

BETWEEN TWO HOMELANDS:
THE EXPERIENCES OF UNDOCUMENTED MEXICAN MOTHERS
WITH THE K-12 PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM IN A RURAL COMMUNITY

By

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ABSTRACT

BETWEEN TWO HOMELANDS: THE EXPERIENCES OF UNDOCUMENTED MEXICAN MOTHERS WITH THE K-12 PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM IN A RURAL COMMUNITY

María Eugenia Corral-Ribordy

This thesis seeks to gain an insight into the experiences undocumented Mexican mothers living in a rural community have with their children's public schools. Specifically I was interested in an understanding of their perceptions regarding the barriers that may impinge upon their children's educational success. Using a qualitative research approach and guided by phenomenological theory I used an open-ended questionnaire to interview six undocumented Mexican immigrant women living in Northern California. The semi-structured interviews provided a format for the women to decide the extent to which they chose to share rich narratives about their lives in Mexico, experiences during the crossing process, and incorporation into the local community following a successful immigration into the United States.

Themes of connectedness and relationships emerged and these were mediated by a language barrier, racial identity, gender expectations, and an immigration process. Furthermore, the participants articulated numerous challenges to their children's educational outcome. Notably among these barriers were: a sense of disconnection with the school community, a concern for the physical and emotional safety of their children while in school, and a perception of social apathy by school officials for their struggles as undocumented immigrants. An inclusion of the perspectives of Mexican immigrant mothers in the conversation about Latino children's

public school experiences, along with educators, administrators, and policy-makers, can be instrumental in the development of appropriate and effective interventions on behalf of their children's educational pursuits.

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Echoing Audre Lorde's call... *To whom do I owe the voice behind my words? To whom do I owe the lessons that offered gifts of multiple meanings to be gleaned in my journey as a scholar, a student, and a teacher? To whom do I owe the clarity of vision necessary to see the importance of this project and faith in my ability to carry it out with academic rigor, ethical integrity, and objective passion?*

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Gloria Anzaldúa said it most eloquently: “gracias a toditos ustedes!”

DEDICATION

I honor the inspiration I derive from the struggle for self-determination

embodied in the lives of women

who cross multiple borders, the world over, and every day;

who undaunted sing transcendental *consejos*,

and though inaudible to many,

hope the *muchachos* will hear their call to freedom;

I stand in awe of my mother Eva, of Yaya,

and of all my mothers before them

whose bi-directional crossing of the Mexico/U.S. border

distilled within our family a lived resistance

to the attempted political and historical laceration of our *gente*.

Their faith in me continues to be my strength.

May their voices—multilingual, erudite, and resolute,

sonorous and kind—resonate within mine.

To my sons Aurelio and Rafael,

to my nieces Amber, Ariel, Angelica, Jerry, and Billie,

May you know that the pursuit of an education and the quest for understanding are

intrinsically and inalienably liberating;

that you too hear and follow the song.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On March 25, 2006, in a manifestation of the swelling grassroots movement for immigrant rights, more than one million people marched in the streets of Los Angeles (Goodman, 2006). At that moment, the reality that the United States is a country with almost 12 million people who live and work as undocumented immigrants crossed the border into mainstream U.S. consciousness (Goodman, 2005; Passel, 2006). The emergent visibility of the participation of undocumented immigrants within the United States has increasingly been the focus of social science inquiry. At the beginning of this project, I set out to investigate the ways in which undocumented Mexican mothers living in a rural community made sense of their lives, the factors that informed their decision-making process, and their understanding of life-choices in relation to their immigrant status.

The perspectives these women offer us may provide a window of insight into the ways in which public schools can better meet the educational needs of immigrant children. Public schools in the state of California, as is the case for schools in most other states of the union, are faced with an increasingly ethnically diverse and multilingual student body (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). In the Southwest, the majority of immigrant students come primarily from Mexico and other Central and South American countries (Chavez, Hubbell, Mishra, & Valdez, 1997; Grant & Rong, 1999). The number of immigrants from Central and South America also has increased significantly over the last three decades (Passel, 2005). In addition to the changing

demographic patterns, the historical trend in educational achievement has been that Latino children have underperformed in comparison with other ethnic groups (Ogbu & Simmons, 1998).

While there have been multiple attempts to explain the academic performance of immigrant groups as well as Latino communities, many of these efforts reflect the perspectives of scholars, school teachers and administrators, or educational policy-makers. However, the perspectives of the mothers of the students in question have not been elicited directly, perhaps because language may be a communication barrier or, depending on the immigrant status of the Latina mothers, the relationship with representatives from state institutions may be precarious.

Access to their narratives notwithstanding, undocumented Mexican mothers may be able to offer perspectives unique in the current sociopolitical context and distinct explanations of why some of their children might struggle with academic achievement. Furthermore, the women's perceptions may represent a more elusive contribution to the conversation of the role of public education in a democracy because of the social distance between the undocumented community and the institutions in which the research is produced.

During the research for this project, I interviewed six undocumented Mexican women who are raising school-age children and currently reside in a rural northern California community. The central two-part question addressed in this thesis is: What are the participants' experiences with their children's schools, and what are the obstacles that impinge upon the educational achievement of their children?

Grounded by a phenomenological approach, my interest was to recount the experiences from the perspectives of the mothers as well as to convey their interpretation of those experiences based on their own educational histories. By establishing their “right to define their own reality, establish their own identity, and name their history” (hooks, 1989), the participants claimed recognition as the subjects rather than objects of research in a field in which the perspectives of the undocumented community on the issue of the educational achievement of their children have been sparse.

Operational Definitions

The language used to define a problem or frame a question informs the scope of possible solutions and frames the answers. In order to have a common understanding of the constructs under consideration, it is useful to offer definitions of terms that have multiple definitions, especially in cases in which a current debate is in progress about the most appropriate use and understanding of the term. For the purpose of this thesis, the terms illegal, undocumented, and white are defined as follows.

Illegal.

The dominant media use the word illegal to denote undocumented immigrants. People are constantly exposed to this term and participate in conversations in which this is the agreed-upon term to use when referring to individuals who are undocumented. Many use the word without realizing that it is a loaded word that is also problematic. The participants used the word *ilegal*, which is the Spanish word meaning illegal, both as an adjective that denotes something as extralegal and as a person who lives in the

United States without legal immigrant status. The participants used the word *ilegal* interchangeably with *indocumentados*, which is the Spanish word for undocumented—a word whose use and context I will address below. When I transcribed and translated their narratives, their language was recorded intact. When quoted, the women’s narratives include the actual words they used. Language and the choice of words one uses, whether purposeful or not, is an informative tool in the analysis of meaning and understanding. In my own analysis and conclusions I reference the community of immigrants who live in the United States without explicit authorization from the state by using the terms undocumented or unauthorized instead of illegal.

The term illegal is problematic because it is used to characterize the identity of a group of people who are considered to be outside the parameters of the justice without being entitled to equal protection under the law. By characterizing a group of people as criminals in the public mind, the consequence may advance the perception of Mexicans, Latinos, and brown people in general as criminals and justify socially endorsed violence against them.

Undocumented and unauthorized.

Undocumented is a commonly preferred term to indicate that a person is an immigrant without current legal status. For the purposes of this thesis, I will use the term *unauthorized* interchangeably with *undocumented* to bring attention to the multiple circumstances that result in an immigrant status with restricted rights and privileges as accorded by law.

The Pew Hispanic Center defines *unauthorized population* as the total foreign-born population, as accounted by the Census Bureau, minus the estimated legal foreign-born population. The remaining foreign-born, hereafter *unauthorized*, population may fall into a number of categories such as *Entries Without Inspection* (EWIs), *Visa overstays*, *Quasi-legals* (who include all those in the process of adjusting their status, asylum applicants), and *Temporary Protected Status* (TPSs) (Passel, 2005).

The term unauthorized is a more comprehensive term for the purposes of this research project in that it challenges binary conceptions of immigrant status of legal/documented versus illegal/undocumented. Some unauthorized immigrants, while not technically deportable because their case is pending, do not have a social security number that allows them to work or apply for a driver's license and drive legally. The definitions of unauthorized and undocumented allowed for the participation of the women with immigrant status at different points of their legalization process.

White.

There is an ongoing debate about the most appropriate language that could be used to identify different groups of people based on shared racial or ethnic attributes. For the purposes of this thesis, I will use the term white instead of Caucasian or European American for two reasons. First, white is one term that the participants used in their narratives. The lexical choices the participants of this project employed to delineate the definitional boundary between the identities of the dominant group vis-à-vis their own illustrates an understanding of their position in the social order as one

which is informed by race. Conversely, how they interpret the consequences that their social status in the community entails is reflected in the language they used as well.

I too use the word white because it reveals and underlines the component of a lived experience in a structured inequality that is enforced by the social construction of differences based on race, among other factors. As a term, white is a constructed category used to justify the unequal allocation of resources and privileges that exclude people not considered to be white. The meaning of white identity, situated in its historical context, can be explained as a social construct—a fictional category of difference that may be applied as an analytical tool to deconstruct its utility in the justification of inequality.

When social institutions are informed by the racial considerations of the meaning of white, however, the consequences of the fiction are undoubtedly real to both those who benefit and those who are excluded from the privileges that are structurally and unequally distributed in accordance with race. bell hooks (hooks, 1980) refers to the ideology that supports an institutional structure based on race as *white supremacy* because it serves as a reminder that race is a construct of a larger apparatus of social inequality which cannot be explained by cultural differences or national origins alone. Twentieth-century U.S. playwright Lorraine Hansberry wrote about the paradoxical nature of race by stating that, “It is pointless to pretend that it doesn't exist -- merely because it is a lie!” (Hansberry, 1994).

In addition to the terms defined above, this thesis includes some terms and popular sayings in Spanish that serve to retain the women's voices as well as the

subtlety of the terms themselves, due to specific language or cultural meanings. The Spanish terms are translated in alphabetical order and may be found in Appendix E.

The remaining chapters of this thesis are organized as follows. The Literature Review in Chapter Two is an overview of published research on immigration, specifically research that has focused on gender, family, and unauthorized influences within immigration patterns and experiences. The research question seeks to understand the experiences that the participating unauthorized Mexican immigrant mothers living in a rural community had with schools as well as their understanding of their children's educational process. Published research regarding the educational experience of Latino children in the U.S. is not the central aspect of the literature review because the question focused exclusively on the perspectives of the women.

Chapter Three, Methodology, offers a detailed account of the research process, data processing, and analysis. The research process addresses the initial and final research questions, the selection of the participants, the interviewing protocol, and finally the ethical considerations regarding the protection of the participants' anonymity as well as potential risks deriving from their participation. A brief individual introduction of the women is included as well to personalize the narratives and give them context in Chapter Four. The participants are listed in alphabetical order based on their first name pseudonyms.

Chapter Four, Results, includes excerpts from the women's narratives that directly addressed the research question, specifically their lived experiences dealing with their children's schools and education. The analysis of the narratives is offered in

Chapter Five. Although the analysis is my interpretation of their stories, experiences, and insights, I sought to retain the integrity of the collective voice of the participating women as much as possible.

The body of the thesis ends with Chapter Six, Conclusion. This section is divided in three parts: conclusions, limitations of the research, and recommendations for future research. The women who participated in this research project shared many of the stories that informed the choices and responses available to them in the context within which their lives have unfolded. Honoring their struggles to encourage their children to succeed in school and with this purpose in mind, I also offer some recommendations for the application of the insights gleaned from the narratives.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This review of the literature seeks to frame a context within which to pursue a better understanding of the contemporary scholastic achievement of Mexican-origin students in K-12 public schools in California, specifically those children living in households where their mother is an undocumented immigrant from Mexico. The context necessitates a broad understanding of the socio-historical background and a review of the political history of the Mexico-U.S. border tracked through the implementation of laws that sought to regulate immigration between the two countries. I then will review the literature that has addressed the immigration process and experience, focusing on more recent research addressing the trend of an increasing feminization of immigration from Mexico. The perspectives of undocumented mothers of Mexican-origin children have been notably absent in the literature that attempts to understand the educational experience of their children.

Contemporary Undocumented Immigration

Undocumented immigrants live within communities all over the United States, and yet they are frequently not seen, heard, or understood by dominant American society. The economy of the United States, specifically agribusiness, construction, and the service sector, rely on their participation in the labor market as a source of inexpensive and exploitable labor (Chang, 2000; Meissner, 2005). The demand for

workers in the United States as well as the crippling effects on the Mexican economy resultant from the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 ensure that Mexican men, women, and children continue to risk their lives and cross the border into the United States (Andreas, 2002; Meissner, 2005; Meyerson, 2006; Spielfeld, 2004). Since immigration laws lack sufficient mechanisms for people to enter the country by legal means, the legal quandary for the transnational workers result in a population of immigrants subject to a compulsory undocumented status living within U.S. An approach to the issue of undocumented immigration that focuses on individual choices effectively conceals the structural and inevitable conditions which result in an unauthorized immigrant status (Meyerson, 2006).

Government policies on immigration in the United States combined with the development policies in Mexico resulted in the further impoverishment of the Mexican economy that pressures its people to migrate in search of jobs (Newman, 2001). Once arriving in the United States, however, immigrants with an undocumented status are in a vulnerable position in which they are subject to exploitative working conditions and to marginalization in the community. Advocates of immigrant and labor rights have argued for public policy changes to legalize the immigrants' status and at the same time improve social development programs in the countries from which the immigrants come (Newman, 2001).

On a social level, mainstream media and legal discourse characterize undocumented immigrants as illegal and by implication as criminals, a rhetorical strategy about immigration that effectively occludes the role that corporations, big

business, and economic policies have on the struggles faced by the working class in the United States (Newman, 2001). Ironically, these are precisely the workers who are themselves most negatively impacted by the free-market policies causing the immigrants to cross the border (Andreas, 2002; Cooper, 2003; Newman, 2001).

Furthermore, the criminalizing language allows some people to feel that the immigrants themselves are the source of the problem, to justify the responses ranging from hostile attitudes, to discriminatory policies, to overt and organized violence against undocumented immigrants (Andreas, 2002; Chacón & Davis, 2006).

Having an undocumented immigrant designation has concrete consequences to the immigrants' ability to be incorporated into the communities in which they live. Although they are compelled to immigrate in part by the availability of jobs in specific sectors, they are also legally precluded from working for a living wage (Andreas, 2002; Bastida, 2001). However, should they find a means to earn money, the state requires and facilitates their ability to pay State and Federal taxes using a Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN), a number specifically designed for people without a social security number, thus ensuring that revenue is collected in the form of income taxes from all workers, documented or not (Internal Revenue Service, 2007).

However low the wages are that undocumented immigrants work for in the United States, they are still relatively higher than the working wage in Mexico. Before the implementation of NAFTA in 1994, Mexican wages were 23% of U.S. wages, but by 2002 Mexican wages were only 12% (Meyerson, 2006). Additionally, the official

report of the percentage of Mexican people living in poverty increased from 45.6% to 50.3% during the same time frame (Meyerson, 2006).

An accurate accounting of the number of undocumented immigrants living in the United States is difficult to achieve. The Census Bureau is the official government body entrusted with documenting the demographic composition of the population in the United States. Significant obstacles to obtaining a reliable accounting of undocumented immigrants as a whole result in a general undercount of the population because the immigrants tend not to respond to the census questionnaires, and they may also change their housing arrangements more frequently (Bureau, 2006). According to a policy analysis and report, census count of undocumented immigrants is an underestimate by almost 50% (Durand, Massey, & Zenteno, 2001). Public policy that addresses labor, education, and immigration issues based on census counts of unauthorized immigrants may not fully encompass its intended significance or impact (Justich & Ng, 2005). The often-cited number of undocumented immigrants in the United States is currently between 10 and 12 million people (Passel, 2006). The real count could be as high as 20 million, and they may represent as high as 8% of the total labor force (Justich & Ng, 2005).

Undocumented immigration to the United States is a contemporary institution of complex political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions. The peculiarities of an immigrant status for Mexican origin immigrants as undocumented or unauthorized and their role in U.S. society did not come about suddenly or in a short time frame. The next section reviews the history of the Mexico-U.S. border and the immigration laws

that have directly impacted the mobility of Mexican immigrants in the United States.

These laws are an important consideration since they have also regulated their incorporation into American society and have mediated dominant social notions of the immigrants from Mexico and Latin America.

