because their stepfathers are legal and have mitigated the effects of having an undocumented parent. Yet even these comparatively more economically comfortable students acknowledge that they experience fear over potentially losing their mothers to deportation. However, as disruptive as losing their mothers might be, these students would not be uprooted from their neighborhoods, their schools, and their support networks.

*Housing*

Many families are unable to secure housing without giving up autonomy in order to get help from others. Two of the ten families (I interviewed two children from one family) of the children interviewed in this study owned the dwelling in which they lived. Carla's family obtained a mortgage by having one of the father's U.S. citizen brothers sign for it. This means that, while there exists a clear understanding that the house belongs to Carla's uncle in name only, he remains the legal owner and, in a

worst-case scenario, can sell the house without consulting Carla's parents. Worst-case scenario aside, Carla's family does not receive the economic benefits of owning a house. Her uncle's credit record improves when her father pays the mortgage on time. When Carla's father pays federal taxes, he cannot deduct the interest from his mortgage. And he cannot decide to sell the house without consulting his brother, who lives in New York.

Other families, like Brandon's, are invited to live with relatives rather than rent on their own. His mother works as a babysitter and does not earn enough money to meet all the costs of rent, food, and transportation on her own, so they live with their uncle. Because of where the family's apartment is located, Brandon attends Oceanside High School. A number of events may occur that would mean that Brandon and his mother would have to move, potentially uprooting Brandon from his school district and throwing another obstacle to the prospect of completing his education. While family ties can be strong, there is no legal obligation to support extended relatives and Brandon's fortunes are now tied closely to those of his uncle, rather than his mother.

The City of Escondido, California, has been embroiled in a long debate over housing and undocumented immigrants, passing a 2006 ordinance that would prohibit landlords from renting to undocumented immigrants. While the debate over this ordinance focused largely on whether the city has the authority to regulate immigration and the extent to which such an ordinance is motivated by racism, little time has been devoted to a discussion of the citizen children that depend on their undocumented immigrant parents. The author's family may potentially be affected by the full enforcement of this ordinance, as his parents may have to take in a number of

godchildren if their parents are evicted from their Escondido apartment. The fact that the author's parents live in Oceanside means that the children would be placed in a new school district, with unknown results for the children's grades, which until now are superb. Overall, it is unknown how a significant decline in the student population would affect federal funding for Escondido's school districts, which is often determined by student population.

Two families, those of Eric and Francisco, consist of undocumented immigrant women who had children with men who were and remain undocumented and ended up marrying men who have papers. I did not explore whether the men's legal status was a relevant cause for the divorces/separations or the marriages, but the effect is clear. Both homes were well furnished, including leather couches, new-looking coffee tables, up-to-date televisions and entertainment centers, etc. Both husbands are able to provide well for their families and while the mothers expressed many of the same frustrations as those of other families, the entire family's situation was not as dire as those in which both parents remain undocumented immigrants. A future study should focus on how legal status affects the divorce and remarriage rates of undocumented immigrant couples.

One family, that of Angela and Carlos, consists of married undocumented immigrant parents that have secured their own mortgage. Their father was not home during my visits to the house, and no one could tell me how he secured a mortgage himself. He is the sole income earner for a family of seven and must work extra hours in order to pay all of the expenses, including the mortgage. He has been deported

before, when the children interviewed were younger, and a future deportation would be disastrous for the family.

*Marriage, Divorce, and Single Parenting*

The undocumented immigrant women in the families studied have been more vulnerable to the effects of having children while being undocumented than the undocumented immigrant men with whom they had U.S. citizen children. Of the ten families studied, four consisted of currently married undocumented immigrant parents. Four families were headed by single undocumented immigrant mothers, including one headed by a single undocumented immigrant mother and her brother; and two were headed by undocumented immigrant women who had divorced the undocumented immigrant father of their children and remarried to either a legal resident or a U.S. citizen. In all cases, it is the mother who is the primary role in raising the children; the fathers, when present in a family, primarily work long hours and tend to have comparatively less contact with their children. Since mothers are more likely to shop and buy the groceries, cook the food, do the laundry (sometimes at a laundromat), visit schools, etc., undocumented status among immigrant couples tends to create burdens that women are more likely to bear and influence the manner in which they are able to raise their children. While this study is not working with a control group against which to measure the impact of a single undocumented status variable on women's ability to raise their children, regularizing both members of a couple's undocumented status would remove a significant source of stress to a couple's relationship, which could

make it less probable that they will break up, leaving the woman to raise her children alone.

Being undocumented adds great pressure to a parenting couple's relationship and exacerbates any issues over which regular couples may stress. Two families that participated in this study consisted of women who had remarried legal U.S. residents. Francisco's mother explained that she believed that her children have been sheltered from the effects of her undocumented status because of her second husband's legal status. As for her former husband, the father of the child interviewed, she said that he is currently undocumented and dismissed his future prospects. She believes he will continue to be undocumented and will fail to make a proper living in the U.S. He is not present in his children's lives. While it is unclear whether the father's legal status was the primary reason leading to the couple's divorce, being undocumented must have exacerbated any other conflicts in the parents' relationship. In a different case, Brandon's mother left his father because of his problems with alcoholism. Whether the hardship of being undocumented with a family caused his alcoholism is unknown, but being undocumented certainly must have exacerbated his problems, which would not have alleviated his alcoholism.

Even among intact parenting couples, undocumented legal status creates situations that challenge parents' abilities to raise their children. The strongest challenge to child rearing comes when one parent is deported, as in the case of Angela and Carlos' family. While their father was deported, their mother worked and kept the household together. Despite her efforts, however, Carlos says that he was out of control and his grades suffered. Should this happen again, now that he and his sister

are in high school, the academic effects of such a disruption to the family would limit his educational opportunities after high school.