History of the Mexico-U.S. Border

The present-day Mexico-U.S. border was first demarcated in 1848 on Mexican territory, spanning 2,000 miles from the Pacific Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico (Gonzales, 2000; Griswold del Castillo, 1990). The establishment of the border was made official with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the legal agreement that ended the invasion of Mexico by U.S. troops and stipulated a cession of over half of the Mexican territory to the United States. Furthermore, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ostensibly guaranteed equal citizenship rights and all protections under the law to Mexican nationals who chose to remain in the U.S. (Griswold del Castillo, 1990; Takaki, 1993). The enforcement of the Treaty's provisions was difficult. Spanish language was no longer an acceptable language for official transactions, and contracts issued under the Mexican government were no longer honored under the new juridical system (Takaki, 1993). Many Mexicans lost their land and were systematically relegated to manual labor, receiving lower wages and forced to live in segregated areas of town (Griswold del Castillo, 1990). Mexican workers became the bulk of low-wage labor in the Southwest (Takaki, 1993). Notwithstanding the political transformation of the territory in the Southwest from Mexican to American sovereignty, Mexican popular culture continues to claim the land as *nuestra tierra*, our land. A contemporary musical band from the

borderlands, Los Tigres del Norte, popularized a song that asserts the arbitrary notion of a border while laying a claim on belonging, “Yo no crucé la frontera, la frontera me cruzó (I didn’t cross the border, the border crossed me)” (Valencia, 2001).

During periods of economic growth and increased labor demand, Mexicans have been able to meet the market’s demand for cheap labor (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992). During this time, employers actively went into Mexico and recruited workers and their families with promises of opportunity and wealth (Takaki, 1993). Employers in the U.S. had a difficult time gaining access to a low-wage labor force, in part because of the laws that had already restricted immigration of laborers from Asia, notably among these was the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1907 (Takaki, 1993; Vellos, 1997). Both of these laws limited or excluded people from other countries from being able to immigrate to the United States based on racial categories (Vellos, 1997).

At the turn of the century, the Mexican economy was devastated by state policies of Mexican dictator Porfirio Díaz, policies that dispossessed thousands of peasants from their lands. Industrialization in the cities was not enough to meet the employment needs of the peasants now migrating to the cities (Ross, 1998). Poverty, corruption, and hunger erupted into the Mexican Revolution in 1910. However, a lack of leadership and direction allowed multiple revolutionary leaders to garner the support of people from different parts of the nation but with different political agendas. Pancho Villa led the northern states in Mexico, Emiliano Zapata covered the southern states,

and Francisco I. Madero became the first president-elect of Mexico after the ousting of Porfirio Díaz, concluding his three-decade long dictatorship (Ross, 1998).

The instability that gripped the Mexican economy resulting from civil strife along with the active recruitment of Mexican laborers by agribusiness employers in the U.S. Southwest and manufacturing employers in the urban areas of the Midwest energized a significant migration of Mexicans to el Norte with great impetus until the 1920s (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1997). The violence of civil war forced many people to migrate first to the cities and then north into the U.S. with full intentions of returning to Mexico once the violence ended (Takaki, 1993). However, the war continued for eleven years, and the immigrant families began to settle permanently in the U.S. (Gonzales, 2000).

Following the return of U.S. soldiers from the Great War, the market demands for laborers decreased, and nativist sentiments began to pressure legislators to control immigration (Velloso, 1997). The use of *nativism* in the historical sense refers to anti-immigrant sentiments rather than the anthropological understanding of *nativism* as a resistance to colonial acculturation by the reclamation of indigenous culture (Acuña, 1988). Congress passed the Emergency Quota Act in 1921 and limited the number of immigrants from any country to 3% of the population from that country already living in the United States in 1890 (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1997). The National Origins Act or the Immigration Act of 1924 reduced the quota to 2%; however, countries from the Western Hemisphere were excluded from immigration limitations set by quotas (Johnson, 1998). The impact of these laws on immigration from Mexico was that U.S.

labor demands increasingly depended on Mexican workers who continued to cross the border relatively unrestricted (Vellos, 1997).

During the Great Depression, immigrants were targeted for violence because they were seen as competition for the few jobs at a time when the economy was stagnant (Johnson, 1998). Starting in 1939, three million Latinos, both immigrants and U.S. citizens, were deported to Mexico in a government campaign intended to address anti-immigrant hostility aimed at Mexicans (Takaki, 1993). World War II relieved the U.S. of its industrial slump, and access to low-wage labor was again crucial. The Bracero Program started in 1942 and is the most successful and notorious of the federal programs for the recruitment of workers in Mexico, and roughly two million Mexican men were hired as braceros (Vellos, 1997). Braceros, a term derived from the Spanish word for “arm,” was a reference to manual laborers who worked in the agricultural industry. In 1952, the Immigration and Nationality act removed gender specific stipulations from immigration quotas, and in 1954 Congress approved a program to repatriate Mexican immigrants in a program called Operation Wetback (Johnson, 1998). Although their purpose was ostensibly contradictory, both Operation Wetback and the Bracero Programs were implemented concurrently (Johnson, 1998; Vogel, 2006). The Bracero Program met the agricultural labor demand, while Operation Wetback removed from urban areas Mexican-origin people who might have competed with U.S.-born workers for higher paid jobs (Gonzales, 2000; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1997).

The ebb and flow of Mexican laborers across the Mexico-U.S. border has a longstanding historical character that resulted from the interplay among government

policies, labor market demands for low-wage laborers, and the establishment of families rooted in communities on both sides of the border (Passel, 2005). Mexican migration into the United States was impacted by improved transportation within Mexico, by a 30% increase of the Mexican population, and by the growing cotton industry in the Mexican border state of Tamaulipas (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1997; Johnson, 1998).

Agricultural employers in Mexico heavily recruited workers from other parts of the country to create a surplus of laborers and thus keep the wages low (Gonzales, 2000). Laborers who found themselves out of work on the border continued into the United States. The Bracero Program and the implementation of Operation Wetback by the Immigration and Naturalization Service reveal a collusion between binational agricultural employers and the Immigration and Naturalization Service (Nevins, 2002). The INS conducted raids of deportation in the fields and apprehended the workers at predictable and politically and economically useful moments during the agricultural production, namely after the harvest was completed (Acuña, 1988).

The amendment to the Immigration and Nationality Act in 1965 established a provision that allowed resident immigrants or U.S. citizens to sponsor family members with a privileged position as applicants for immigration authorization (Johnson, 1998). As a result, men who had immigrated under the Bracero program were allowed to sponsor their wives, children, and parents (Salcido & Adelman, 2004). In time, immigrants reinforced the already existing communities, and families developed extended networks of support (Chavez, 1994). The temporary and transitory nature of agricultural work allowed many Mexican families to work during the majority of the

year and then travel to Mexico to spend several months with their families in Mexico. This cyclical immigration pattern was especially true of men who traveled alone, leaving their families in Mexico (Chavez, 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992).

The role and responsibilities of the institution of public education to undocumented children became codified in 1982. The U.S. Supreme Court decided in *Plyler v. Doe* that undocumented children are subject to compulsory education laws and as such are entitled to attend public school (Morse & Ludovina, 1999). Specifically, the court held that it is a violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Constitutional Amendment for the State of Texas to withhold funds from public schools that knowingly enroll undocumented children ("*Plyler v. Doe*", 1982). Though their decision was mired in a complex interplay of arguments, the court asserted that by educating all children the nation would benefit from the contributions that a productive and tax-paying labor force can offer (Brennecke, 2002/2003). Furthermore, the Court proclaimed that the children should not be punished for their parents' decisions or their undocumented status. Public schools are legally obliged to comply with the following guidelines in order to be compliant with *Plyler*: 1) schools may not deny admission to students or treat them fundamentally differently based on their undocumented status, 2) schools may not engage in any practices that make the school environment feel uncomfortable or unsafe to the children or their families in any way which would have a negative impact on their attendance, and 3) the school may not make inquiries that may expose their immigrant status. Finally, though schools may request social security

numbers to process documents such as free and reduced lunch applications, the number itself may not be a requirement (Brennecke, 2002/2003; Morse & Ludovina, 1999).

The long history of cyclical migration and the established socio-cultural networks facilitated an increase of the flow of immigrants from Mexico and Central America (Olmedo, 2003). Simultaneously, the anti-immigrant sentiments among those in the dominant population of the United States increased as a measure of a broader economic recession. During the 1970s, anti-immigrant rhetoric began to describe Mexican immigrants as illegals (Vellos, 1997). Unlike nativist groups from the past who had argued that immigrants were a threat to American workers because they took their jobs away, anti-immigrant rhetoric during the 1980s reframed the problem to one that charged the immigrants with being a burden on public funds (Chang, 2000).

Immigrants from Mexico and Central America thus began to be perceived as representing a burden to society, specifically to the hardworking taxpayers, because of the cost they allegedly incurred in social services. Immigrant rights advocacy groups also lobbied legislators, and Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 (Chang, 2000).

IRCA legislated three important measures in an effort to stop further undocumented immigration into the country and to address the vulnerable position that the population of undocumented workers already living in the United States experienced: 1) it provided a provisional mechanism through which undocumented immigrants who could document that they had been living in the United States since 1982 were eligible to apply for amnesty and petition to regularize their immigrant status,

2) employers would be sanctioned if they were found to knowingly employ undocumented immigrants, and 3) it contained a separate stipulation that allowed agricultural laborers to apply for temporary visas (Chang, 2000; Chavez, 1998). The amnesty program facilitated by the Immigration Reform and Control Act did not affect long-term immigration patterns (Orrenius & Zavodny, 2003).

A possible explanation of the limited effect that the Immigration Reform and Control Act had on reducing the rates of immigration patterns into the United States was that there was no workable verification system in place to assist employers in determining the laborers' eligibility to work (Meissner, 2005). Additionally, the enforcement of sanctions for those employers who were found to hire workers without proper authorization has been sporadic (Meissner, 2005; Passel, 2005). An employer verification system was piloted, but less than 0.005% of the employers in the U.S. used it (Meissner, 2005). The desire for cheap labor on one side of the border and the availability of workers on the other side, desperate enough to work for any wages, were two factors that remained unaddressed by IRCA. Furthermore, the provision of IRCA to allow agricultural laborers to work on a temporary basis without facilitating residency or citizenship suggests the administration's intent to meet the need of agribusiness to have access to low-wage workers without any sociopolitical responsibility to the workers themselves (Passel, 2005).

Though IRCA provided an opportunity to regularize the immigrant status of almost 7 million undocumented immigrants, fewer than 3 million undocumented immigrants were actually able to do so (Chang, 2000). The implementation of the

amnesty provisions by the Immigration and Naturalization Service resulted in a willful denial of amnesty to millions of immigrants with a disproportionate and negative impact on women (Andrews, Ybarra, & Miramontes, 2002). The INS made public service announcements with incomplete or misleading information that effectively discouraged women, who would have otherwise applied for amnesty, from applying (Chang, 2000). Of those who did apply, many were wrongfully denied amnesty on grounds that the women posed a risk of public charge due to their gendered role of mothers and care providers of their children (Andrews, Ybarra, & Miramontes, 2002; Chang, 2000). Systematically excluding women—half of the undocumented labor force—from the ability to regularize their immigrant status creates a permanent hyper-exploitable labor force of immigrant women of color at a time when the demand for reproductive laborers and service workers was increasing as well (Chang, 2000). Reproductive labor has been identified as an occupation that includes the responsibility for work that supports daily life or one that ensures the reproduction of the next generation, and so it may be the very work that traditional gender expectations in patriarchal societies have assigned to wives and mothers (Duffy, 2005).

Anti-immigrant sentiments in California were expressed at the polls November 8, 1994, when voters approved Proposition 187, also known as *Save Our State (S.O.S.) Initiative* (Martin, 1995). Implied in the name of the initiative was the perception that the state of California was under attack by immigrants and that it was up to the voters to protect it. This act required that social service providers and public school employees required legal resident verification of the families and children with whom they worked

(Martin, 1995). In the event that there was a suspicion of anyone being an undocumented immigrant, not only were the services to be denied to the immigrant, but the Immigration and Naturalization Service was to be notified (Holman, 1996). The Act sought to deputize teachers, nurses, medical personnel and social workers as INS agents responsible for enforcing federal immigration laws (Meissner, 2005).

Proposition 187 violated the terms of *Plyler v. Doe*, and its implementation was stopped by an injunction, never to be enforced because a U.S. District Court judge found many of its provisions to be unconstitutional (Wilson, 2006).

By 1996, public concern over the way that either poor or immigrant women were allegedly a burden to society resulted in two important laws: the Illegal Immigration Reform and Responsibility Act (IIRRA) and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunities Reconciliation Act, otherwise known as Welfare Reform Act (Wilson, 2006). Both of these legislative efforts effectively reframed the state's accountability to, and relinquished responsibility for, the welfare of women, specifically poor women, women of color, and immigrants—both documented and undocumented (Chang, 2000; Wilson, 2006). Under the IIRRA, President Clinton authorized a budget increase that would almost double the size of the Border Patrol (Andreas, 2002). The law also made all immigrants, including those who were legal residents but who had not become naturalized citizens, ineligible to receive most forms of social assistance, with the exception of emergency medical aid, public health immunizations, and in-kind disaster relief (Wilson, 2006). Notwithstanding this legislation that precluded undocumented immigrants from receiving public assistance, the dominant public

discourse against them continues to frame immigrants, especially non-white immigrants, as people who seek to come into this country only to have babies, live off of welfare, and commit crimes (Chacón & Davis, 2006; Moses, 2005; Parrish, Pérez, Merickel, & Linqunti, 2006; Passel, 2006; Wilson, 2006).

Four years later, California voters passed another initiative, this one governing the education of language minority students. Proposition 227, *The English for the Children Initiative*, was passed on June, 1998 (Parrish, Pérez, Merickel, & Linqunti, 2006). The stated goals of Proposition 227 were to teach English as efficiently as possible to Limited English Proficient (LEP) students in public schools, to reduce the attrition rate of immigrant students, and to increase the overall literacy rate of language minority students (Martínez, 2000/2001). Proposition 227 had a limited impact on the educational outcome of English learners. First, there has been a consistent increase in the scores of state achievement tests, and although there are more English learners participating in statewide tests the test performance gap has not widened (Parrish, Pérez, Merickel, & Linqunti, 2006). Additionally, there is no conclusive evidence that one instructional method of teaching English to the students is superior relative to another pedagogical method (Parrish, Pérez, Merickel, & Linqunti, 2006). This point is important because the effectiveness of bilingual programs came under attack by the proponents of Proposition 227. One striking conclusion was that the “likelihood of an English learner meeting the linguistic and academic criteria needed to reclassify them to fluent English proficient status after 10 years in California schools is less than 40 percent” (Parrish, Pérez, Merickel, & Linqunti, 2006).

The etching of the political border between Mexico and the United States has a history that, since its creation in 1848, has been mediated by the legal discourse of immigration legislation and the educational consequences of social policies. Having established a historical framework for Mexican communities on both sides of the border, I will present in the following section a brief overview of current research regarding the immigration experiences unique to women.

Immigration Experiences of Women

Early research used to formulate transnational migration theories has traditionally been focused on the immigration patterns of men, especially the participation of men who were traveling by themselves—that is, they are either single or have left their families behind in their hometowns (Takaki, 1993). As the specific demands for labor in the United States continues to shift and the demand for workers to fill in the gaps in the service sector and reproductive labor force increases, more and more women are leading the migration flow into the United States (Bastida, 2001; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992, 1997).

The unauthorized characterization of immigrants from Mexico to the United States has become an economic institution that reinforces the financial interdependence between both countries (Andreas, 2002; Vogel, 2006). Employers in the United States benefit from the cheap labor force that unauthorized immigrants provide in the service, construction, and agribusiness industries. The Mexican economy, on the other hand, relies on the almost 4 billion dollars in the form of remittances that are sent back to Mexico from the wages earned by workers who would otherwise have been

unemployed. (Andreas, 2002) The remittances are significant enough to the Mexican economy that they have now surpassed the revenue generated by the petroleum industry (Isaacson, 2005). The families of the migrant workers live on the money they receive monthly, and sometimes the families pool their money to pay for the maintenance of public use infrastructure such as paving roads or repairing school buildings (Sharry, 2005).

Current research on immigration focusing on Latina—and more specifically undocumented immigrant—women reflects the geographic presence of undocumented workers in the United States as well as the increasing role that women have on migration patterns (Blank, 1998; Chavez, Hubbell, Mishra, & Valdez, 1997; Valdés, 1996; Villenas, 2001). Relying on both quantitative and qualitative research methods, scholars have documented the experience of undocumented Mexican workers in rural North Carolina (Villenas, 2001), in rural Washington state (Andrews, Ybarra, & Miramontes, 2002), in urban Southern California (Chavez, 1991), in the borderlands of the Mexico-Texas border (Valdés, 1996) and in Phoenix, Arizona (Salcido & Adelman, 2004). While the research question guiding each of these research projects is as diverse as the geographic areas they covered, it is notable that the participation of women in the immigration movement from Mexico to the United States is receiving increasing attention.