Other families who have not faced forced separation through deportation still face barriers to their abilities to raise their children properly. Carla and Desiree, the only two other students interviewed who live with their married parents, talk about the fact that their fathers are not around much because they work long hours for their family. While this is typical with many working class families, the more time that the fathers of these families spend in public, be it at work or driving to or from work, they risk being pulled over by the border patrol or being caught in an I.C.E. raid and being deported. They may also work longer hours because they are unable to secure better-paying work, due to their undocumented status.

Among estranged couples, undocumented status may reveal a women's inability to raise her child alone. Separation and the reality of raising children alone creates a burden on women which may lead to many undesirable choices, including returning to Mexico and taking their children out of the school system; working and raising children alone and not having time to raise them as they would like; depending on other family members to help raise children or for a place to live; or marrying a legal resident or citizen in order to provide stability for their children. Brandon's current academic troubles certainly stem from the fact that he lived in Mexico for three years, instead of in Oceanside, where he would have been speaking English regularly. While he is working to catch up with his credits so he can graduate on time, attending a four-year university seems like a distant goal.

Divorce and remarriage can often be difficult for adolescents to deal with. It is interesting that in both families studied in which mothers remarried, the new spouse was a legal resident or U.S. citizen. While the children in these families enjoy a higher economic standard of living than others interviewed, they seemed indifferent to their own future prospects. The mothers feel that their improved economic standing has made their children complacent and worry that their children, both of whom are males, are emotionally distant. The fact that these boys' fathers are no longer in their lives could factor into their current troubles.

Among the families studied, the children of single mothers tended to have the most academic and social problems. While being a single mother is a difficult situation even for U.S. citizens, being a single mother as an undocumented immigrant further puts women and their children at risk. The children surveyed in this study who lived in households headed by single mothers were the most academically underachieving and exhibited the most signs of trouble assimilating to American society. David and Albert are involved in gang life and have put themselves in physical danger often. Brandon's mother was unable to support the family on her own, and now lives with her brother. These boys' mothers may eventually resort to marrying a man with legal status as a way to secure a stable home for their children, which could potentially lead to other domestic unrest if the children rebel against their stepfathers' authority.

How these students react individually to these similar obstacles will determine the range of academic and professional options that they will enjoy as adults. Understanding the extent to which their parents' undocumented status helps or hinders

their academic attainment is important to understanding the full cost of current American immigration policy.

**Chapter IV:** Citizen Children of Undocumented Immigrants' Self-Identities and Education

This study sought to understand how undocumented immigrants' experiences affect their citizen children's self-identity and how this self-identity affects their educational attainment. Since all of the adolescents interviewed, along with millions of others, were born in the U.S. long after the 1986 amnesty, they have lived their entire lives with parents who are in daily danger of arrest, resulting in deportation and loss of property. The disruptive potential of this threat on the children's academic and social lives are readily apparent, but in-depth interviews with these children revealed a range of awareness and impact on their self-identities and attitudes towards education.

Parental undocumented status as a factor in children's identity formation cannot be studied as an isolated factor, but rather in conjunction with all other factors (including race, phenotype, economic class, gender, etc) in an adolescent's domestic life. The eleven adolescents interviewed showed a wide range of relevance of their parents' status in the expression of their own identities. Similarly, the manner in which these identities were expressed embraced good academic behavior in some cases and self-destructive behavior in others. For those adolescents who lived in households with more stressful circumstances (single parents, past deportation, health problems, etc.), parental undocumented status exacerbated the effect of all those other factors. Conversely, those students who had more parental support in their education referred to their parents' legal status as a source of motivation to succeed. The way in which the adolescents expressed opinions regarding their parents' legal status depended a lot

on the extent to which their parents have spoken to them about the obstacles they face, which can also be the result of parental preoccupation with the immediate danger their legal status represents.

*Parental Undocumented Legal Status and their Children's Self-Identities*

There is a strong relationship between parental undocumented status and the way that their citizen children describe their own identities. Students tend to refer to their families in discussing their identities, and many identify with their undocumented parents' struggles, even though, as U.S. citizens, anti-immigrant rhetoric and legislation does not target them specifically.

None of the students interviewed identified themselves as "American," usually defining their self-invoked term (Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano, etc.) along cultural lines (Carlos, Eric, David, Francisco, Desiree, Guillermo), linguistic lines (Carlos, David), or by inclusion in an immigrant family or community (Angela, Bianca, Francisco, Desiree, Guillermo). This selection of a Mexico-oriented identity, along with their parents' legal obstacles, makes the issue of undocumented immigration relevant to their identities for two reasons, which may explain why nearly all of the students were involved in the immigrant marches or expressed that they had wanted to attend.

The way that some of the students described their identities revealed a two-way process, in which their reactions to perceived racism influenced their self-perception and vice-versa. Carlos describes anti-immigrant rhetoric from African American students at his high school while talking about why he doesn't want to

become American. He uses “us” to describe Mexican students from Mexico and the U.S. when he talks about American attitudes towards immigrants. Eric similarly describes himself as Mexican, not because of a specific positive quality, but because he associates “American” with people who act like they are superior to Mexicans and by extension, himself. By his reasoning, there is no space for his language and culture in his conception of “American,” since becoming American would require him to look down on his culture. David also describes Americans of Mexican descent as having gone through a process of becoming “whitewashed,” citing a Mexican American teacher who he believes treats Mexican students poorly. To David, to be American is to oppress Mexicans. However, his explanation of his identity does not do away with inferior place of Mexicans. In describing his ethnic pride, he says, “… the Chicano is a person with dignity and with pride. It’s saying that I don’t care. We might be brown, but we’re proud. We’re proud to be brown.” He is still acknowledging that he believes he is expected to be apologetic about being of Mexican descent. Anti-immigrant rhetoric and legislation affects these students because it reinforces their existing perception of their identity as incompatible with being fully American. This alone does not necessarily lead to positive or negative effects on their education, however.

Their parents’ undocumented status motivated most of the students to want to attend the spring 2006 immigrant marches that took place as a response to the December 2005 Sensenbrenner House bill 4437, indicating that they felt it was important because they felt they had to stand up for their parents. Angela, who is doing well in her high school, explains, “I wanted it so badly…, I was willing to get up early, willing to drive two hours [to the Los Angeles march], willing to stay in a

walking…, it took probably about four hours to get down like two or three blocks. It took forever and I was willing to stand there because I wanted it so badly. For what we were protesting about to be true." David, who is heavily involved in *cholo* gang life, also attended the marches: "I did it for my mom. You know, they told us, one of my friends told me if I went, it would increase the possibility for my mom to get papers. For illegals to get papers. I said, 'hell yeah, I'm going.' That was the only reason I went." For both these students, engaging in a civic protest was well within the range of behaviors with which they identify because they can derive a sense of accomplishment from protesting publicly. It also may provide an opportunity for these students to make a stand in opposition to the perceived dominant cultural group in the U.S. Only one student interviewed, Francisco, said that he did not attend the marches, nor did he want to, mainly because he did not feel like walking. Such a casual reason for not marching, which stands in stark contrast to other students' perception of the marches, may be the result of the fact that he is more insulated from the effects of deportation, as he lives in a house with a U.S. citizen stepfather. His mother explained to me that she thinks her children have not had to confront the hardship that comes from having parents with undocumented status.

Aside from participating in the marches, students express that they avoid identifying publicly as children of undocumented immigrants. Eric says that his friends don't know about his mother's legal status because it's "personal stuff." Desiree: "…my mom always tells me not to talk about [her undocumented status] because anybody who gets mad and stuff with us, they would take that and put it against my parents. So I don't know if [my friends] know." Carla says that she has

been told by her parents not to share information about their legal status with anyone. These students are unlikely to identify publicly as children of undocumented immigrants and form strong friendship bonds with other similar students. The secretive nature of this identity may mean that its effect on students' actions is limited.

Despite overwhelmingly invoking Mexico-oriented labels and participating in the immigrant marches – perhaps one of the few instances where students could safely identify publicly as children of undocumented immigrants because not every participant was undocumented – many students' definitions of their labels were rather simplistic. Aside from David, who seeks to resist expectations of Mexican inferiority ("I don't care. I'm proud to be brown.") and achieve Chicano status when he achieves dignity, the typical explanation of self-identity was of the pre-determined, passive sort. Students' identities were a mixture of *jus soli* (they were born in the U.S.) and *jus sanguinis* (their parents are from Mexico). Some students, like Carlos and Guillermo, are also beginning to consider how the behaviors they choose affect who they are. Guillermo: "… I'm American…, like, I do American stuff and then I do Mexican stuff. Like I'm both. Like, I could do Mexican stuff and home and at school I do like American stuff, like basketball, football, skating." Carlos in particular is considering how he will resolve the conflict in his mind between being an educated professional in the U.S. and remembering where he came from.

Being adolescents, some of the students interviewed may only just be beginning to explore what their ethnic identities mean to them. However, all of the students act according to their individual set of acceptable behaviors, whether they have fully thought them through or not. How their behaviors and aspirations reveal

the influence of their identities is important to understanding the long-term consequences of their parents' undocumented status.

*Citizen Children's Self-Identities and their Approach to Education*

Among the students interviewed, their parents' undocumented status served as a motivating force to do well in school for some, while for others it was less relevant. This is the result of parental immigration status interacting with other factors at work in these students' lives. Students' own rationalization of their current situation as a better or worse case than it would be under different circumstances (such as if their parents had their papers) seems to justify their current attitude towards their position in society. Students who are experiencing difficulties in the U.S. may look at their parents' legal status and imagine that life would be better if their parents were legal. On the other hand, students who have experienced some levels of success might imagine that it is their families' initial disadvantages that have motivated them to their success thus far. Other students are more pragmatic and determine that life would largely be the same, except for certain things that would be easier for their families. These attitudes depend on a variety of factors, as discussed above, that are not directly attributable to legal status, but whose effects may be magnified by it.

Among these students, there are examples of students on an academically successful trajectory and others on a more academically problematic path. Parental undocumented status alone cannot explain why some students struggle within the educational system while others find success, but it can strengthen the framework presented by segmented assimilation and its context of reception. In this sense,

parental undocumented status interacts with other factors at work at times amplifying their effect.

Angela and Carlos (siblings), Carla, Desiree, and Guillermo are doing well in school. While unable to eliminate the daily possibility of potential disruption to their lives, their families have managed to raise their children in a way that has put the children on a trajectory to graduate high school and attend college.

Parental expectations and involvement in education is an important factor in children's academic success, regardless of parents' citizenship status. Students interviewed who are doing well in school tend to come from families where education is a priority. Angela and Carlos' mother attends school meetings regularly and has her youngest daughter (not interviewed) in a charter school, Desiree attends a charter school, and Carla's family emphasizes her education. These students talk about their parents' undocumented legal status as a source of motivation for doing well in school.

How they talk about their motivation differs, however. Carlos expresses that he thinks his life would be worse if his parents were legal residents. In his view, his parents' undocumented status actually keeps them from being complacent and motivates them to overcome their disadvantaged position in the U.S:

> [My life] would have been different [if my parents had their papers] because they wouldn't really care about school, they would be worried about their job. 'Cause they would be working and stuff. We wouldn't have a house. We would probably live in an apartment because they could get an American job. My dad probably wouldn't be a gardener; he'd probably get like a regular job and get just like $11 an hour, not enough money. My mom would do the same thing, probably. My dad probably wouldn't be a gardener and work like all the time so we can live in a house and stuff. 'Cause the job he works in, it's like, his own little business and you make more than minimum wage and all that.