The theories of immigration that address the impact of gender has identified the need to secure employment and the desire to reunite families as two important factors that influence the decision for women to migrate to the United States (Durand, Massey,

& Zenteno, 2001). Women are compelled to cross the border as undocumented immigrants in spite of the increasing physical, monetary, and emotional costs for reasons that are gendered in nature (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992, 1997).

Women struggle to escape domestic violence in their hometowns. They may feel marginalized by a community that supports marriage as a social relationship that is inherently patriarchal and with unequal distribution of power and resources. Fearful of repercussions that may befall them if their abuser catches them after they run away, some women feel that only by immigrating to the United States can they find a sense of personal safety for themselves and/or their children (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992; Salcido & Adelman, 2004). In this way, battering gives rise to women choosing to immigrate without legal authorization. Conversely, the specific requirements for the regularization of an undocumented immigrant status may trap women in an abusive relationship. This dynamic would have the most pernicious impact on women with few social network connections leaving them to feel that they have no choice but to stay in the abusive relationship in order to complete their immigrant regularization process. In this context, border crossing and criminality can be considered strategies of survival that battered women may use to protect themselves and their families (Salcido & Adelman, 2004).

An immigrant family's well-being and successful incorporation into dominant society are contingent on the adults' ability to secure legal residence in order to both minimize the negative stresses associated with having an undocumented status and to gain access to the opportunities available to U.S. citizens and legal temporary or permanent residents (Winters, Janvry, & Sadoulet, 2001). Considering the importance

of obtaining legal immigration documentation, some women find themselves in a quandary in having to choose between staying in a violent domestic relationship and filing for immigration status regularization or leaving their relationship knowing that they walk away from the one key privilege that can facilitate their families' lives (Salcido & Adelman, 2004). Additionally, immigrant Mexican women who are in an abusive relationship may underutilize medical health care (Belknap & Sayeed, 2003).

Immigration patterns and historical context inevitably alter the traditional patriarchal dynamics of the adult relationships in the homes of immigrants on both sides of the Mexico-U.S. border. The process of migration itself, and not assimilation of feminist ideology or the increased earning power of women, is what ultimately alters the behavior traditionally organized along gender expectations in the homes of Mexican families (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992). Family stage migration, where one family member migrates first and then is followed by the rest of the family, is initiated by the gendered expectations of the men and women in the family. Concurrently, the migration process has a lasting impact on the renegotiated gendered aspects of the families' relationships, thus "migration is both gendered and gendering" (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992).

Latina women as a group have lower annual incomes and are less likely to use health care services compared to non-Hispanic Anglo women (Chavez, Hubbell, Mishra, & Valdez, 1997). Undocumented Latinas, 53% of whom were born in Mexico, are also most likely to be unemployed and have a higher likelihood of living in complex households, with young children, and extended family members, or more than one married couple (Chavez, Hubbell, Mishra, & Valdez, 1997). The higher incidence of

complex households is indicative of the insufficiency of the family's resources to cover the household's expenses as well as the social networks available during the migration process (Chavez, 1998).

The reliability of the data obtained during research addressing the experiences of immigrants may be further compromised if the participants are legally unauthorized. Attempting to differentiate between the multiple bureaucratic and procedural nuances which immigrants who are considered undocumented can represent, researchers have offered in their questionnaires up to eight categories for participant self-identification. However, the different categories end up being conflated because the lived experience of the immigrants does not vary with the technical and legal variances of their undocumented immigrant status (Chavez, Hubbell, Mishra, & Valdez, 1997).

Conclusion

This literature review examined a brief history of the Mexico/U.S. border as well as outlined pertinent immigration legislation up to and including California's most recent educational policies addressing language minority and underrepresented children in schools—for example the dismantling of bilingual education programs. Additionally, the review outlined recent research on contemporary experiences of immigrant women.

Literature on immigration has for a long time centered on the experiences of men and the experiences of women as immigrants who have settled in urban areas and the Borderlands. Furthermore, researching a community whose members may include undocumented immigrants offers real and inherent limitations because of the compelling consequences that may befall the participants if discovered. Thus, it is

possible to explain the dearth of research that focuses on the undocumented experience as a topic in the immigration and education discourses.

Seeking to broaden educational institutions' approaches to the question of, "What are the factors that impinge upon Latino students in K-12 public schools," I propose that asking their mothers directly would offer a perspective qualitatively different from that of the teachers, administrators, and policy makers. Furthermore, wanting to ascertain the perspective of Mexican immigrant mothers on their children's education, I posit that undocumented immigrant mothers have an experience that may offer insights into the unique challenges posed to their survival resultant from the stigma and legal restrictions of living as an undocumented or unauthorized immigrant, and furthermore, that these lived experiences form barriers to the educational outcome of their children. My research was guided by the following two-part research question: What are the experiences of undocumented Mexican mothers living in a rural community of northern California with their children's public K-12 schools, and what are their perceptions of the barriers that may impinge on their children's ability to succeed in school?

The following chapter offers a detailed description of the methodology I utilized in carrying out my research.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This research project is a case study of the experiences and insights of six undocumented Mexican mothers in a Northern California community. Their stories are unique due to the multiple factors that have influenced their lives. One of the differences between the methods of a case study and a quantitative research approach is that in the case study we seek to gain a deeper and more detailed understanding of the lived experiences within its context. This can be accomplished by using small samples that result in personal narratives rich in detail and ongoing self-analysis. While the samples are too small to warrant valid generalizations of the population at large, they do provide an opportunity to become closely acquainted with the research participants and to elicit more intimate and concrete answers to the research questions posed. Consistent with the purpose of existential phenomenological methods, the narratives shared by the mothers participating in this project do not necessarily represent the experience of the broader population of Mexican mothers or of other undocumented immigrant women raising children in the United States. The insights gained during the research process may be used to guide future research.

At the onset, there were three interrelated and guiding assumptions about the relationship between the research question and the potential value of the application of the findings. The first assumption was that the public school system in California, a

public institution seeking to advance the principles of democracy, is mandated to address the educational needs of all the students and, furthermore, to do so regardless of the erratic fluctuations in the political and social climate of the communities they serve.

A second and more specific assumption is that the cognitive and educational needs of children who live in households in which the main care provider is an undocumented immigrant are unique and different from the rest of the students. If true, education providers and policy makers may be unaware of the life context of families where at least one caregiver is an undocumented immigrant. The way in which the immigration status of the mother intersects with her ability to interface effectively with the school system on behalf of her children is an important question. Thirdly, asking the mothers about their lives and their needs is a strategically important step in gaining such insight. The mothers' contribution to the conversation of their children's education can be a crucial component of the pursuit of a more complete implementation of the task entrusted to a public school system.

In an effort to gain an understanding of the way undocumented mothers with school-age children in a rural community make sense of their lives, I conducted semi-structured interviews with six women. The intended audiences of this research project are the employees, volunteers, and policy-makers of the K-12 public education system as well as the faculty and coordinators of teacher-credential certification programs.

Participants

This section will provide a detailed overview of the methodological process in selecting the sample group, the actual interview procedures, and a brief biographical

sketch of each of the participants' life stories. The strategies used to obtain a sample group that would be knowledgeable about the research question through their own lived experiences and an ability to talk about it from that experience are consistent with existential phenomenological theory and feminist research paradigms. (Garko, 1999)

Selection criteria.

The purpose of this research was to address the experiences of immigrant women in a rural community as they raised school-age children within the context of a state-defined immigrant status as undocumented. Participation in this study was limited to women self-identifying as undocumented or “not having papers”—immigrants who were born and raised for some time in Mexico, had at least one child in public school, and had been residents of the same rural county for at least five years. The decision to only include participants whose country of origin is Mexico was intended to reduce the variability to their experiences resulting from the different social and political environments at the moment of their departure from their country of origin as well as to control for the social support networks available to them upon arrival, both of which are mediated by their sending communities.

The opportunity to grow up in Mexico allowed the participants to develop a national identity and a lived experience as Mexicans, with all of the attendant historical and cultural implications, as well as a basis for comparison between their experiences living in Mexico and their experiences of living in the United States. Seeking women to participate who were simply born in Mexico would not necessarily include women who

could speak to the immigrant process. Immigrants arrive in the United States at different stages of their lives, ranging across a whole life span from newborn to elders.

I wanted to investigate the processes and transformations that occur when people, specifically these women, decided to leave Mexico, migrate to the United States, and subsequently settle here. Seeking participants who were old enough when they initially migrated to have had some input into the immigration decision-making process was an important requirement. Living in the community a minimum of five years gave the participants an opportunity to identify and implement strategies for survival in their new surroundings. In addition, this criterion was included to ensure that the women had lived in the rural community long enough to have a sense of what it meant to live in the U.S. and to be able to speak to that experience relative to their lives in Mexico, or to their initial point of arrival in the United States.

Participant selection.

Using snowball sampling, eight women were approached by telephone or in person and asked to participate in the study. All but one were personally known to me prior to the research. All initially agreed to participate, however two women subsequently withdrew, both of them cited their partner's objection as the reason for withdrawal.

Informed consent.

The confidentiality of the participants is always a critical methodological consideration. In the specific case of this research, the potentially negative outcomes that could befall the participants are compelling reasons to disguise all identifying

information as much as possible. All proper names, including the names of people as well as the names of places, have been changed. Other potentially identifying information has been changed in a way that does not impact the meaning of the stories as told.

During the first interview, the participants and I discussed their involvement in this project including the extant risks to them. I read the Agreement to Participate (see Appendix A) in Spanish and asked them if they had any questions. The participants signed the Participant Agreement Form in English for my records, but they kept a copy for themselves in Spanish. The form they kept included my home phone number in the event that they needed to contact me for any reason.

Audiotapes and digital copies of the transcribed interviews and thesis drafts were stored in a locked file cabinet. To insure confidentiality, the audiotapes and digital files of the interviews were labeled with numbers assigned for the participants and for the numbered interview. Thus, the second interview for Participant Three was labeled 3-2.

In the context of a small rural community, it is possible that identifying the real names of the schools or places and unique family configurations could facilitate the recognition of the individuals. Even though the participants were nonchalant about their identities being concealed from the very beginning of this project, I continued to take the process of concealing their identities very seriously.

It is important to note that none of the women appeared to regard the details of the research project as points of contention. During the informed consent process, I also

emphasized their rights as voluntary participants, noting that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences to them or their family. Knowing that one of their motivating factors in agreeing to be interviewed was their personal wish to assist me, I also assured them that their participation was invaluable for the project at whatever level of they felt comfortable. I openly acknowledged and expressed my gratitude for their efforts and support, and they in turn expressed satisfaction in knowing that their participation had potentially meaningful and tangible results.

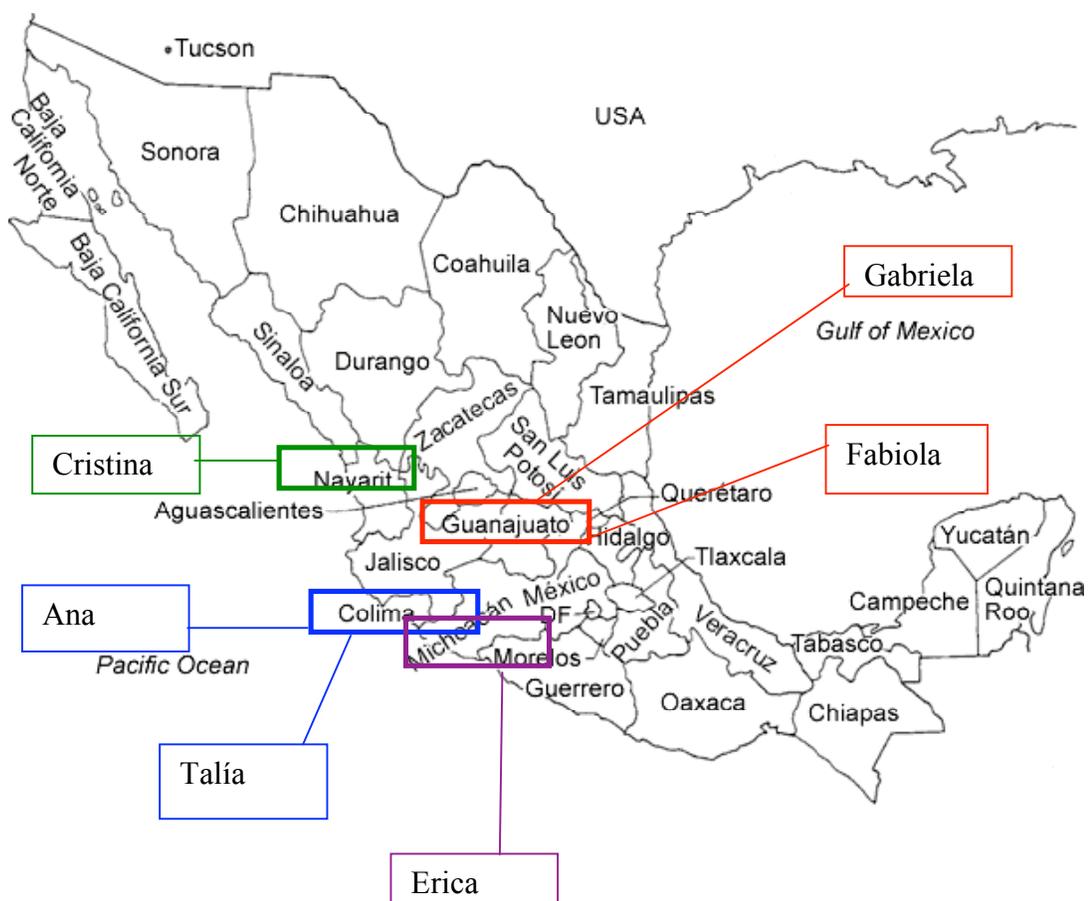


FIGURE 3.1

MAP OF MEXICO WITH PARTICIPANTS' STATE OF ORIGIN

Las Madres /The Mothers.

During the interview process I elicited detailed narratives of the participants' life-stories: about the context of the decision to migrate, their crossing experiences, the multiple struggles of surviving in the United States, and the strategies of resistance they deployed to overcome their specific struggles in the process of raising their children and providing for their families. The detailed narratives offered an opportunity to begin an assessment and articulation, in the form of a case study, of the lives of these specific undocumented Mexican mothers in a rural community. In order to facilitate an understanding of the participants' narratives, I have outlined out a general introduction to each woman I interviewed.

Ana.

Ana was born in Colima, a state on the Pacific coast of Mexico. Although she was born in the capital city, her family lived in the rural parts of the state because her father was a ranch caretaker. As the oldest of seven children, Ana had to begin working for wages when she was ten years old. When Ana was sixteen years old, she got married and subsequently gave birth to five boys, each about two years apart. With only one year of formal schooling, Ana taught herself how to read and write. She worked hard and was constantly thinking of ideas to make extra money to supplement her household income while also being the main care-provider for the boys. She made tortillas, cheese, and other food items to sell and eventually opened her own corner store. During the harvest season, Ana also worked picking limes in the groves, children in tow.

Temperatures reaching in excess of 100 degrees Fahrenheit made harvesting the limes from thorny trees an arduous and backbreaking job.

One of her closest friends, a comadre (please refer to Glossary for a further explanation of the term comadre in Mexican kinship relationships) who was already living in Los Angeles, California, sent Ana the money that enabled her to leave an abusive relationship after thirteen years of marriage. Ana left her three youngest sons with her sister, got on a bus, and headed for the border with her two oldest sons: Rogelio and Bolívar, ages 10 and 8 at that time. Ana was 29 years old.

Ana and the boys crossed the border on their third attempt and were welcomed into her comadre's home. Ana found garment piecework that she could do out of her home so that she could take care of her children at the same time. Ana was netting less than 20 dollars a month from 12 to 14 hour work shifts. This was not nearly enough money to save the necessary amount to send for her other sons. Six months after she left her home in Mexico, her husband tracked her down, found her, and convinced her to return to living with him. Ana knew that it was unlikely that the dynamics of the relationship would change, but the promise of sending for her children who were left in Mexico and the possibility of settling in the United States convinced her to leave her comadre in Los Angeles and follow her husband to Northern California.

Both Ana and her husband, along with their two sons, moved to the town where she still lives. Four months later, they were able to send for the other three boys: Carlos, Alberto, and Miguel. Two months after they all were re-united, Ana's husband abandoned the family and returned to Mexico. At that time Ana did not understand any

English; her written literacy skills were very basic and only in Spanish. She did not know how to drive a car nor did she have a state-issued ID. Her family was in Mexico, and her closest comadre who lived in Los Angeles was far away.

Ana and her children were about to be evicted because her husband left without paying the rent, and he took the money as well. Finding herself alone in the United States, with five children, without employment, far away from a family network, lacking the language skills to interact in the broader community, and without papers, Ana made the decision to stay and raise her sons in the United States—whatever the cost.