For Carlos, the fact that his parents are undocumented is the motivation for his parents to work so hard and is the reason why he and his siblings must excel in school. He may be correct that his father might make less money if he was not paid under the table, but having legal residency would not necessarily make his parents more complacent. At the moment, it may make sense to Carlos since his identity as Chicano is based on his family's struggle, and he is concerned that as his family becomes more stable, they will lose their culture:

> Carlos: That's why I get mad when my dad speaks to the kids in English a lot, because they are going to be speaking English all the time and they when one of our family members that only knows Spanish, "where's this and that" they are going to be like "I don't know. I don't speak Spanish." And I hate it when Mexicans do that. When their parents speak Spanish and they don't. It just doesn't make them look right.
>
> Interviewer: What do you think he's doing that? Why do you think he's speaking to them in English?
>
> Carlos: Cause they only speak English. It's his fault. He's trying to learn English and he keeps talking to them in English and they respond to him in English. So there's no Spanish connection with them.
>
> Interviewer: And you have a problem with that.
>
> Carlos: Yeah, see, when I was coming up, they didn't know English. They didn't know anything. My first language was Spanish, you know. The school taught me how to speak English. That was preschool.
>
> Interviewer: You say your parents act too white?
>
> Carlos: I mean, they're still Mexican, but they try to like…, they act like white people, like they don't really like celebrate as much as like other Mexicans, you know, like they don't really have that much pride into what they are anymore. They're trying to be white and stuff. I know my mom is always at meetings and stuff, trying to help out the community, I be like, I mean that's a good thing, but still, like, she

> doesn't want to, she's proud of being Mexican, but still, she doesn't act Mexican as much.
>
> Interviewer: Would you rather she doesn't go to the school meetings and things like that?
>
> Carlos: No. Yeah. I'm proud that she does that for me, you know, but she still should have a little bit of pride, you know, remember where she comes from.
>
> Interviewer: What does that mean?
>
> Carlos: It's good she goes to the meetings, but she should always remember where she comes from, just because they live here doesn't mean they have to forget everything, they shouldn't leave everything in the past.

For the moment, his professional aspirations (he wants to be a counselor in order to help other Chicano students) are rooted in his family's experiences with having undocumented immigrant parents. Maybe due to the lack of successful adult Chicano role models, he struggles with the need to develop professional behavior that brings success in the U.S. and his desire to remember where he comes from. By contrast, Carla's thoughts about how things would change if her parents were legal immigrants focus on their health and family income, not on her education. "Well, probably my mom would be getting more money and probably helping my dad with the house. Probably my dad wouldn't have that much stress for the house. And probably my dad would be better for his heart." Her parents undocumented status is a source of motivation, but not the only one.

The families with academically successful children tend to be headed by married parents. This is not evidence of some intrinsic good in being married, but more likely the fact that these parents are able to share child-rearing responsibilities

and can often earn more money than families headed by one parent. Although Guillermo lives with only his mother, they live in a housing complex that provides social services, including a computer lab for students. This gives him more stability and resources that other students interviewed lack. The other students live in houses where the mother can attend school meetings, where parents can purchase school-related supplies like computers, and even purchase a home. These families are structured in a way that can better overcome the barriers that having undocumented immigrant parents presents.

Parental undocumented status keeps these families' options limited, although they have been successful up until now. While regularizing parents' legal status would not solve all these families' problems, it would add a great deal of stability to their lives, as well as allow them to seek better jobs and allow them to participate publicly in their children's lives, as well as become contributing public members of their communities. In short, it would allow these parents to continue doing what they are already doing well, which is to raise their children to become contributing, integrated American citizen adults.

Albert, Brandon, Bianca, David, Eric, and Francisco are doing poorly in school. They share similar experiences that factor into their less successful academic experiences, the effects of which are exacerbated by their parents' undocumented status. Generally, these students don't make their education a high priority and neither do their parents. The behaviors these students act out show that their parents' undocumented status is relevant in a way that is different from the more academically successful students.

Absent a strong parental emphasis on education, some students have developed non-academic aspirations. David's Chicano identity emphasizes the pursuit of what he calls "a big Chicano dream," which is to rap. He does not identify a "big Chicano dream" to be a college degree, because to link such a goal with a Chicano identity would imply that being a "good Chicano" may be out of his reach. Bianca works to help her single mother with income, so she says that she is not involved much with her own education. Albert does not have many aspirations in general, explaining that he will take any good job.

Many of the families are also headed by single mothers, which means that the mothers have to take on all the earning and child-rearing responsibilities that two parents otherwise share. Everything is more difficult when one is undocumented, and these families are less able to provide the support that can these students need. Albert, Brandon, Bianca, and David. Brandon has experienced the worst-case scenario, in which he had to return to Mexico for four years and was years behind academically when he returned in middle school. Brandon's aspirations are to be a mechanic and own his own shop. While being a mechanic is a fine aspiration, Brandon's options are arguably limited by the fact that his mother self-deportation has limited his academic prospects. Bianca's practical decision to work as a student is partially motivated by the fact that her mother has to support her other brother who is mentally retarded. David's aspirations to be a rapper or boxer is based on the need to redeem his community from the poverty that he has experienced. These students' aspirations are similar in that they have been shaped by their parents' own obstacles in the U.S.

While civic action is a behavior favored in mainstream society, identifying with their undocumented immigrant parents can also lead some students into engaging in dangerous behavior, especially when confronting other students' xenophobic comments. Students like Albert and David, who are already susceptible to engaging in fights and other gang-related behavior, feel obligated to defend themselves when they hear others degrade Mexican immigrants. These fights lead to trouble at school, which can lead to expulsion. Albert, who is at an alternative high school, explains that he has been in fights with black students because they call Mexicans "beaners" and say that they should go back to Mexico. David explains that his definition of "Chicano" obliges him to defend his people, which allows him to engage in actions ranging from protesting to fighting. It makes sense for him to have aspirations that do not require one to have a competitive high school transcript.