At the time this research was conducted, 14 years had passed since Ana made the decision to immigrate to the United States in search of a better future for herself and her sons. She took great pride in the fact that her children had not starved, that they had never been homeless, and that she was functionally bilingual. After five years of raising her children by herself Ana met Manuel and married. He was a legal permanent resident, and his immigrant status enabled Ana and her sons to apply for temporary residency. Six years later, they still awaited a resolution of their residency petition. Their immigrant status, and thus their ability to participate open and fully in society, were officially “Pending.”

Ana’s sons all attended the public school system. Rogelio struggled with school and dropped out after completing 8th grade, while Bolívar graduated from high school with good grades. Carlos needed a flexible school schedule to accommodate his work schedule. With Ana’s support, he worked to support a 1- year-old son while completing

his studies and finally graduated from the alternative community high school. Alberto and Miguel were both in high school. Twelve years after her decision to remain in the U.S., Ana found tremendous gratification in looking back, remembering all she had endured and knowing that the family was healthy, remained together, and was growing. She was a grandmother of two grandsons and two granddaughters who, because they were born in California, all had papeles (legal immigration documentation).

Cristina.

Cristina grew up in Nayarit, the state on the Pacific coast of Mexico where she was born. She is the second child of three and the only daughter. Her parents supported her education through high school. She could not continue with her ambitions to go to nursing school because her family could not afford to pay for her education and her older brother's as well. Ironically, he quit his medical studies and migrated to the United States in search of a job. A year later, he returned to Mexico with stories of opportunities and adventure. Cristina asked him to take her with him when he returned, and he did, along with Cristina's boyfriend Samuel and another one of her childhood friends.

They crossed the border with the guidance of a coyote and were apprehended two times. They walked through the border and successfully crossed without being apprehended on their third attempt. Cristina and her boyfriend, whom she later married, made their way to Northern California. At the time that Cristina crossed she had a large extended family that was already living in California for several generations. Cristina's

process of finding a place to live and a job was greatly facilitated by having access to a social network of family and friends who were able to help her get established.

Cristina and Samuel married and had three sons, all born in the United States: Ricardo, Rafael, and Isaac, ages 12, 11, and 7 respectively at the time of the interview. While Cristina was working as a preschool teacher before she immigrated, in California she only worked in the cleaning service industry. She worked in the janitorial department of a local hospital. Samuel worked for a local lumberyard operating heavy machinery. Samuel did not develop a fluency in English, but Cristina communicated with ease in both English and Spanish. Cristina asserted that she had placed a lot of emphasis on the importance of her sons' education, especially their ability to speak English.

All my children started going to preschool since they were three years old. ... That's why I have sent them to school since they were very young, that they may learn! Even if they didn't learn how to read when they were little, at least they could learn how to speak the language [English]!... This is why I always tell my children, "Hijos—you have to study. You have to get ahead! Don't be dummies like me!" I tell them!... It's really hard, María! It's hard to know what else to do.

However, she also wanted the boys to continue to speak Spanish so that they maintained a connection with their family and culture.

Cristina and Samuel were involved in the community and actively participated in their Catholic Diocese. The boys played soccer, and they all worked hard at school,

and while the oldest one struggled to get passing grades the two youngest ones did very well. In 2001, Cristina and Samuel heard that they could apply for amnesty based on the fact that they have been living in the United States for more than a decade. They hired an attorney from out of town and agreed to pay \$10,000 to process their petition for the legalization of their resident status. Unfortunately, they were misinformed about their prospects for a positive outcome. In 2005 they were still waiting to hear the final decision on court appeal of a deportation order.

In the meantime, Cristina made and sold tamales to add to her family's income. She continued to work full-time at the hospital even though she injured her back on the job. The doctor told her that she should go on disability, but she needed the income and was fearful of losing her job if she took any time off. Cristina took over-the-counter anti-inflammatory medication to make the pain manageable enough to sleep. Her family was well established and as a result it was one on which new arrivals in the town from Mexico could rely for help. She frequently hosted newcomers and was quick to lend a hand by giving people rides or helping them with a short-term loan.

Erica.

Erica was born in the state of Michoacán, another state on the Pacific coast of Mexico. She was the second child and first daughter in her family; she had an older brother and two younger sisters. Erica grew up in a small rural town with few educational options, especially for women. When she was 12 years old, her uncle who lived in Northern California asked her parents if she could come live with them and help out in his restaurant. Erica traveled to the United States with a tourist visa to live

with her uncle's family. Her experience though was not what she expected. She was required to work in the family restaurant until very late into the night. Erica was enrolled in 6th grade in the local elementary school and managed to do her homework by showing up to school early and working through her lunch hour.

During her one school year in California, she learned how to speak, read and write basic English. Erica returned to Mexico when Child Protective Services was notified that she was a victim of child labor violations as well as physical and sexual abuse. That was also Erica's last formal school year. Erica went back to her home in Mexico but did not tell her parents of the details of her abuse because she feared that her father would "get into trouble" by defending the family honor. She explained that in a small town like the one she came from, the honor of the family and especially the name of the father were dependent upon the chastity of their daughters. She married an older man who was not from the same town to cover up what had happened to her and to protect her father. When she was 16 years old, she got pregnant, and her husband left her because she refused to have an abortion. At that point, she decided to leave Mexico and return to the United States in search of a better place to raise her child.

At the time of the interview, Erica was 34 years old, and 18 years had passed since she crossed the border undetected. Her first child, Francisco, was born in California but struggled with school and became so rebellious and unmanageable that Erica sent him to live in Mexico with her parents. She perceived that he was on a path already so dangerous, that she had to intervene to save his life. Francisco left the United States for the first time in his life when he was fifteen years old without

completing 10th grade. At the time of the interview, Francisco was working in construction with his grandfather in Mexico earning 50 dollars a week. Erica had not seen Francisco since he left the U.S two years prior. Without legal immigrant status, she did not know when she would be able to see him again.

Erica had two more daughters, born in the United States, and they were doing well in school. Citlalli was 12 years old and a 6th grader in a local middle school. Xochitl was 10 years old a 4th grader. The girls' father abandoned the family and was neither involved with the girls' lives nor contributed financially to their support. As far as Erica knew, he had returned to Mexico.

Erica made a modest living working in the kitchen of a chain restaurant. She appreciated the fact that her schedule allowed her to be home with the girls in the afternoon and on weekends. However, she expressed a great disappointment when talking about the fact that in 12 years of working there, she had not received a raise above the minimum wage increases. She attributed this to the fact that her employers knew that she was undocumented and that she could not bring attention to the labor equity practices. She regretted that so many years had passed and that she still did not have her papers, but she was proud to have a job to feed her family and keep a roof over their head.

Fabiola.

Fabiola was a 27-year-old mother of two pre-school children who had not returned to Mexico 12 years after her decision to cross the border into the United States to work for a couple of years. She is the fourth daughter in a family with twelve

children. Fabiola was born in Leon, Guanajuato, a state in central Mexico. Fabiola and her sister Gabriela, whose story follows, are the only two participants of this study who hail from a state of Mexico that is not on the Pacific coast and who grew up in an urban rather than a rural community.

Her mother struggled to make ends meet while her father lived in the United States and sent remittances home to help with the financial needs of the family. Her parents separated, and her father's financial contribution to the family ended, forcing the two oldest sons to go north and seek employment in the United States. For her part, Fabiola, realizing that her mother could not continue to afford to pay for her educational expenses, quit going to 7th grade and began working as a waitress full-time to help her mother. Although she did not go to school at the time, she sustained the ambition to go back to school someday to become a nurse.

Fabiola was exposed to media images about the "American Dream" and popular notions of what it is like to live in the United States:

In Mexico you hear people talking about how easy it is to make money here. I even heard that American people would sometimes throw away brand new TV's, radios... I only wanted to come and see things for myself, to find out if what people were saying was true... I wondered, "could that be true?"

One day, she decided to find out for herself and, along with two of her sisters, one of their husbands, and her 14-year-old brother Javier, and with the financial help from their brothers already established in California, crossed the border.

When they arrived in Northern California, Fabiola and Javier enrolled in high school and were placed in the grades corresponding to their ages. Fabiola had missed almost two years of schooling and did not speak a single word of English, yet she entered high school with the sole assistance of her cousins who translated for her. One of the sisters worked for a year and then returned to Mexico because she intended to marry her boyfriend who had stayed behind. Her other sister, Gabriela, moved out of their brother's home to live with her husband and newborn baby boy.

Fabiola felt that the environment at her school was too hostile, and anti-Mexican prejudice compelled her to drop out of school again and look for a job. She moved to a different town, half an hour away from her brother, to live with her sister's family. Ironically, her inability to find a full-time job convinced her to re-enroll in school. She completed her high-school degree while waiting tables part-time. Her English language skills improved significantly, and as a result she got a full-time job as a waitress in a Mexican restaurant.

Fabiola worked a couple of years, saved her money, and sent it to her mother in Mexico to help her support the rest of her family. In 1999, Fabiola got married and had two children, her daughter Sofia and son Alejandro. At the time of the interview, they were four and two-years-old respectively. When Fabiola was pregnant with Alejandro, she separated from her husband and sought a restraining order to protect herself and the children from continued domestic violence. Her husband got arrested for battery, was imprisoned, and then deported. She did not hear from him after that, but fearfully

believed that one-day, as he had promised, he would return to hurt her or take away her children.

Since that time, Fabiola made efforts to get a full-time job, but the demands of taking care of her young children without the financial means to pay for childcare while she worked made it very difficult to find employment with flexible work hours and with sufficient wages to pay someone else to care for the children. She did not have a car and was sharing an apartment with her sister Gabriela and Gabriela's three children in a housing arrangement providing mutual financial and emotional support.

Fabiola's experience in life is that things get better or worse at a moment's notice. This in turn gave her a perspective that helped her know that, however difficult things were, they were also temporary. Her hope, perseverance, and gratitude for what blessings she had carried her forward.

Sometimes I sit down and think about what would things be like if I had been born here; I would have a license now, maybe a car. I just sit and think a lot about these things. Only God knows why (pause) why some people are born with (pause) let's just say more support than others, right? In life you get your highs and your lows. Sometimes you are very low and all of a sudden things get better. Thank goodness my mother taught me to work. Thank God I have my two feet, my hands, so I am fine. There are others, who don't have one foot, or they are missing a hand but they persist and get ahead anyway...

Gabriela.

During the interview process with the last two participants, Gabriela, a mother of three elementary school children, called and asked to be included in the research project. She knew about the research project because her sister Fabiola lived with her at the time and told her about it. I was aware that Gabriela had time to think about the interview process, the questions, and the stories that she wanted to share. Thinking about what she might be interested in talking about gave Gabriela the opportunity to choose the narratives as well as the extent and detail that she wanted to share with me-- an option not offered to the other participants.

Gabriela was born in Leon, Guanajuato, a central state of Mexico. She was the third child in a family of twelve. She did not get to see her father during much of her childhood because he left the family and came to the United States to work and send remittances home. She completed an 8th grade education but then had to stop and find a job to help her mother with the family's financial responsibilities. She was almost 18 years old when, pregnant and recently married, she decided to immigrate to the United States in search of what she thought would be a better life for her family. Gabriela, her husband, her sister Fabiola (mentioned earlier), her brother Javier, and one more sister successfully crossed the border undetected on their second attempt. Seven people were laid next to one another in the rear part of a van. The heat and exhaust fumes made the breathing air difficult to endure, but the fear that someone might hear them or see them during the check points paralyzed them until the door was opened after almost forty minutes.

Gabriela would have been young enough to enroll in high school, but her brother felt that school was not a place for a pregnant woman to be so Gabriela stayed home to care for her baby while her husband worked in the lumber mills. Gabriela remembered that at that time there were a lot of rumors in the community and fears that the migra, representatives of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, were in town looking for undocumented immigrants to deport. Gabriela was in constant fear, and living in the outer part of an already rural community intensified her sense of isolation.

Six years later, Gabriela left her husband to put an end to the emotional and physical domestic violence. She worked at any and every job she could get, but the language barrier limited her to work jobs requiring intense and repetitive manual labor. Although she never really learned to speak in English, she was determined and expressive enough that she usually was able to make herself understood. Her sister Fabiola spoke highly of Gabriela's outspoken and strong sense of pride, noting that she always spoke up and did not take abuse from anyone. However, it was precisely this refusal to be silent and adopt a subservient manner that cost her many jobs.

At the time of the interviews, Gabriela struggled to manage her recently diagnosed diabetes. Without reliable full-time employment, no access to consistent medical health services, and three children to raise alone, her medical needs were relegated to the status of things that were out of her control. Gabriela's energy remained focused on raising her children: Timothy (age 12), Raul (age 11), and Patty (age 10). Additionally, she was anxious to get a job while she looked for another place

to live because her landlord had asked her to leave the small apartment she was sharing with her sister Fabiola.

Talía.

Talía was born in the state of Colima on the Pacific coast of Mexico. I met Talía in a community cultural event when Ana introduced her to me as her niece-in-law. Talía's mother was Ana's first husband's sister. In the United States, the importance of family ties, even if the ties are extended, is heightened. Thus, Ana's sons and Talía's children grew up as cousins. Talía talked about living in abject poverty as a child and remembered that the rainy season meant that sleeping through the night was difficult because of leaks in the roof that inevitably left their beds soaked with rain. Although she remembered her father as a kind man, he was also not a good provider for his family. As the third child of six, Talía remembered working in the lime orchards with her mother in order to help the family make more money to survive.

When Talía was 13 years old, her mother left the family to go to the United States in search of a job that would pay her enough to support her children. Her mother took her oldest two children and moved to Florida to work in the agricultural industry. Talía was left alone to care for her three youngest siblings. Talía's mother sent her own father the money for her children to live on in the form of remittances. However, when Talía went to her grandfather to get the money, he often abused her in exchange. Talía was not able to endure the abuse, and the anger against her mother for abandoning her caused her to get pregnant in order to feel like she had a way out of the situation.

With an eight-month-old baby in arms, she left her home and made the decision to move to the United States on her own. When her mother realized that Talía had left, she went back to get the other three children. At the time of the interview, eighteen years had passed since Talía made the decision to leave her siblings and cross the border to California. She and her daughter were still undocumented immigrants. Talía's mother, an agricultural worker in Florida, was able to legalize her status, and all her other children's as well, under the IRCA provisions of 1986.

Talía met her future husband in Los Angeles soon after she arrived in California. They got married and moved to Northern California looking for a smaller community in which to raise their children. Her husband was also undocumented and although he worked in a variety of labor-intensive jobs, he was never able to keep a job for a long time. He insisted that she stay home to take care of their five children. After years of domestic violence and emotional abuse, Talía successfully left her husband after the third attempt.

In order to make ends meet, Talía worked as a low-level manager of a crew of workers in an ornamental flower greenhouse that employed over 400 undocumented, mostly Spanish-speaking, employees. Talía's mother sponsored her application for the legalization of her immigrant status and that of her oldest daughter Mariela in 1994. While her petition was being decided, Talía rented a room in her home to someone else as an additional source of income to help make ends meet. She had made a resolve to teach her daughters to be strong and independent of men, as well as teach her sons to respect women who are strong. As part of her effort to survive, she also worked to deal

with her anger against her mother, and she was able to do so by understanding that the abuse she endured at the hands of her grandfather was neither her nor her mother's fault. She also decided to talk about her abuse to her mother. Although Talía did not complete an education beyond 7th grade in Mexico, she became functionally bilingual and biliterate and very proud that her five children had done well in school.

María.

Like the participants in this research project, I am a first-generation immigrant from Mexico. Unlike them, I was born in Mexico City where I benefited from the private education of The American School, a college preparatory bilingual school. My mother is a U.S. born American citizen, and my father was a Mexican citizen, so I grew up with dual citizenship and an understanding of my culture and family rooted on both sides of Border. As I, the oldest sibling of four, approached the time to go to college, my family moved to Sacramento, California, to be closer to my maternal side of the family and to avail the children in our family with further educational opportunities. That year, my family had to endure the process of migration and reeled from the sudden death of my father. Being the oldest daughter, I struggled in deciding whether or not to go to U.C. Berkeley where I had already been offered admission, or stay home, get a job, and help my mother with my younger siblings. With the support of my family and the certainty of knowing what my father would have wanted me to do, I left home to go to school.

Although I grew up bilingual and bicultural, it was not until my arrival in the United States that I first experienced discrimination and prejudice based on my Mexican

identity and accented English. I saw my younger sister and brother struggle with more vulnerability because they were younger and because of the overt nature of the prejudice and racism in their public schools. Our relative socioeconomic, national, and cultural privilege prior to immigration was not sufficient to prepare us for the trans-border transition.

I got married and had two sons before I finished an undergraduate degree in Ethnic Studies at U.C. Berkeley in 1998. With my husband, I moved to a town in rural northern California from the San Francisco Bay Area, seeking a tranquil place to raise our boys. I hoped to establish our family in the community and particularly sought getting involved with the Latino community in what is an otherwise predominantly white county.

During the first two years, I became president of the Parent Teacher Organization at my son's school, got a job as a Conflict Resolution Coordinator in a local middle school, coached four youth soccer teams where some of the players were Mexican-origin boys, and was admitted to the masters' program in education at Humboldt State University. Soon thereafter, my background and varied conversations in the community kitchens, my children's classrooms, and my own graduate program studies helped me to more clearly identify a significant gap in understanding between the Mexican mothers in my community, the teachers at the schools I had the opportunity to work with, and the educational theories relating to the educational struggles Latino children have in U.S. schools.

The intent of individual teachers to educate the children was failing to connect with the desires of the mothers to support their children's education. I grappled with questions of power, privilege, and structural forces that impinge upon the educational attainment of groups of children, yet I had the interesting vantage point from where I could address all these disparate perspectives.

Hoping to reduce the communication gap and seeking to identify specific strategies that schools may implement in developing better pedagogies inclusive of the needs of children of undocumented mothers, I set out to frame and implement this research project. More importantly, I wanted to provide the means for the participating women to tell their stories, voice their concerns, and address the K-12 public education system regarding their families and the educational needs of their children.

Like the participating women, I am a Mexican, bi-cultural, bi-lingual, immigrant, and a mother of school-age children. Unlike the other mothers, I am privileged with a higher socioeconomic status, have benefited from access to the institutions of higher education, and—of paramount difference—I maintain a dual Mexican/U.S. citizenship. As it turned out, this last point alone makes all the difference in the world.

Interviews

Interview guide.

The questions in the Interview Guide were organized thematically and chronologically into six sections: Background, Family, Surviving, Schools, Community, and Hopes. (Please refer to Appendices C and D for the Open Interview Guidelines in

Spanish and English respectively.) The Background section included questions about the participants' lives in Mexico, their decision to move to the United States, and the physical and emotional process of migration. While the bulk of the analysis in this thesis is focused on the women's experiences during their process of accommodation within U.S., the Background section provided the vital pre-migration context and comparative framework that informs many of their future decisions.

The remaining five sections contained questions designed to explore the women's lives after arriving in the United States. The Family section included information about the participants' immediate family, their friends, social networks of support, and the ways in which they organized both their personal time and space. The third section on Surviving addressed key components of the participants' ability to secure basic needs such as employment, housing, food, and health care, aspects that were more directly regulated by the government and restricted to the participants as a result of their undocumented immigrant status.

The fourth section, Schools, was intended to elicit information about the women's interactions with a specific type of public institution: their children's schools. The questions prompted the participants for information about their interactions with the teachers, administrators, and staff at their children's school. All of the participants were encouraged to go into detail about this topic during their accounts. The women shared their understanding about their children's academic performance, their expectations for their scholastic achievement, and the kinds of information and resources they needed to be more effective advocates for their children. The open-

ended format of the questionnaire encouraged the mothers to speak of their experiences with the least direction in either a positive or a negative way.

One of the questions I asked of all participants during the interviews was to state and convey a message to the schools—anything they felt the schools (including all the employees) needed to understand about their families. This information would presumably facilitate the efforts of the school employees to more effectively teach and meet the needs of the participants' children, as well as other students in similar situations.

The last section, Hope, addressed questions about the women's hopes, fears, and aspirations for themselves and their children. This section explored the psychological state that the women experienced on a daily basis. The Open Interview Guide (Appendices C and D) offered the participants the opportunity to determine the direction and content of the conversation during the interviews. I prompted the participants with general topics during the interviews and then followed the specific area about which they wanted to talk. The purpose of an open and flexible structure in the interview format was to ensure that the participants' stories reflected the topics that were most salient to them rather than the ones that were important to me, the researcher. Occasionally, when the conversation on a specific topic came to a natural conclusion, we used the guide to pursue other areas that had not yet been addressed.

Initially, some women felt uneasy with the openness of a question such as, "Tell me about your family" because the scope was too broad for them, and they were more comfortable answering a specific question. Once I explained to the participants the

purpose of open-ended questions in eliciting what they thought was important, the interviews proceeded with a minimum need for direction or encouragement. Within an open-ended and semi-structured interview, the participants had control not only of the content and direction of the narrative but also of its pace. The content could be easily controlled by the topics and stories the participants shared with me and also by directing me to stop the tape recorder on command.

For example, two participants asked that I stop the recording when we got to difficult parts of the story, and I immediately complied. During the time the recorder was off, they cried, and when they felt more composed, they asked about the direction that they should take once we continued with the taped interview. I reminded them that they were in complete control of the direction we took, and that they could continue talking about the issue that we were just discussing or that they could in fact change the topic and talk about something else. One participant changed the topic when this happened, a possible indication that she was not ready or willing to talk about the specific painful experience that came up during her narrative.

As is the case when talking about one's life, the actual conversations were not linearly topical. The conversations were fluid and had a more circular and intersectional tone. The participants often began talking about parenting and schools first, then proceeded to talk about their jobs, followed by their employment and educational experiences in Mexico, and returning to the relevance of everything in their lives to their central role as mothers. The interviews were recorded using a small, battery-operated, audiotape recorder. This type of recorder was chosen in order to use

standard sized audiotapes since many transcribing machines use this size of tapes only. I considered the time saved in the transcribing process as being well worth using the standard size tapes even if digital recorders were much smaller.

The first interview with each participant was scheduled as soon as they agreed to be involved in the study. We scheduled the first interview at a time and place of their choice. Important considerations in scheduling the interviews included finding a convenient time and a location that afforded them a sense of privacy. As a result, the interviews took place in a variety of locations including both their homes and mine, and in two instances we met inside my car. During one such instance the participant's busy schedule allowed her to meet with me only while her children attended catechism, so I parked and we met outside the church. The other participant who chose to meet in my car wanted to leave her home for the interview.

I conducted all of the interviews between June 2004 and May 2005. Every interview was audio taped, transcribed verbatim, translated from Spanish to English, and then coded. I personally transcribed and translated all the interviews because as the researcher and the only person present during the interviews, I was privy to the narrative subtleties of the stories such as tone, body language, and silences. These events were noted during the transcribing and translating procedures, and they added insight into the women's feelings about the topic being discussed.

After the initial interview, I conducted one or two more with each participant totaling a minimum of three hours for each participant. If after three hours of interview, we felt that she had not finished sharing her story, or if I had any lingering questions

that had not already been attended to, we then scheduled an additional and final interview. A total of 16 interviews and over 25 hours of recorded narrative were completed and processed.

Given the busy schedule of the women and the limited amount of discretionary time that they had, we had to schedule the interviews at times when they could do other things as well, such as cooking dinner or waiting for their family to get home from school or work. Last minute changes in their schedules, like having an unexpected ride to the grocery store for example, forced some of them to reschedule our meetings several times. Despite the unforeseen changes to the schedule, I expressed my appreciation with the participants for their willing resolve to find alternate times to meet with me.

During our meetings in the participants' homes, they all offered to feed me. At first, I felt awkward accepting their kind gesture because I was supposed to be performing a role of researcher. I soon realized, however, that this was a process of equalizing our roles; that in the process of sharing food we also shared in a very concrete way the stories and the ensuing knowledge that were equally life sustaining. Food preparation and the sharing of food became an integral part of the relationship, although we did not necessarily cook at the same time that we taped the interviews.

The conversations we had while preparing food and eating together were rich with information, and the stories were relevant and additive to the narratives that were audiotaped. While it is difficult to document all details of these conversations, they provided a rich context for the taped interviews. A valuable aspect of these moments,

undoubtedly, was their ability to strengthen the camaraderie in our relationships. Building the trust between the participants and me was a prerequisite for them to feel comfortable in sharing their life stories. Seeking to develop a co-researcher relationship between the women and me relied on the principle of coconstitutionality. Having the ability to dialogue as a constructive way to describe human experience is another important aspect of phenomenological methodology. (Garko, 1999)

The open-ended and semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed the participants to be in charge of the progression and order of the interview's content. Consequently, the focus of each interview as a whole varied because each participant's narrative reflected both her individual context and her personal struggle. The interviews were loosely structured. Once I asked the participants a general question about their lives, and they started talking, I followed the conversation. Interruptions were minimal, and mostly done to clarify a specific point and make sure that I understood what was happening. The questions were frequently framed as a statement of understanding such that I would repeat what I thought they said, and then they would repeat it back. Asserting the information and having them confirm it was a way to reflect to them what they said, demonstrate my understanding, and verify that I correctly understood their meaning.

Coding and analysis of the narratives.

At the conclusion of each interview, I began processing the oral narratives as written text. Each audio-recorded interview was fully transcribed using a transcription machine to minimize the interruptions in writing and to sustain the pace of the dialogue.

I used a systematic way of managing the interviews in individual computer files to keep track of their processing stage. A summary of the management steps with their respective components is noted in Table 3.1.

TABLE 3.1

MANAGEMENT OF NARRATIVE TEXT PROCESSING AND DATA CODING

Step	Folder Name	Document Name	Coding and Processing Steps
1.	Finished Interviewed	THREE 2.doc	<p>Create a file to note that the interview was performed.</p> <p>Begin to transcribe verbatim from Spanish to Spanish.</p> <p>Enter the tape counter number before the text as needed.</p> <p>Bold text that narrates noteworthy text and insert comments in brackets as needed.</p>
2.	Finished Transcribed	3 THREE 2.doc	<p>Edit the name of the document by adding a number corresponding to the participant.</p> <p>Move the document from “Finished Interviewed” to “Finished Transcribed.”</p> <p>Convert text into a table and add a column to the left of the Spanish text.</p> <p>Begin to translate the Spanish text, entering the English text on the corresponding cell to the left.</p> <p>Continue to bold/highlight text that narrates noteworthy text and insert comments in brackets as needed.</p>
3.	Finished Translated	3 THREE 2 DONE.doc	<p>Edit the name of the document by adding “DONE” to the name (as shown).</p> <p>Move the document from “Finished Transcribed” to “Finished Translated.”</p>

TABLE 3.1 (CONTINUED)

MANAGEMENT OF NARRATIVE TEXT PROCESSING AND DATA CODING

Step	Folder Name	Document Name	Coding and Processing Steps
4.	Coding in Progress	3 THREE 2 DONE copy.doc	<p>Copy all documents from “Finished Translated” to “Coding in Progress”. Rename all documents in this new folder by adding “copy” to the documents’ name as shown. Delete Spanish text column. Add two columns to the left of English text. Label each cell on the first column with the interview identifier number. Insert a sequential number to the cells in the second column to identify the line in the interview. Color-code the text around topics using a “search and replace” macro. Continue to bold/highlight/ the text and add coding notes to the corresponding cells in the fourth column.</p>
5.	Finished Coded	3 THREE 2 code.doc	<p>Edit the name of the document by deleting “DONE copy” and adding “code” as shown. Copy the text of all interviews and conflate them into a single document.</p>
	Technical Aspects		<p>This file contains documents with coding instructions, and other notes relating to the various aspects of data coding and processing.</p>
	Field Notes		<p>Files containing field notes and other information and notes that were not part of the interviews.</p>

The first step was saving each interview in its own document named after the number of the participant, in the order in which they agreed to participate, and the number of the interview. Thus, the second interview of the third participant became: THREE 2.doc. The initial stage of the written text was a complete Spanish transcription. Periodically through the transcription, I noted the tape counter number as indicated in the transcription machine. Noting the point of the interview with a counter facilitated my ability to cross-reference between the text and the audiotape in the event that I needed to refer back to the audio text. In addition, if during the transcribing process I identified a uniquely noteworthy section, I began to bold the text and add a few bracketed comments for later review.

After the interview was transcribed, the text was converted into a two-column table with the Spanish version in the left column, and the English translation in right column. In order to facilitate going back to the audiotapes to listen to a specific segment of the interview, I recorded a number at periodic intervals in the text that coincided with the recording counter. I transcribed and translated all of the interviews in order to retain as much of the intended meaning of the interview conversation, to be consistent in the translation, and to re-hear the stories for increased understanding. Listening during the interview, translating, transcribing, and then coding the interviews offered me thorough exposure to the stories and readily revealed themes and patterns.

The coding of the information began after all the interviews were translated. At that point, I made separate documents and deleted the column of the Spanish version, leaving the English column intact and a blank one available for coding comments and

notes. This step was made to reduce the volume of pages that needed to be printed and the file was given a different name in order to save the unaltered Spanish text. The thesis advisor and the committee members did not need the Spanish version of the interview to assist me in the data analysis. However, if necessary, we could easily find the Spanish text related to the quote in question as well as the audio segment in the tapes.

Once I deleted the column including the text in Spanish, I was left with a table with two columns. The first column retained the translated text in English, and the second column had the preliminary comments and code words identifying the topic discussed in the text. At that point, I added two columns to the left of the text, the first column was filled with a decimal number identifying the interview; the first number identified the participant, and the second number corresponded to the specific interview. Thus, a cell with 6.2 means that the text was taken from the second interview with participant number 6.

While identifying the participants with a number during the coding process is akin to a process of objectification, it was a concise and quick way to label the cells. Given the small number of participants and my familiarity with the order of interviews, I was able to remember who was who without losing the personal essence of the voice. The numbering system further assisted in concealing the identity of the participant in case someone else read the files or interviews. The protocol for naming the files was also consistent with this system of keeping track of the interview. The second column inserted in the table, between the interview identifier and the text, was numbered

sequentially. This was done to keep track of the location in the interview that a particular quote was said and to maintain the sequence of dialogue later on in the conflating of all interviews.

Once the passages were identified, each was coded for the most salient topic the women were articulating. From the list of topics and issues, the passages were sorted and organized into an outline that reflected four distinct categories: 1) the experiences of the mothers with their children's schools, 2) the issues that pose a challenge to the successful scholastic achievement of the children, 3) the specific consejos or advice that the women offered explicitly to the schools and to their children about what they thought was important to know. The fourth category was a collection of narratives where the women shared aspects of their lived experience and those which I identified as examples of how the women resisted the limitations imposed on their lives resultant from their undocumented immigrant status. Of these four categories that related to the women's experiences with the schools and to their children's education, only the first two are presented in this thesis. The decision to delve into only two categories of the participants' experiences with schools and their perceptions of the educational process of their children was strictly pragmatic. The interviews produced in their entirety four-hundred and forty-seven pages, of typed, 12 point, single-spaced text per language version. The practical limitation of a thesis project necessitates a clear yet narrow analysis of a single research question. The last two categories can be made available for further analysis in a different forum and time.

As the researcher I performed the interviews, transcribing and translating of all the text from the interviews. Because the interviews were recorded, another Spanish-English speaker could have done the transcribing. However, processing the narratives provided me the added benefit of familiarizing myself with the stories, a richer understanding of the participants' life experiences, and compensate for the potential of a single-rater bias.

By eliciting the participant women's life stories within the context of their immigrant process, their families' challenges for survival, and the meaning they ascribed to these events, I hoped to further articulate the contextual understanding of their lives. In order to maintain the integrity of their voices, I transcribed the interviews word by word and then translated them. Body language, tone, and use of humor and colloquial expressions all helped the participants express their stories. The trust between us allowed them to talk about very difficult moments in their lives, but also to feel that they could stop the interview if the recollection of certain events became too painful to continue.

Conclusion

This thesis focuses the experiences and insights of six undocumented Mexican mothers with the K-12 public school system in a rural community of Northern California. It is important to note the artificial process by which the different aspects of the women's lives were fragmented in order to be able to present an overarching theme within the scope of this thesis. Still, I attempted to extract from the complete body of text the passages, anecdotes, and stories that related to schools, education, and the

scholastic achievement of their children, including specific examples of their experiences with the schools and their employees.

The insights and experiences that the women shared regarding their children's education were presented in a sequence that has facilitated a sequential and cumulative analysis. At the onset, the women's own experiences with formal education formed the foundation from which their attitudes and perspectives about education in general and their children's specifically could be understood.

The conversation about their children's formal education began with a narrative of the actual experiences the women had with the schools, both positive and negative. These then were compounded by experiences the mothers felt illustrated the reasons their children may struggle in school. Lastly, the largest category of educational challenge was framed around the women's undocumented immigrant status, and their perceptions of the schools' response to their marginalization because of their identities as undocumented, immigrant, Mexican, single-parents (if applicable), poor, and limited-English speaking.

This research project began as a general question seeking to understand the way undocumented Mexican mothers raising school-age children in a rural community make sense of their lives. The results in the following chapter address the thesis question, "What are experiences and insights of undocumented Mexican mothers with the public K-12 public school system in a rural community of Northern California?"