It is interesting that, of the students who are doing poorly in school, two of them live in a house with a legal resident or citizen step-parent. In both cases, Eric and Francisco's undocumented immigrant mothers remarried to a legal resident and U.S. citizen, respectively (their fathers are undocumented as well). These two families are also the most economically well-off. In both cases, the mothers explained that they struggle with their own obstacles to living in the U.S. as an undocumented immigrant, but they believe that this fact is lost on their children, who don't feel the impact of their undocumented status. Eric believes that his mother's lack of legal status motivates him to want to do better in school, but when pressed, he admits that he doesn't think anything would change if she did have her papers. He holds this opinion despite the fact his mother talks at length about the opportunities that are out of her

reach because of her legal status. His mother is the most educated of the mothers of the students interviewed and she is very vocal about the kinds of jobs she would love to have if only she could get her papers. She would be able to be a positive contributor to American society and take a more public role in her son's development, but she is unable to at the moment. His lack of educational motivation more likely stems from factors other than his mother's legal status. At the least, her undocumented status is not a serious source of motivation.

Regularizing undocumented immigrants' legal status would not necessarily turn all their children into better students. However, it would remove undocumented status' magnifying impact on families' obstacles to earning more income, remaining in the U.S., and perhaps take away some of the stress that leads to divorces among undocumented immigrant couples. The students interviewed in this study showed that their parents' legal status does, to a varying extent, influence how they construct and act out their ethnic identity. Every student was aware of the difficulties that undocumented status poses for their parents, if not for them. Similarly, every student expressed that they wish that their parents could regularize their legal status. Most students identified closely enough with their parents' experiences that they participated in the immigrant marches of March or May 2006. Many of the students who claim that their identity as Mexican/Chicano/Mexican American motivates them to act in a way that will help them represent their community well and that they are proud of what it means to be Mexican/Chicano/Mexican American. All of these attitudes, taken together, imply that having parents who are undocumented immigrants is relevant to these students' lives.

**Chapter V**: Conclusions and Implications of this Research

The manner in which the undocumented immigration problem has been debated is fundamentally flawed. That a sizable population continues to support the deportation of all undocumented immigrants as a solution to the problems raised by undocumented immigration indicates that the undocumented immigrant population continues to be conceived as totally segregated from the legal immigrant and U.S. citizen population. If that were the case, then the possibility of deporting the entire undocumented immigrant population would theoretically be easier than is actually the case in the U.S. In reality, many undocumented immigrants belong to the same families as legal residents and U.S. citizens and as this study has shown, they often are in charge of raising U.S. citizen children to become responsible adults. Given that undocumented immigrant parents have the primary responsibility of raising their citizen children, the extent to which these parents are successful in carrying out their responsibilities is a benefit to the public good in the U.S. It is inaccurate to conceive of the undocumented immigrant as a cancer, whose damage can only be addressed by quick removal from the American body. In arriving at a solution to undocumented immigration, people will need to reconsider the U.S.'s relationship with many of its undocumented immigrants as a symbiotic one, in which the American public has a stake in the stability and continued residence of these undocumented immigrants.

The immigration debate's focus on undocumented immigrants' economic impact needs to be expanded to incorporate their effect on the U.S. citizen children that are dependent on the resources they provide. However, the secretive nature on the undocumented immigrant population is a barrier to a proper statistical analysis of their

impact on their children, assuming that one can quantify parental influence. Nevertheless, this study, along with common sense, indicates that parents, regardless of their legal status, have a tremendous influence of their children's chances of success and the extent to which children develop into successful adults benefits the U.S. as a whole.

It is difficult to raise citizen children when one lacks legal status. Lack of secure income or healthcare, the constant threat of eviction and deportation, and the fear associated with the carrying out of any public activities are serious obstacles to raising healthy children. Even in the best of circumstances, undocumented immigrants who are healthy, employed, and living in a stable home are subject to immediate disruption of their livelihood in the case of a deportation. Children from these families succeed and fail in school due to a variety of factors. However, legalizing parents' immigration status would remove a significant barrier that permeates all other disadvantageous influences in a child's life.

*Implications of this research*

As this study is not a policy paper, it does not focus on a specific proposal to correct the effect of parental undocumented status on citizen children. However, this study's conclusions raise a number of issues that any serious solution to the problem of undocumented immigration would need to address.

If parents' undocumented status is hindering the educational opportunities of U.S. citizen children, then regularizing their status would benefit these children. The other options – that of deportation, of splitting families, of keeping families from

creating stable homes for their children – is at best unbeneficial to the raising of an educated, acculturated, contributing member of American society. The prospect of withholding citizenship from U.S.-born children of undocumented immigrants is likely unconstitutional.

The idea of regularizing the status of people who are in violation of federal law raises a number of valid questions. Most important is whether undocumented immigrant parents should be entitled to residency by virtue of the fact that their children were born on U.S. soil. Opponents quickly point out that an affirmative answer would incentivize would-be parents to immigrate illegally in order to secure their residency by giving birth in the U.S. However, residency need not be an entitlement; the U.S. government can and should exercise discretion over who it allows to reside legally within its borders. This study has focused on the link between the public good (assuming that children who complete higher education is good for the public) and the efforts of undocumented immigrants.

This idea of regularizing immigrant status based on their civic contributions is not new. The President expedited the citizenship process of a number of active military volunteers (citation needed), and the DREAM Act would grant citizenship to current undocumented immigrants who graduate from a 4-year university (citation needed). The underlying idea is that these immigrants, who have demonstrated that they are willing to work for the improvement of American society, should be pardoned and become citizens. This study suggests that the efforts of parents in the development of responsible citizen adults should not go unnoticed, but rather be taken into consideration in some sort of earned citizenship program.

This study came to an abrupt end in April 2007, when I.C.E. agents carried out a series of raids over two weeks and arrested a total of 359 people in San Diego and Imperial counties (Soto 2007). While agents were seeking immigrant fugitives, they would arrest anyone who they met who was undocumented. As a result, undocumented immigrants who had previously agreed to let me interview their children no longer wanted to participate, nor would they return my phone calls. Since I was first introduced to prospective immigrant families by local community leaders, I did not want to erode the credibility of these leaders by adding to these families' anxiety over possible deportation, so I suspended by field research.

The U.S. stands to gain or lose millions of successful citizen adults, which is the difference between gaining millions of tax dollars in revenue or having to spend millions in public support. The experience of one San Diego family, whose story came to light long after the culmination of the interview process and did not participate in it, serves as an anecdotal example of what is at stake. The two parents, married and both undocumented, had financial trouble, due to the inability to find legal employment. The mother returned to Mexico with her three children, ages 16, 14, and 11, all of whom are U.S.-born honor students. The father remained to work and send money home. If they children return to the U.S., they will be behind in school and they cannot afford to pay the tuition for an expensive American school in Mexico. The U.S. will have missed out on the contributions that these children could have made if they do not complete their education. This would have been my own (and my brothers') fate, had my parents not been granted amnesty in 1986. Instead, my parents went on to raise three productive members of American society, two of them Ivy League graduates.

When one considers that 3.1 million citizen children (Passel 2006) are being raised by undocumented immigrants, the stakes should become clear.

Appendix

PART I:
Student Questionnaire

**In order to participate, first answer the following questions:**

a. **Were you born in the U.S?**
b. **Are your parents/guardians undocumented immigrants?**
c. **Are you between 14 and 17 years old?**

***The subject does not qualify if the answer to any of these questions is 'no'***

1- Name (alias): _____

2- Code number: _____

3- City: _____

4- School: _____

5- Grade (entering this year): _____

6- Age _____

7- Male: _____ Female: _____ GPA?_____

How much do you agree with each of the following statements about your current/last school and teachers?

| | 1. Agree a lot | 2. Agree a little | 3. Disagree a little | 4. Disagree a lot |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8- There is real school spirit | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 9- Students make friends with students of other racial and ethnic groups | ____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 10- The teaching is good | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 11- Teachers are interested in students | ____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 12- I don't feel safe at this school | ____ | ____ | _____ | _____ |

13- Disruptions by other students get in the way of my learning ___ ____ _____ _____

14- Fights often occur between different racial or ethnic groups ___ _____ _____ _____

15- There are many gangs at school _____ _____ ____ _____

16- Students are graded fairly ____ _____ _____ _____

17- Discipline is fair ____ _____ _____ _____

During the current/last school year how many times did any of the following things happen to you at school?

| | 1. Never | 2. Once or twice | 3. More than twice |
|---|---|---|---|
| 18- I had something stolen from me at school | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 19- Someone offered to sell me drugs at school | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 20- Someone threatened to hurt me at school | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 21- I got into a physical fight at school | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 22- I heard someone talk badly about undocumented, or illegal, immigrants | _____ | _____ | _____ |

23- Which of the following best describes your present situation:

i. I live with my biological/adoptive father and mother____
ii. I live with my father and stepmother (or other female adult)___
iii. I live with my mother and stepfather (or other male adult)____
iv. I live with my father alone ____
v. I live with my mother alone ____
vi. I alternate living with my father and mother who are divorced or separated ____
vii. I live with other adult guardians ____
viii. Other (Explain) _____

24- How many people beside you and your parents, live in the same house with you? Number: _____

a. Brothers or step-brothers: _____
b. Sisters or step-sisters: _____
c. Grandparents: _____
d. Uncles or aunts: _____
e. Other relatives: _____
f. Non-relatives: _____

*Please describe the present or most recent job of your **father, stepfather,** or **male guardian**:*

25- Is he currently working, unemployed, retired, or disabled?

1. currently working _____ 2. unemployed _____
3. retired _____ 4. disabled _____

*If your father is* unemployed, retired, *or* disabled, *answer the following questions for his most recent job.*
*Also, if your father works* more than one job, *please answer for the job you consider to be his major activity.*

26- What kind of work does he normally do? That is, what is his job called?

Name of occupation: _____

27- What does he actually do in that job? What are some of his main duties?

_____

_____

28- Describe the place where he works; what does the company make or do?

_____

_____

_____

29- What is the highest level of education that he completed?

i. Elementary school or less _____
ii. Middle school graduate or less _____
iii. Some high school _____
iv. High school graduate _____
v. Some college or university _____
vi. College graduate or more _____
vii. Other _____ Explain _____

30- Has your father/guardian ever been deported? Yes _____ # of times _____ No ____

*31- Please describe the present or most recent job of your **mother, stepmother,** or **female guardian**:*

32- Is she currently working, unemployed, retired, or disabled?
1. currently working _____ 2. unemployed _____
3. retired _____ 4. disabled _____

*If your mother is* unemployed, retired, *or* disabled, *answer the following questions for her most recent job.*
*Also, if your mother works* more than one job, *please answer for the job you consider to be her major activity.*

33- What kind of work does she normally do? That is, what is her job called?
Name of occupation: _____

34- What does she actually do in that job? What are some of her main duties?

_____

_____

35- Describe the place where she works; what does the company make or do?

_____

_____

_____

36- What is the highest level of education that she completed?
i. Elementary school or less _____
ii. Middle school graduate or less _____
iii. Some high school _____
iv. High school graduate _____
v. Some college or university _____
vi. College graduate or more _____
vii. Other _____ Explain _____

37- Has your mother/guardian ever been deported? Yes _____ # of times _____ No ____

38- Do your parents (or adult guardians) own or rent the house or apartment where you now live?

i. own _____ 2. rent _____ 3. other _____

39- Do you have a paying job at present? 1. Yes _____ 2. No _____

40- If yes, what is your job? (Please describe clearly, *including the place where you work*)
_____
_____
_____

41- How many hours *per week* do you work at it? _____

42- Approximately how much do you earn per week in this job? $ _____

*Let's talk about the language that you speak at home*

43- Do you speak Spanish?

44- How well do you speak Spanish?

i. Very little _____ 2. Not well _____
3. Well _____ 4. Very well _____

45- How well do you understand Spanish?

i. Very little _____ 2. Not well _____
3. Well _____ 4. Very well _____

46- How well do you read Spanish?

i. Very little _____ 2. Not well _____
3. Well _____ 4. Very well _____

47- How well do you write Spanish?

i. Very little _____ 2. Not well _____
3. Well _____ 4. Very well _____

48- Do people in your home speak Spanish?
i. Yes _____ 2. No _____

49- How often do the people who live in your home speak Spanish when they are talking to each other?
i. Seldom _____ 2. From time to time _____
ii. Often _____ 4. Always _____

50- When you talk to your parents (or guardians) what language do you most often use? _____

51- In what language do you prefer to speak most of the time?