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

*“I was educated, and wore it with a keen sense of pride and satisfaction,
my head propped up with the knowledge,
from my mother,
that my life would be easier than hers.”*

(Moraga, 2000) pg.43

Introduction

A central objective at the beginning of this research project was to gain a phenomenological understanding of how undocumented Mexican mothers who are raising school-age children in the United States make sense of their lives and those of their children. Specifically, I sought to gain a better sense of the ways these women understood their children’s educational experience and opportunities based on their own experience with academic institutions. With this purpose in mind, using open-ended, semi-structured interviews, I interviewed six undocumented Mexican mothers about their lives, their process of migration, and their struggles in raising children in the United States. The participants offered richly detailed extensive narratives during the interviewing process resulting in copious amounts of text regarding all aspects of their lives.

For the women I interviewed, the task of narrating their lives, complete with remembering and re-living through a retrospective analysis, was daunting. However, the women were candid in their accounts and generous in sharing their perspectives and

opinions. Their lives were filled with heart-wrenching stories of struggle, survival, and resistance. The stories also illustrate the impossibility of teasing out the women's understanding of a specific aspect of their current situation without taking into account all the experiences that have shaped their lives up to this point as well as their hopes and expectations for the future which motivate their decisions given their current situation and perceived available set of choices.

The results are presented in this chapter by first laying a foundational and brief overview of the mothers' formal schooling history to frame the context in which they will ground their own understanding of their children's educational experience. The second and largest section of the results presented in this thesis relates to the mothers' perception of the children's educational experience in K-12 California schools. Within this last section, the women shared in detail the experiences they had with their children's schools as well as the factors they perceive may hinder the scholastic achievement of their daughters and sons.

The Formal Education of the Women

The women's early childhood experiences with schools and their own educational ambitions constitute the foundation for their understanding of their children's educational experiences. In general, the stories revealed that the participants' ability to pursue an education in Mexico was limited because of patriarchal expectations based on their gender and the financial hardship due to their family's socioeconomic status. Ana, the oldest of seven children, recalled her only experience with formal education: she attended school for the first time when she was ten years old and then

only for one year. Her father pulled her out of school as soon as she learned how to write her name because of his belief that women are expected to get married and that they don't have any need for book learning in order to take care of their home and their husbands and to raise children. She said,

He thought that kind of thing was not necessary. That a woman has no use for studies to learn, that to take care of her husband and children she did not need an education. That's how he felt then so that's why he didn't send me to school. But when we got to that little ranch, and he got his plot of land, then we did have a little school, and he sent me for a year so that I might learn to write my name.

In addition to her father's expectations of what Ana needed to learn as a woman, her ability to work and contribute to the family's income was critical for their survival. Ana began working as a domestic servant in a city far away from her home. She sent all her wages home to her mother while her father spent much of his income drinking. She was twelve years old.

Similarly, Cristina's educational pursuits in Mexico were thwarted because of socioeconomic limitations and the social value placed on educating sons compared to daughters. Cristina finished high school in Mexico, but her ambition to continue with her education and become a nurse ended when her family could not afford to send more than one child to the university—and her brother, as the oldest son, would be the one to go to medical school.

Taking into account her own mother's struggles to send her to school, Fabiola dropped out of 7th grade and began to work. Fabiola did have an interest in completing a high school level education, but feelings of guilt and pride prevented her. She chose to work and planned to go back to school only when she could afford it on her own so that her mother would not have to work so hard to pay for the cost of her education, namely the enrollment fees and the cost of scholastic supplies:

My mother wanted to provide us with an education, and we were aware of that. She enrolled me in middle school, but I told her that I wanted to go to school—but on my own. I dropped out of school after she had paid the enrollment fee, and since then I have been trying to get ahead on my own. I tried to pay for my own education, but I couldn't. I couldn't. I stopped. I stopped going to school.

Tables 4.1 illustrates the range in educational attainment of the participants and their subsequent educational attainment in the U.S. Multiple and prohibitive educational barriers impeded the mothers' continued scholastic progress. Notably, the women's education ranged from one year of elementary education to completion of a high school education in Mexico. Of the two who finished high school, one of them did so with her age cohort in California after migrating to the United States and having missed two years of schooling when she worked to supplement her family's income.

TABLE 4.1

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Name	Elementary Grades Completed											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Ana												
Cristina												
Talia												
Erica												
Fabiola												
Gabriela												



Education completed in Mexico



Education completed in the U.S.

The participant who started her own education experience in the United States at the youngest age was able to finish 6th grade, but that was also her last year of formal schooling. Patriarchal notions of women's roles within the family and their need for education limited another participant: upon arrival to the United States as a teenager, her brother prohibited her from enrolling in the local high school because she was already pregnant, and he strongly believed that pregnant women have no business in going to school.

Although the amount of formal education the women had varied greatly, there were common factors that influenced their decisions to terminate their efforts to continue with an education. These factors were related to the socioeconomic status of their family and to the fact that they were women in a culture with rigid gender behavior expectations.

The Formal Education of the Children

At the onset of the interviews for this research project, I sought to document the composite meanings that undocumented Mexican mothers living in a rural county of Northern California give to their lives, their challenges, and opportunities. The scope of this thesis, however, is focused on the women's understanding of their children's educational experience as well as the challenges they perceive their children encounter resultant and uniquely related to their own immigrant status that impinge upon their scholastic success.

The information extracted from the narratives regarding their children's education is presented in the two following sections. The first one, *Experiences with*

the public K-12 school system, relates to the different experiences the women have had with the schools, teachers, and administrators as institutional agents along with specific examples for illustrative purposes. The second section, *Challenges to the children's academic success*, enumerates the specific challenges that the mothers perceive interfere with their children's successful educational attainment.

Experiences with the public K-12 school system.

During the interviews, the participants were asked to talk about their children's education, their teachers, and their schools. They were not given specific questions or themes to address, such as school lunches or their opinion of the curriculum. Instead, I utilized open-ended questions to elicit the topics most important or salient about the schools for the mothers. Their stories were complicated and inter-related with other aspects of their lives. However, it was possible to characterize each element within each event as having either an overall desirable or an undesirable impact on the mothers' understanding of their relationship with the schools.

I will report these two experiences in two separate yet related sections. The first one is titled Meaningful Connections, and it speaks to the supportive and positive interactions the mothers have had with the teachers and schools. Within this topic, three categories emerged: 1) feeling that they are taken into account and validated, 2) effective and reciprocal communication, and 3) significant relationships between the adults in the school and the children. The second section conveys the antithetical experiences the mothers had relative to the examples presented in Meaningful Connections. The women reported these latter incidents as having had a negative

impact on their sense of connection with the schools, thus the section was titled Dis-Connections.

Meaningful connections.

While narrating their experiences with the schools, all of the women shared stories with some common themes. They praised the willingness of the school personnel to make an effort to communicate with their family. They also spoke favorably of the times when they or their children were seen, listened to, and taken into account. Most of all, when mothers related this type of interaction with the schools, they emphasized their appreciation of the relationships individual teachers made with their children outside of the classroom. Feeling that their children are seen and noticed individually by their teachers was expressed as very important for some of the mothers. Talía remembers that after a difficult period of family struggle leading to marital separation and a sudden change of residence, her son Carlos, six years old at that time and in Kindergarten, was understandably upset. Carlos began drawing pictures at school that caught the teacher's attention, and she in turn asked Talía if everything was ok. Talía was grateful for the teacher's sensitivity, that she was able to recognize Carlos' sadness about his parents' divorce, and then ask about it:

[Carlos] was in Kindergarten when my ex-husband and I separated.

Carlos used to draw pictures of little people crying. The teachers asked, "What's the matter with your son? Look at what he is drawing!" That is the truth. The teachers see that the drawings the children make reflect their sadness, or their joys, or whatever. I am grateful to them for that.

He drew little figures crying, and he drew his dad, his mom... He is doing well in school now.

Carlos continued doing well in school, and Talía attributes his success to teachers like the one he had in Kindergarten.

Erica, a mother of two girls—Xochitl in 4th grade and Citlalli in 6th grade—decided that she had to get help from the school when she received the scholastic progress reports in the mail. She went to the school to address Citlalli's struggle in her math class. Erica always encouraged her daughters to do their homework, but her own sixth-grade education proved to be insufficient in helping the girls with the academic aspect of their homework. Erica requested that Citlalli be enrolled in the after-school program, hoping that someone there would help her with the homework she could not do herself.

They [after-school staff] help her with her homework. I talked with the school counselor, and I told her that I wanted her to stay after-school so that she... so that she could get the help she needs with her homework... The kids need to learn to be responsible, that they have to do their work, right?... I have not had any complaints that she does not turn in her homework, ... she is doing fine up to this point, thanks in part to the support we have had from the school so far, right?

When the final report cards were issued, Erica was very pleased that Citlalli's grades had improved significantly. Erica expressed her gratitude for the after-school program and the impact it had on Citlalli's grades. Erica states that responsibility is an important

value that the girls need to learn. Her own responsibility is to provide for her children and advocate for them when they are in trouble. The school's responsibility is to teach the children and help them with their homework, and the girls' responsibility is to do their homework, to not be disruptive in class, and to get good grades. Erica monitors the process with a "no news is good news" approach. As long as there were no complaints from school, then all was well, and she trusted that the girls' progress was adequate. Other mothers, however, expressed the desire to have a more effective and frequent communication with the teachers and the schools, especially if there was any emergent issue about their children's progress or behavioral concern.

Ana has raised five sons who started attending public schools in California fourteen years ago, starting from the Head Start Program to as late as fourth grade. Consequently, she has had plenty of interactions with teachers in the public schools. She remembers two teachers fondly, and she stressed the teachers' motivation to have an open communication both with the students and the parents. The teachers' interest in forming relationships with her sons that extended outside of the classroom revealed the teachers' respect for the students but also for the role the mother maintained in being actively involved in her children's education even when she cannot be physically present on a regular basis in the children's classroom. Here she told of one teacher whom she respected and appreciated:

The other teacher I was telling you about, the one who is really very good, he really helps the students is [Mr.] Arroyo. He was another one, who really helps the kids. If he sees that the students are having

problems, he goes to them and asks, “Hey, what is happening to you? What’s the matter with you?” ... [He has] talked with me, when my son Bolívar was Mr. Arroyo’s student he would call me and keep me informed. ... When Bolívar was having problems, [Mr. Arroyo] wanted to know if I was aware of what was troubling him, and I told him what was going on. He helped me a lot. Unfortunately, teachers like them are very few.

Ana appreciated the effort Mr. Arroyo made to communicate with her about her son’s struggles in school as well as his approach with Bolívar in asking him directly what was troubling him.

In addition to Mr. Arroyo’s efforts to communicate with the students and their families, his ability to sustain a relationship with the students beyond the scope of the context of the class was important for Ana. Mr. Arroyo is a Latino teacher who also speaks Spanish, and she attributed his ability to relate to the Mexican children to his own ethnic background:

Maybe because he too suffered a bit, or because of the teachings he had... They are the kind of individuals who, more than teachers, they are friends to the kids. That is how they can actually accomplish something, they can get things done with the kids if they tried to be more their friends...It has to come from [the teachers], to say, “I will help these kids, x and y have problems. I will try to help them. I will ask them why they are acting in such a way.” What do the teachers do at

school now? If the kid misbehaves, they call the mother. “Come and get your kid, he is suspended for a week for bad behavior!”

Ana appreciates a more informal relationship between the teacher and the students as an indication that the teachers care about the students’ well-being. When the students get in trouble or have a difficult day, she expects the teachers to communicate with the students and get a sense of what is going on. She considers the schools’ punitive response of calling their mothers and suspending the students when the students misbehave as a response of a system not invested in helping or understanding the students. Consistent with qualitative research on the disengagement of high school students from their education manifest by selective class cutting (Fallis & Opotow, 2003), Ana sees school policy as a way for schools to wash their hands of the responsibility of meeting the students’ needs when they most need the help.

Fabiola recalled an incident when the teacher was able to identify that something was bothering her niece Patty. The teacher asked Patty if there was anything troubling her and later she also asked Fabiola when she arrived to pick her niece up from school. Gabriela and Fabiola are sisters, they lived together and both were involved in raising their children. On this occasion, Gabriela had a medical complication related to her diabetes, and an ambulance had to be called in the middle of the previous night. The children were scared because no one understood what was happening, and they still did not know what to expect. During the day Patty, who was 10 years old, was very upset at school:

And, I don't know... my niece went to school and she spent all day in school crying and crying and crying. When the teacher asked her what was going on, all Patty could do was cry, and cry and cry...My niece was not well all day so the next day when I took her back to school, the teacher wanted to know if everything was all right. I didn't know what to tell her, I didn't know if I should tell her what happened or not. I said, "No. Everything is fine!" "OK," she said, "It's just that Patty's behavior yesterday was like this and this and this other way. No one could talk to her without her starting to cry. I asked her if everything was all right and she answered, 'yes, yes.' Later on she did finally tell me what had happened."

Fabiola was pleased to know that the teacher had noticed that something was bothering Patty, but she was also surprised initially by the teacher's inquiry. Fabiola denied that anything was the matter because she did not understand the purpose of the teacher's question. It was only when the teacher told Fabiola that she was worried about Patty's emotional status and ability to pay attention in class that Fabiola opened up and admitted to her that they were worried about Patty's mother Gabriela. Even then, Fabiola kept her distance by downplaying the severity of Gabriela's medical condition.

Talía, Ana, and Fabiola all told of incidents when their children were truly seen by their teachers, and their teachers took the time to figure out what was wrong. In the mothers' opinion, this extra step was an important difference between teachers who make valuable connections with the children and those who do not.

Dis-connections.

The stories narrated by the participants that had a negative impact on their relationship to the school or the teachers had to do with the mothers' perception of being invisible, of their children or themselves not being seen, not being heard, or not taken into account. These patterns conversely mirror the experiences characterized as positive by the mothers. I will illustrate with specific quotations some events that exemplify situations that promoted a sense of invisibility and others in which the communication mechanisms between the school and the families were insufficient—whether accidentally or by intent.

The experiences the mothers described ranged from concerns about the children's well-being to the school's ability to perform and implement valid assessment leading to proper class placement. Additionally, one mother spoke of her child's futile efforts to elicit help from their teacher; another could not believe the extent to which she had to prove herself to be heard in the midst of a conflict with other students. Lastly, I illustrate an example of the school's insensitivity about the emotional impact that myopic cultural curriculum can have on children from non-traditional households.

On occasions, when the mothers have a concern about their children's educational experience, they go to the schools and seek to speak to the teacher or the principal. They often do not make an appointment because of the difficulty in communicating over the phone, so they go to school and hope to get an opportunity to express their views. When her daughter Sofia began to lose weight, Fabiola felt that the

food provided by the Head Start Program had changed to a diet high in sugar and low in nutritional value.

The teacher who used to work there used to feed the children a lot of nutritious foods. The people who work there now give the children only cookies, milk, juice; morning, noon, and afternoon. Sometimes I ask if I could bring her with her own food because I need her to gain some weight. They tell me no. No, no, no. If you want to have your daughter in this program then you follow what we do, otherwise you can move her to a different school. What can I say but OK, it's all right.

Fabiola's effort to bring her concern about the nutritional value of the school lunch to the teacher's attention was met with dismissal. Furthermore, when Fabiola offered to send her daughter to school with her own lunch the teacher stated that Fabiola would have to comply with what the school served or find another school program. Not having any other viable school choices or enough understanding of the school system to question the teacher's response, Fabiola had no choice but to acquiesce.

Cristina narrated an experience with her children's school that expressed her awareness that the school principal and teachers are not interested in her contributions and requests about her sons' education. Cristina's three sons were all born in the U.S. and have attended public schools since they were old enough to go to Head Start. The boys are native bilingual English and Spanish speakers, and noteworthy their language proficiency in English has surpassed their Spanish speaking ability. Cristina's youngest son, Isaac, has consistently scored at the top of his class in standardized language exams.

Their English fluency notwithstanding, the boys have been identified as needing to participate in an Limited English Proficient (LEP) program. A requirement of this program is that they get pulled out of their regular instruction class time to participate along with other students in a class designed to teach the students English. The boys dislike the class and find it very boring. Cristina was furious that her children were pulled out and requested numerous times that they be removed from the LEP program. All her requests were denied, and the children continued to be identified as English language learners:

They continue to send them [to the LEP class]! I even talked to Isaac's teacher and I told her that I did not want her to send him [to the LEP class]. I asked her, "Do you see that he has a difficult time understanding what you say? "No," she said, "Isaac understands everything, everything (strong emphasis)!" So then, why are the directors in the school doing this? I don't understand why they do this if I am telling them not to send my children? They are pulled from their regular class and they are sent to another classroom. This is not right, you agree? ... I keep telling her [the teacher] but they [the boys] are still being sent! I have even thought about going with Isaac's teacher again and tell her that if they continue to send him to that class that I am going to have to send him to a different school. What else can I do? Even though he is my last child I will be wiser about this. Given that I could

not.... with Ricardo and Rafael I could not. Ricardo is now graduating from Mountain Valley Elementary... (remorseful tone).