52- Have you ever visited your family in Mexico? Yes _____ # of times _____ No _____

53- If yes, were your parents with you? Yes ____ No _____

*About your plans for the future*

54- What is the **highest** level of education that you would like to achieve?

i. Less than high school ____ 2. Finish high school ____
3. Finish some college ____ 4. Finish college ____
5. Finish a graduate degree (masters, doctor, etc.) _____

55- And **realistically speaking,** what is the highest level of education that you think you will get?

i. less than high school _____ 2. Finish high school ____
3. Finish some college _____ 4. Finish college ____
5. Finish a graduate degree (masters, doctor, etc.) _____

56- What is the highest level of education that your parents want you to get?

i. Less than high school _____ 2. Finish high school ___
3. Finish some college _____ 4. Finish college ___
5. Finish a graduate degree (masters, doctor, etc.) _____

57- What job would you like to have as an adult? (Please write clearly)

_____
_____
_____
_____

58- Among the following job categories, which is the one that comes closest to the job that you would like to have as an adult?

i. Factory worker _____
ii. Office clerk _____
iii. Salesperson _____
iv. Technician/computer programmer _____
v. Nurse/physical therapist/dietitian _____
vi. Business executive/manager _____

vii. Engineer _____
viii. Teacher/professor _____
ix. Lawyer _____
x. Doctor (Physician) _____
xi. Other (write in) _____

59- And **realistically speaking,** how do you see your chances of getting this job?
i. Very poor ____ 2. Poor _____
3. Good ____ 4. Very good _____

59(a)- If you plan to attend college, which is the college that you would *like* to attend?
Name of College _____
No plans to attend college _____
Don't know _____

59(b)- And **realistically speaking**, which is the college that you think you *will* attend?
Name of College _____
No plans to attend college _____
Don't know _____

59(c)- If you do not go to college, what is the main reason why you do not plan to go?

_____
_____
_____
_____

*How important is each of the following to you in your life?*

| | 1. Not Important | 2. Somewhat Important | 3. Very Important |
|---|---|---|---|
| 60- Having lots of money | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 61- Having strong relationships | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 62- Being able to find steady work | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 63- Living close to parents and relatives | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 64- Getting away from this community | _____ | _____ | _____ |

65- How many close friends do you have in school? (Write number) _____

66- How many of your friends have:

| | 1. None | 2. Some | 3. Many or most |
|---|---|---|---|
| a. Dropped out of school without graduating | ___ | _____ | _____ |
| b. No plans to go to college | ___ | _____ | _____ |
| c. Plans to get a full-time job after high school? | ___ | _____ | _____ |
| d. Plans to attend a 2-year community college? | ____ | _____ | _____ |
| e. Plans to attend a 4-year college or university? | _____ | _____ | _____ |

67- In talking with your friends at school, do you sometimes speak Spanish?

i. Yes _____ 2. No _____

68- How often do you use Spanish when talking with your school friends?

i. Seldom _____ 2. From time to time

3. Often _____ 4. Always _____

69(a)- How do you identity, that is, what do you call yourself?
(Example: Mexican American, Mexican, Chicano, etc.)

_____

69(b)- And how important is this identity to you, that is what you call yourself?

1. Not important _____ 2. Somewhat important _____

3. Very important _____

Please indicate how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements (Mark the right line):

| | 1. Agree a lot | 2. Agree a little | 3. Disagree a little | 4. Disagree a lot |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 70- There is racial discrimination in economic opportunities in the U.S. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 71- The American way of life weakens the family | ____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 72- There is much conflict between different racial and ethnic groups in the U.S. | ____ | ___ | _____ | _____ |
| 73- Non-whites have as many opportunities to get ahead economically as whites in the U.S. | ___ | ____ | _____ | _____ |
| 74- There is no better country to live in than the United States | ____ | ____ | _____ | _____ |
| 75- Americans generally feel superior to foreigners | ____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 76- Mexican immigrants without their papers should go back to Mexico | ___ | ____ | _____ | _____ |
| 77- Immigrants without their papers should get residency/citizenship if their children are born in the U.S. | ___ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 78- If the parents are deported to Mexico, they should take their children with them, even if they are U.S. citizens | ___ | _____ | _____ | _____ |

79- Have you ever felt discriminated against? 1. Yes _____ 2. No _____

80- (If yes) And by whom did you feel discriminated? (Check all that apply)

a. Teachers
b. Students
c. Counselors
d. White Americans in general
e. Latinos in general

f. Black Americans in general
g. Others _____ (Write in) _____

81- What do you think was the main reason for discriminating against you? (write clearly)
_____
_____
_____
_____

82- During the typical **weekday**, how many hours do you spend studying or doing school homework?

1. Less than one _____ 2. One to two _____
3. Two to three _____ 4. Three to four _____
5. Four to five _____ 6. Five or more _____

83- Who helps you most with your homework when you need help? (Pick one)

i. My father or mother ___ 2. My brother or sister__
3. My friend(s) ____ 4. My teacher(s) ____
5. My counselor(s) _____ 6. Other ____
7. No one ____

84- During the typical **weekday**, how many hours do you spend watching television or playing video games?

i. Less than one _____ 2. One to two _____
3. Two to three _____ 4. Three to four _____
5. Four to five _____ 6. Five or more _____

85- Linda and Luis are both student whose parents were born in another country. Linda says: "I am sometimes embarrassed because my parents don't know American ways." Luis says: "I am never embarrassed by my parents. I like the way they do things."
Why one comes closest to how you feel?