In spite of the efforts made by Cristina to express to the school her desire that her children not participate in the LEP program, her children continued to be enrolled in it year after year. She refused to sign the permission slip for years, and nothing changed. What seemed most aggravating to Cristina was that no one was able to explain to her why the boys were in enrolled in an LEP class when they were native English speakers.

Cristina's sense of being ignored by the teachers and by the principal were exacerbated by her belief that this program was hindering her sons' ability to do well in school because they were pulled out from the regular class and thus lost instruction time. Realizing that participating in this program was detrimental for her older two sons' educational experiences, she intended to advocate on behalf of Isaac and did whatever she could to make sure that he had a different educational experience. Cristina considered threatening the teacher with pulling her sons out of the school if the school was not attentive to her children's needs. However, Cristina does not believe that the situation would really be better in another school, and she did not think the teachers cared whether or not her sons left the school.

Cristina went further in sharing why she believed that the schools did not intend to hear what was important to her and her children. She cited an example of her oldest son Ricardo's struggle in his math class. Cristina saw that Ricardo did his math homework every afternoon; he assured her that he turned it in, and when the exams were graded he often failed to get a passing grade. Cristina asked me to go with her to

talk to the math teacher and help her with the communication. She knew that I was a student in a graduate program in Education and thought that I would be able to understand what the teacher said as well as ask what she perceived to be the right questions. We met with the teacher, and he said that Ricardo just needed to ask for help when he did not understand something. He assured us that Ricardo was capable, but he was shy and did not want to ask questions.

He needs help in mathematics more than anything else. He's too slow in math. He says he asks the teacher, but that the teacher is always in a rush to leave because he has to pick up his daughter. So, I don't know. Do you remember that we went to ask the teacher if he was able to help him, and he assured us that he would? The teacher sometimes tells him, "You know what? Not right now. You need to wait." Later on, the teacher forgets. So when a child goes to the teacher and asks for help, and the teacher says "Later," it is like you know they are disregarding you! The student will say, "OK, I asked the teacher for help, and the teacher doesn't help me." What can the student do then? Flunk the class, María! Because he didn't get the help he needed from the teacher?

Cristina reported that even when her son Ricardo tried to get help from his math teacher, that the teacher did not have time to answer his questions. Although Cristina had not yet returned to the school to find out what strategy would work better, she expressed a frustration that Ricardo did not get the help he needed from his teacher even when he specifically asked for it.

The perception of not being seen or heard has significant consequences during an interpersonal conflict mediated by someone in a position of authority who cannot, or will not, take all perspectives into account. In this narrated experience, Gabriela's oldest son had a physical altercation with another student in the school playground. Gabriela went to the school to complain about an incident for which she perceived her son was unfairly suspended. The principal claimed to have an impartial hearing with both children involved and decided to believe both sides of the story. Gabriela was surprised at her conclusion because the stories were mutually exclusive, and when the teacher stated that she believed the other boy as well, Gabriela felt that by implication she did not believe Ricardo. It was not until a girl, another student at the school, came forward and testified as having been witness to the event and corroborated Ricardo's story that Gabriela felt they would finally be believed.

I went and spoke with the principal and everything. My son told her, but ... the reason the principal believed him is that there was a girl from the same grade who witnessed what happened... The principal took each child involved in the conflict and spoke to them separately.... She believed the other boy's story because she didn't count on my son coming in with a bruise on his arm. She argued that she didn't really know the real cause of the bruise. "How could I really know how it happened?" That's what she said!

Gabriela's expectation that the other student's testimony would be enough to convince the principal to believe Ricardo proved to be premature. When Gabriela presented the

principal with the bruises left on Ricardo's arm as physical evidence that he was indeed hurt, the principal questioned the origins of the bruise. To Gabriela, her word and that of her son, the testimony of another child, and the physical evidence on her son's body were not enough proof to convince the school's head administrator that their story, as told, was true.

On a more general sense of feeling disregarded, Fabiola talked about an incident that upset her and her daughter Sofia very much. Sofia was enrolled in a Head Start program at that time. During the third week of June during arts and crafts time, the children made Father's Day cards to take home. The family structures in the community at large differ significantly, and not all children have a father either living at home or involved in their lives. Although a family unit without a present father is not uncommon, for Fabiola this was a painful reminder of a recent and difficult separation and a relationship she considered reflected a failure on her part. The absence of a father in her own family was made visible by her daughter making a card, within a context in which social expectations and mores are reproduced, and having no one to whom to give it.

The teachers know that I am separated from my husband. Last year, in school they made a card for the children to give their Dads on Father's Day and it had their picture.... That day [Fabiola] said to me, "Oh, my teacher told me that... that I needed to give this to my Dad." On the spot I didn't know how to react. She continued, "But I don't have a Dad." I felt awful, but I said to her, "You may not have a Dad but I am both your

Dad and your Mom. Remember?” She nodded, “Yes, you buy my things, you wash my clothes, you take me to the store.” I mean, at that moment I felt really very bad. I felt really awful, right? I even cried... I think that a teacher shouldn't be telling kids to (pause) that they send the kids home with things for their fathers, knowing that they don't live with their father (silence). In the beginning it was, it was very painful for me (pause). I don't know. I went to speak with the school principal. I told her... “If you could have seen how much it affected my daughter!”... I got really upset with the teacher! I told her that!

Fabiola demonstrates an awareness of her daughter's activities at school as well as an awareness of Sofia's attitude toward schoolwork and its affective impact. Although this experience was not specific to Fabiola's family on account of her immigrant status or country of origin, it did contribute to her broader sense that the teachers in the schools are inattentive to the emotional consequences of their actions on her children.

On the topic of feeling like their families were invisible, the participants identified experiences that included having their concerns about school lunches ignored, and having the principal not believe their perspective during a conflict without corroborating evidence or witnesses. The participants perceived that their children were literally and individually rendered invisible when a teacher failed to help the child after his assistance was requested and by having the school administrators refuse to withdraw their children from pullout programs even when the mothers expressed their explicit opposition. These were some examples that reinforced the participants' beliefs that the

teachers could not see or hear them; narratives of not being understood are presented in the section to follow.

Contributing to the mothers' sense that they were not seen or heard by the school system is their perception that the schools did not intend to have an open and reciprocal communication with their families. Without communication, the understanding between the families and the schools was hindered. There were three types of communication challenges that were identified by the mothers. The first one stemmed from a language barrier between the participants' emergent English competency and the reticence on the part of school personnel to communicate in Spanish either in verbal or written form. The second academic dynamic related to the language barrier, was the schools' reliance on the students themselves to act as interpreters and to be responsible for conveying both message and intent of oral or written communication to their mothers. The third and most dis-connecting of the communication obstacles was the selective and skewed nature in which the schools contacted the mothers regarding their children's performance and behavior.

The participants reported that parents did not always know what was happening at school or what their children were learning in class. When the school Cristina's children attended scheduled back-to-school evenings or parent meetings, the school did not provide a Spanish interpreter to assist the parents with limited English language skills in their understanding of the information presented. Not being able to understand what was said discouraged parents from attending the meetings, and their absence in turn reinforced the school's perception that parents were not interested in what was

going on and were then less likely to provide a translator, closing off any possibility of school-community dialogue.

Parents don't go to the meetings because they couldn't even follow what is being discussed! They say, "Why should we go if we don't understand!" If they don't assign anyone to go to the meetings and translate what everyone's saying for those parents who go to the meeting and don't speak English, then how can they possibly understand? The parents say, "What's the point of coming to the meetings if we don't understand. I'm better off staying home. They couldn't even begin to tell you what their children are doing and not doing in school!"

The school's failure to provide an interpreter for the Spanish-speaking families during board meetings, parent informational nights, or school sponsored events was further evidence for Cristina that the school was not interested in making sure that the Spanish speaking families understood what was going on in the schools. Cristina believed that the lack of interest on the school's part to communicate with the parents by providing an interpreter during the meetings was a barrier for the parents to know what was going on in the schools and with their children's education.

Different but related examples in which language served as a barrier in communication was during parent-parent conflicts during which the school had to intervene or between parents and school personnel. Frequently when the conflicts arose, there was no paid employee available to translate between the Spanish-speaking parents and the school officials. In these events, the school solicited the assistance of other

parents or their bilingual children to interpret for them. The schools seemed to rely on the fortuitous chance that there would be someone available to facilitate the communication between the families and the school personnel. In addition to the serendipitous aspect of this translating arrangement, the objectivity or partiality of the interpreter came into question.

María: Does the principal speak Spanish?

Gabriela: No, she got a translator.

María: Was the translator woman an employee?

Gabriela: No. She was a mother and her son went there. What I mean is that she was not impartial. I told the principal, "I am very upset because you ignored me!"

That woman told her [the principal] what I said. The interpreter assured me, "I do not take sides for either one of you. Not because she is the principal or because you are the mother of the child. I am impartial."

In a small rural environment, the Spanish-speaking community is even smaller, and the ability of the interpreter to remain as neutral as possible during her interpreting role proved to be a challenge. The possibility of interpreters displaying bias in their translation process was an ever-present concern on the part of the mothers.

School meetings and events were not the only occasions when the communication between the mothers and the schools fell apart. The paperwork that was sent home from school was always sent in English only. Some families had limited literacy skills, and fewer had the ability to read and understand written English. The

mothers did the best they could to understand what the printed information said, and when they needed help, they sought clarification from their own children.

I try to read them [papers sent from school] and see whatever it is that I can understand myself. If I don't then I can ask him [her son] what is going on. So my son reads the paper to me. He reads and explains to me what it is that's going on... Only when I went to the parent-teacher conference to talk about his grades, I did get a young woman who did speak Spanish. However, when I go to ask questions on my own, I'm by myself then. I ask the best as I can... I do my best with my mocho English! No, no, no, they do not even ask me, "Do you need anything? Do you need someone to help you translate? Anything?" No. They don't even ask me at the school.

Cristina explained how she handled the documents sent home that she did not understand. More so, she recounted her visits to the school and the availability of translators to help her communicate clearly with the teachers. Her children's school made available a woman who spoke Spanish during school-wide scheduled meetings, that is, during school-initiated communication. When the parents had questions or sought information, however, the responsibility of obtaining assistance in translation was shifted to the mother. While sometimes the parents did ask other relatives or friends to accompany them to the school, this was not always possible because the mothers' work schedules were at times irregular or inflexible, and thus the opportunities to go to school were not always available.

When Ana needed to express a concern with the teachers at school, she had to rely on her children to translate for her. Her perception of the school's attitude toward her was ambivalent; on one hand she acknowledged that the office personnel were not rude, that they were always polite. On the other hand, considering that her children's translating skills were limited, the school's failure to provide a proficient interpreter was a gesture of disrespect to her.

To tell you the truth [the teacher's response to the complaint] was in part it was good and in part it was bad. They knew that I didn't understand the language and they didn't find anyone to translate for me so that I could really understand what was going on. They told me what was happening in English and they wanted my child to translate! You know things don't work out like that... Perhaps the child is translating the whole thing, and perhaps the child is not. So, in that way, I don't know.... I think that they treated me well because they were not rude, but I do think that it is not respectful that knowing I didn't understand English, that they didn't try to get someone else to interpret for me.

Effective and timely communication between the school and the parents regarding the students' academic progress is critical to ensure the children's success in schools. When problems are identified early enough and a clear plan of action is set in place to address the problem, then the student's chances of improvement increase. Cristina, concerned that her oldest son was not doing well in his mathematics class, expressed her frustration that the teacher had not made more efforts to communicate to

her that Ricardo was struggling with the material. On the other hand, if the problem was behavioral, then the school did seem responsive in sending a note home to let her know what happened.

The teacher has never called me. Ricardo says that he doesn't send papers home either. The other day that Ricardo got into a fight he told me himself that he got in trouble. So I figure if Ricardo was the one hiding things from me he wouldn't have told me anything about the fight either! Right? Victoria Middle School did send me a piece of paper—in English, telling me about the fight with the other student.

Cristina relied on her sons to translate the written communication from school. Notably, Cristina trusted her son unreservedly. She was certain, without a doubt, that he would not willfully misrepresent any communication from the school, or even conceal a note that relayed a message that could get him in trouble. Her belief in his integrity to tell the truth was based on their relationship and on his voluntary, honest, and proactive communication with her.

The selective efforts the schools made in communicating with the mothers about their children's performance in school represented a common theme identified by other mothers as well. Ana was vexed by the teachers' failure to communicate with the students to get at the source of the conflict and choice to "get rid" of the students instead.

So for any little thing that happens in school... the teachers are clueless, instead of helping and asking, "What is happening with you? How can I

help you? Tell me what is wrong.” They [the teachers] call their mother or whomever and they send them home! They send them away! They don’t care! They don’t pay any attention to the student!

A common experience that the participants expressed was that the schools did not make a directed effort to communicate with them if their children were experiencing academic difficulty. When the problem was behavioral in nature, the school did then communicate with the mothers but only to inform them of the resolution of the conflict, namely a suspension from school, and to instruct them to pick up their child.

No participant during the interviews shared a time when a teacher made an effort to communicate personally with the sole intent to get to know the family better or to inform the mother that her child’s behavior or academic performance was outstanding. The participants, collectively, had several children whose behavior and academic performance were outstanding, but their accomplishments were not recognized by the teacher and did not elicit communication from the teachers.

Illustrative of the ineffective structures of communication between the different school representatives and the mothers and their families, the participants cited several communication barriers. Three salient barriers were the language barrier between Spanish and English; the reliance on the children to provide adequate translation of school documents sent home, and lastly the schools’ tendency to call home only when the children got in trouble. Even then, the school-initiated communication was limited to behavioral and not to academic trouble.

The varied experiences that the women interviewed in this project shared regarding their encounters with their children's schools and their representatives were roughly characterized as being either an experience that contributed to their sense of connection to the school or one that exacerbated their sense of dis-connectedness from the schools specifically and possibly from other dominant social institutions as well. The nature of the relationships between the school personnel and the families as well as their intent and ability to communicate effectively were two important mediators of their overall experiences. The mothers' and the children's attitudes toward school could have a significant impact on the children's ability to obtain scholastic achievement.

Challenges to the children's academic success.

It would be a daunting task to enumerate all the possible obstacles that may impede a student's academic progress and establish a causal relationship between the challenge and the educational outcome. However, the mothers interviewed in this study, during their narration and articulation of the meaning they attribute to their lives as undocumented immigrant mothers in the U.S. and of the challenges of parenting children in the K-12 public school system, offered multiple examples of the possible factors that may be barriers to their children's education. I present these challenges separated into two broad categories: those that have to do with the schools and the actual learning, and those that are related to the mothers' immigrant status as undocumented.

School environment and pedagogy.

On the question of academic challenges, the women participating in this study pointed to a number of obstacles they perceived had a limiting impact on the scholastic achievement of their children. These educational barriers ranged in the level of complexity from pragmatic ones such as regular attendance to difficulties with the academic content and instruction. Language hindrances and the impact on the development of the students' identity as learners were other considerations discussed by the mothers. I have selected the most salient or frequent comments and present them in the next section organized around two general themes. The challenging issues related to the students' ability to get to school, stay in school, and feel welcomed and safe in school are discussed in *Being at School*. Topics related to the academic, emotional, and language issues are presented in *Learning in School*.

Being at school.

Regular and consistent attendance is a fundamental requirement for students to do well in school, and this tenet was a commonly held belief among the mothers interviewed. However, they all articulated that getting their children to and from school and feeling that their children were safe while in school were two salient concerns. Erica, for example, struggled with her teenage son, Francisco, as he began to get involved with what she perceived to be the wrong crowd after he finished 8th grade. Erica believed that his peers exposed him to and pressured him to use drugs. Soon after that, Francisco stopped attending school on a regular basis. His mother was unaware of

his truant behavior until the problems with his friends and his substance abuse became an unmanageable situation, prompting her to seek help from the police.

On one such occasion, a police officer asked Francisco why did not he go to school, and he responded that it was he who didn't want to go to school; that his mother had nothing to do with it. Furthermore Francisco was conscious of his mother's lack of awareness of his absences from school and of her inability to force him to go attend. The ominous possibility of getting in trouble with the police and the legal system was not enough to daunt Francisco's attitude. Francisco was 14 years old at the time.