1. Linda _____ 2. Luis _____
3. Neither (explain) _____

86- How often do you prefer American ways of doing things?

i. All the time _____ 2. Most of the time _____
3. Sometimes _____ 4. Never _____

87- How often do your parents (or adults with whom you live) prefer American ways of doing things?

i. All the time _____ 2. Most of the time _____
3. Sometimes _____ 4. Never _____

88- And how often do you get in trouble because your way of doing things is different from that of your parents?

i. All the time _____ 2. Most of the time _____
3. Sometimes _____ 4. Never _____

Please indicate if you agree or disagree with the following statements:

| | 1. Agree a lot | 2. Agree a little | 3. Disagree a little | 4. Disagree a lot |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 89- I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 90- I feel that I have a number of good qualities | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 91- All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 92- I am able to do things as well as most other people | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 93- I feel I do not have much to be proud of | ____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 94- I take a positive attitude toward myself | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 95- On the whole, I am satisfied with myself | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 96- I wish I could have more respect for myself | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 97- I certainly feel useless at times | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 98- At times I think I am no good at all | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 99- I am satisfied with how I look | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 100- I am not very popular with members of the opposite sex | ___ | ___ | ____ | _____ |

101-I am seen as a trouble maker by other students ____ _____ _____ _____

Now, this is another list that describes young people. Please answer how true each statement is for you.

| | 1. Very True | 2. Partly True | 3. Not Very True | 4. Not True at All |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 102-My parents do not like me very much | ___ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 103- It is very important for me to get good grades | ___ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 104-My parents and I often argue because we don't share the same goals | ___ | ____ | _____ | _____ |
| 105-My parents are usually not very interested in what I say | ___ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 106-No matter how much education I get, people will still discriminate against me | ____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |

107-Lots of things happen in families that may affect young people. In the last 3 years, have any of the following happened to you or your family?

(Circle one in each line)

a. My family moved to a new home

b. My parents got divorced or separated

c. One of my parents got married or remarried

d. One of my parents lost his/her job

e. I became seriously ill or disabled

f. One of my parents died

g. One of my brothers/sisters dropped out of school

h. A member of the family was the victim of a crime

i. My parents were deported

j. Someone in my family was deported

PART II:
Open-ended interview, to be transcribed

**School**
Talk about what you like/don't like about school (based on earlier question-friends/cliques, etc)

**Identity**
Are you proud of Mexico? What does it mean to you?

How do you feel about the U.S? What do you like/not like?

(Continuing on an earlier questionnaire question): Explain what you mean about being Mexican or Mexican American, etc? What does that mean? Why don't you call yourself _____ (American)?
What does "American" mean to you?

What do you think others think of Mexicans?

Do you and your family belong in the U.S. or Mexico? Why? What do you think of when you think of Mexico?

(Continuing on a past question) If someone in your family has been deported, did that affect you? How?

**Immigration**

How do you think other people feel about Mexican immigrants like your parents, who don't have their papers?

Why do you think your parents came to the U.S. without their papers? What do they tell you about the differences between the U.S. and Mexico?

Do you want your parents to get residency? Citizenship? Why?

Have you ever had to talk to immigration? The police?

Talk about how your parents have crossed the border in the past. Were you ever with them?

**Bureaucracy**

When it comes to buy big things (cars, home, etc), do your parents need you to help them with paperwork/talking to people/etc? Describe what that is like.

Some people in Congress, in Washington D.C., are saying that if undocumented immigrants have children who are born in the U.S., those children should not get automatic U.S. citizenship, which means that they could be deported. What do you think about that?

Because your parents don't have their papers, does that cause any kind of trouble or problems for you? What kind? Describe. Would things be easier if they were residents?

When people started marching earlier this year, did you march? Why/why not? What were people at school saying about the marches? What were the marches about?

When you get sick, do you go to the doctor? Do your parents have insurance?

Summary of Student Interview Subjects

| Name | Age | Grade | Academic Standing |
|---|---|---|---|
| Albert | 14 | 8 | Very low |
| Angela | 16 | 11 | Good |
| Carlos | 14 | 9 | Good |
| Brandon | 16 | 11 | Low |
| Bianca | 16 | 11 | Low |
| David | 15 | 10 | Very low |
| Eric | 14 | 9 | Low |
| Carla | 13 | 8 | Good |
| Francisco | 14 | 7 | Very Low |
| Desiree | 13 | 8 | Very Good |
| Guillermo | 15 | 9 | Good |

| Name | Parental Presence | Parental Legal Status | Previous Deportations |
|---|---|---|---|
| Albert | Single mother | Mother- undocumented | No |
| Angela | Married parents | Mother and father- undocumented | Father- deportation |
| Carlos | Married parents | Mother and father- undocumented | Father- deportation |
| Brandon | Mother and uncle | Mother- undocumented | Mother- self-deportation |
| Bianca | Single mother | Mother- undocumented | No |
| David | Mother and stepfather | Mother and stepfather- undocumented | No |
| Eric | Mother and stepfather (legal resident) | Mother- undocumented; stepather- legal resident | No |
| Carla | Married parents | Mother and father- undocumented | No |
| Francisco | Mother and stepfather (U.S. citizen) | Mother- undocumented; father- U.S. citizen | No |
| Desiree | Married parents | Mother- undocumented; father- legal resident | No |
| Guillermo | Single mother | Mother- undocumented | No |

| Name | Home Ownership | Preferred Identity Label | Life Goals |
|---|---|---|---|
| Albert | Rent | Mexican American | Any good job |
| Angela | Own | Mexican American/Hondureña | Criminal justice/investigator |
| Carlos | Own | Chicano | Social Worker |
| Brandon | Rent | Mexican | Own his own mechanic garage |
| Bianca | Rent | Mexican | Law or business |
| David | Rent | Chicano | Boxing/rap/poetry/architect |
| Eric | Rent | Mexican | Architect |
| Carla | Own | Mexican American | Marine biologist |
| Francisco | Rent | Mexican American | Construction |
| Desiree | Rent | Mexican American | Veterinarian or news-related work |
| Guillermo | Rent | Chicano | Astronomer |

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