I tried to make my son attend school. Sometimes I would take him, sometimes he would go on his own and I would tell him, "I am not going to work until I take you to school." He would tell me, "No, no, no, I will go by myself, I will go by myself!" But he wouldn't make it to school. I called the police and I told them that my son was not attending school.

A police officer came and asked him why he didn't want to go to school. He answered, "No, I don't want to go to school." The police officer said, "OK, I will take you to school" and my son said, "No, my mom says that she can take me, but it is I who don't want to go. I don't want to go to school." That day he went to school, but can you imagine, every day having to call the police? Huh? I did call them several times... they were very familiar with our problem.

Erica took her children's attendance to school very seriously, and the lessons she learned from her son Francisco prompted her to be much more diligent in the overseeing of her younger daughters', Citlalli and Xochitl, attendance. Erica took both Citlalli and Xochitl to school and dropped them off at the entrance. They were both in elementary school, and the defiance that is generally associated with adolescents had not begun yet. For Erica, it was very important that she provided the transportation for her daughters to and from school and appreciated that her work schedule accommodated her ability to be able to do so. However, she was also concerned that her schedule could change and wanted to make sure that the girls knew how to get to school on their own. Notwithstanding Erica's legal restriction to drive without a driver's license, she drove to school, to work, and other places. She was careful to drive only when it was critical for her family's welfare and nowhere else. Erica sought information and taught her daughters to take the school bus so that, in the event that she could not take the girls to school, they would be able to be independently mobile by themselves.

In the beginning I also taught (Citlalli) to take the bus, because I was concerned that my car would break down one day, or whatever and she needed to know how to take the bus to come and go. I'd take her to the bus stop and then I'd go to work. But she said that the majority of the people in the bus were men, in the bus.... I imagine they were all mixed, I mean... 8th graders and all, so... she Citlalli felt really uncomfortable more than anything else. So I told her that my intention was that she learned how to take the bus and be able to come and go.

But for her, her problem was that she didn't feel comfortable amongst so many boys and men. Furthermore, I am always telling them about the dangers that abound in schools. I don't know if it is because of the schools, or because of the boys, or what.... But I know of two girls, two friends of my girls that I know of, who got pregnant already by going to school. If I know of two, imagine how many of them are out there!

Helping her daughters attain the option of going to school independent of her driving them, Erica struggled with her own concerns of the safety of her daughters on the school bus. Erica was constantly vigilant of her daughters not being left alone in a situation where they could be vulnerable to sexual assault. Erica's fear arose from her own experience and was constantly reinforced by the awareness that her fears are indeed actually founded. Stories from the community of girls getting pregnant at school confirmed her fears.

Ana's struggles with keeping her sons physically in school had to do with her objection to the school policy of sending home students whose behavior is labeled as disruptive. Her sons never showed any disrespect toward the teachers; however, they sometimes got into fights with other students. On those occasions, the school secretary called Ana on the phone to inform her that one of her sons had been suspended.

As far as I'm concerned, if a student is acting badly in school, they (the teachers) have to talk to the student's parents and ascertain why the behavior is so terrible. And if it really turns out that the youth is very rebellious then I think they ought to provide them with some special

program to get him engaged in, I don't know... in a job or something that they continue to do, but AT school! Don't just send them to the streets! ... If the student does not behave properly the school sends them home! Where do the students go when the teachers suspend them? The teachers do not even know of their whereabouts! The parents have to work, so where does the child go? The school doesn't even care! They don't realize the harm they are inflicting on the student!

She felt that the policy of forcing the students who got into trouble or who were disengaged at school to leave the school premises contradicted the school's social mandate to educate the students. Furthermore, Ana felt that this policy of the physical exclusion from the school campus was harmful for the students and promoted a progressive disengagement by the students from the schools and their education.

Sometimes the tension between the students' resistance to go to school and academic struggles were mutually reinforcing. Erica's middle child and oldest daughter, Citlalli, had always earned good grades in elementary school, but when she transitioned to middle school and was placed in a sixth grade math class, her grades fell below passing level.

But I was very worried because she... she didn't want to go to school at all... and like I told you, after I talked with the school, (and changed her math class placement) she didn't have problems or fears about going to school anymore.

Erica went to the school and requested that her daughter be placed in a class that matched her mathematics ability level. The counselor complied, and Citlalli's grade improved dramatically at the same time that her reluctance to go to school ceased.

The challenges in getting the children to school, both as a legal and social obligation and an imperative for their academic success, were complicated by the mothers' concern for the welfare and safety of their children while on school grounds. All of the participants expressed a concern over the physical or psychological safety of the children resulting from a variety of causes such as direct abuse on one hand to passive neglect on the other. The concerns expressed by the mothers were gendered, that is, the worries were uniquely different if their child was a boy or a girl. The fears that were expressed without an association to the sex of the child had to do with their psychological safety regarding the stigma associated from being Mexican and from being immigrants, specifically undocumented immigrants. In the remainder of this section, I will present illustrative narratives of the concerns the mothers had for their boys, their girls, or for both.

The type of dangers that the mothers of boys were worried about had to do with overt violence and the consequences of getting involved in physical fights. Gabriela's oldest son, Timothy, was constantly bullied and picked on at school by other boys in his school. Although he is big in stature for his age, his mother described his personality as helpless and noted that he tended to shy away from trouble. Consequently, his mother reported that a number of boys in school took advantage of the fact that Timothy did not fight back to pick on him. Gabriela was very worried about him and felt helpless that

she was not able to protect him at school, a concern compounded by her sense that she did not know how to teach him to take care of himself. Additionally, she felt that the school was not capable, nor willing to protect him.

What I find most challenging is that my son doesn't know how to protect himself. ... I don't think this is normal. I don't know. Sometimes I don't even know what to do for him. I feel very frustrated for him. I feel helpless because I know that (other kids) hit him and that he doesn't do anything about it. He doesn't go and tell, he doesn't tell anyone, so he is more (pause). I think it is harder with him because I see him more vulnerable, more helpless. I think he feels helpless (pause). I don't know (pause). The doctor hasn't told me exactly what the problem is or how much delay he has... he has not explained things very well at all. Nothing. I wanted to know if there is any medicine or something like that. He said that my son might outgrow this delay by himself. But I don't know, right? I don't know...

Gabriela was concerned about her son's safety from students who bullied him and by her perception that the school was unwilling to take his safety seriously. The nature of the bullying Timothy experienced was not clear during our conversations because what seemed most important to her was that his peers identified him as someone who could be bullied for any reason—and did. In the pauses of Gabriela's narrative, I could hear that she was having a hard time describing a sense that there is "something wrong" with Timothy. He was a fifth grader working on second grade material and very likely had a

learning disability. While she knew intuitively that he was different, no one had explained to her what that meant or what she could do about it.

Fabiola recalled the violence that her brother confronted while he was a junior and she was a sophomore in the local high school. While her story involved her brother instead of her own children, it nonetheless contributed to her emerging thinking about schools as dangerous places within a culturally hostile environment.

So my brother as a consequence had a lot of problems in school. Some Indians wanted to get my brother into trouble, they called him “beaner,” they called him “beaner” and other things... So my brother got into more and more trouble each day, he fought some Indians at the high school. He fought some Americans as well.

My brother would frequently get in fights because (pause) they [the students] would tell us that we were there wasting our time, that we would never get ahead, and all that... My brother got really mad, he felt humiliated. I told him to ignore them, to pay them no mind, right, because otherwise he would get into trouble.

Fabiola and Gabriela’s brother, Javier, was constantly provoked in high school by the other students with taunts and ethnic slurs. Fabiola recalled that in his case Native American students and American – presumably European American – students were responsible for the name-calling. The school’s student body was primarily comprised of three ethnic groups; the largest group included white students, with Native Americans as the second largest group, and Latinos as the smallest yet growing group.

Gabriela talked about other children at the school who harassed her children with the same insults that Javier had to endure.

The American kids may pick on my kids because of what they wear.

The kids call them wetbacks and things like that. Their [the teachers'] only response is, "Oh, just ignore them!" This is an issue that should not be just ignored. They are supposed to do something about it, about the things that they [the students] are saying. But they [the administration] don't do anything, they don't say anything! I don't know, I don't understand!

Salient in this incident is the fact that the children used other students' clothing as a basis for a connection with a specific charged label related to what they perceived to be their immigrant status. More importantly was the school's dismissal of the children's taunting and failure to recognize the social implications of their implicit acceptance of the harassment. In the school's refusal to address Gabriela's concern, the principal was complicit in the marginalization of the students who were perceived to come from undocumented immigrant families.

All the participants who were parenting girls shared their concerns about their daughters' safety in very specific gendered terms that reflected their lived experience in a society both in Mexico and in the United States where sexual violence and child abuse are prevalent. Their worries concerning the protection of their daughters from sexualized violence ranged from being molested by their male teachers or male peers, engaging in sexual activity that could result in pregnancy, to the fear of being raped by

random strangers in isolated school spaces. Erica's vigilance of her daughters' safety and well-being informed many of her decisions about their daily routine.

I always try to protect them the best I can. When I get out of work I go pick them up at school every [with emphasis] day. I leave with my girls and I come back with my girls. They have never been left home alone, all by themselves. I am here with them all day. I am still afraid that one day, God forbid [silence]. I can protect them here in my house but not in school—I cannot take care of them there.

Erica's commitment to keeping her daughters safe was fueled by the painful lessons she was brutally forced to learn as a young girl. Her lifelong silence about her own experience compelled her to speak to her girls and teach them to be cautious and strong. The primacy of such a mandate to safeguard her daughters was clear when she shared an important dream she had for the girls:

The only thing I ask the Lord is that the girls may one day have a boyfriend or someone; I know "it" will happen some day. That when they have their first encounter, that they have it in love and that they do it with someone they truly love (pause). That they not be raped or have something bad happen to them (pause) as it happened to me. This is the only thing I ask of God.

As a mother of two pre-school children, Sofia and Alex, Fabiola expressed great apprehension about sending her kids to school and feeling that they could be safe from harm. At the time of the interview, her daughter Sofia was preparing to transition from

the Head Start Program to the Kindergarten class at the elementary school. For Fabiola, the elementary school's bigger campus and larger classroom size suggested the possibility of less supervision of the children's activities by the teaching staff.

Right now I don't know. I do have a great deal of feelings of mistrust of the schools. When I leave my children at school I don't come home feeling good as I used to. Now I come worried and wondering if they are OK (pause) it is not a safe place. I wonder, if these are the problems that happen at this school where the children are supposed to be supervised by other adults, then what am I to expect from the other school where the teachers are not always present inside the same classroom? I really worry about this. Me—feeling that schools are safe places? [shook her head and paused] not any more.

Fabiola made a reference to an incident that involved her daughter and which occurred while she was in school. Both of the students were three years old. Fabiola was told that her daughter was found alone in a classroom with another boy and that he may have touched her inappropriately. Fabiola interpreted the school's response to the incident as nonchalant in manner because the teachers attributed the children's behavior as normal and harmless. Fabiola's reaction to the incident, however, was different. Given the delay in communication on the school's part, the perceived absence of seriousness or concern from the teachers about this issue, and not having access to information about the identity of the boy nor the specific details of the incident made Fabiola feel like the school was trying to cover something up. She imagined the worst and anguished

tremendously over her perception that her daughter was sexually abused, that Sofia's prospects to be what she perceived as normal were robbed from her, and that the school and the medical professionals did not care about her daughter's well-being.

Fabiola's lack of confidence in the school's ability to provide a safe environment for her daughter was a theme that all mothers of daughters expressed. The mothers' concerns for their daughters' safety from sexualized violence were compounded by their isolation from access to information or someone to talk to about their concerns. Fabiola admitted that her only confidant was her sister and that she did not know whom else she could trust.

Fabiola—I used to think that school is everything and now I don't believe so. It is not so. My mom always taught us the importance of going to school. Now, I send her because I am aware that if I pull her out of Head Start she can struggle in Kindergarten, but (silence). . . . I am interested in an education, because like I told you, I want my children get ahead, but if that [getting molested] is all they get at school then -- school is not worth it. There are times when I feel guilty because it's like, that day I went to work thinking that my daughter was OK (pause). Sometimes I think it was my fault! (crying) Everything changed, everything, everything. I don't know! To me schools are not safe, not anymore. I am very worried.

María—What are you worried about?

Fabiola—That something might happen to my daughter (voice breaking and pausing) every hope I used to have came crumbling down (crying). There are times that I feel very guilty. If only I had been with them, if I hadn't been at work (pause) perhaps things would have turned out differently. This is the reason why I don't think that schools are safe places anymore. I distrust all of them, all of them. Maybe this is a bad thing—I don't know who to talk to, someone who can understand as a mother.

Learning in school.

In addition to the challenges of getting the children to school and having them stay in school with a sense of safety and belonging, the mothers identified a number of obstacles to their children's education that may be characterized as academic in nature. Having already discussed the obstacles to being in school, the following challenges address important concerns specific to learning in school. Salient among these include: the role of language, academic preparation, and the access to accurate and timely information.

Language.

Language played a significant role in the mothers' understanding of the complexity in their children's struggle to succeed in school. While the mothers' English language competency was for the most part sufficient to get their point across in basic conversations, their children were all either bilingual or English-speaking dominant with an understanding of oral Spanish. The children's bilingualism frequently

placed them in the position of being their mother's and their teachers' interpreter. The mothers realized the need for a dependable interpreter and, knowing that the school often did not provide one, asked their own children for help.

I don't like to make... I don't like to make an appointment unless I know that someone is available to translate. I do this because I want to make sure that I can explain everything, what is happening with the children, everything. Sometimes I would take the children and tell them...

Perhaps the child is translating the whole thing, and perhaps the child is not. So, in that way, I don't know....

Reflecting on the limits of her children's linguistic abilities, Gabriela pondered about her children's "bilingual-ness." Gabriela was also the only participant in this project who did not speak or understand any English, and her children were critical mediators between her and the non Spanish-speaking community. This notwithstanding, she questioned her children's ability to translate asserting that their language competency in each language was partial and ineffective for accurate translation purposes.

María: The kids translated?

Gabriela: No, the kids didn't translate because they don't know how to translate. What I mean is that they are not very advanced in English or in Spanish. They are like half and half. They do know many things in English, but they don't know how to say the same thing in Spanish, or the other way around. ... They may know what it means in Spanish but don't know how to say it in English. They struggle a lot with this.

Expressing concern about her kids' language skills, Gabriela consulted with the school teachers about the possible consequence, whether beneficial or detrimental, of speaking Spanish at home and its impact on the kids' educational experience. During the most recent parent-teacher conference, Gabriela was disconcerted with the change in advice her daughter's teacher gave her about Gabriela's responsibility to speak English and its imperative role in her children's education. Confused about the change of position relating to speaking Spanish at home, Gabriela reflected on the broader impact that the kids losing their fluency in Spanish would have on their ability to stay connected to their family in Mexico.

I have always asked, ever since they started first grade in school, I have been asking about their language. I wanted to know if they [the teachers] thought it was ok that they [the children] were learning Spanish at home. I even asked them last year... She said that everything was fine... because I don't speak English... She said it was fine! ... And now, the teacher said that I need to go to school and learn English, and that I need to speak in English to the children! She told me that she is getting a whole grade behind, so I told her, I said, "I have always asked my children's teachers what they thought about this. You the teachers, you know more than we do, than me as a mother, you know more about this, right?" ... I don't want them to lose their ability to speak Spanish, their culture, because what is going to happen when they go visit my family? My family does not understand a single word in English. My whole

family is in Mexico. The teacher was silent for a moment, “Well yeah, but her first nationality is American. They need to know how to speak English, it is imperative.” I was left speechless, like... I didn’t know what to tell her because she continued to tell me that I must speak in English to my boys so that they would not be held back in school any further. I don’t want my children, to go to school talking like this and think that it [the way I speak] is correct. I really thought that what she said was not right, but... she said that I have to think about my children, so that they see that I am trying to get ahead, make an effort, so they too make an effort. She said that I have to speak English at home so that my children learn English better.

Furthermore, following the teacher’s contention that she needed to learn English to model to her own children the importance of speaking English, she expressed concern that she could become a proficient enough English speaker to be an useful model for her children’s evolving bilingualism.

While none of the children of the women participating in this project were non-English speakers, the schools labeled many of them as students who needed supplemental English language support allegedly to bolster their prospects of successful academic achievement. Of the 21 students, the total number of children of the participants, 12 were placed in a Limited English Proficient (LEP) program in school. Of these twelve only six, Ana’s sons and Talía’s oldest daughter, were born in Mexico. Their ages at the time of migration twelve years ago ranged from 6-months-old to 8-

years-old. Talía's oldest daughter, Mariela, was never placed in an English language remedial class. Cristina's sons were placed in LEP classes without the mother's consent; in fact, the boys were enrolled in the program in spite of their mother's explicit objections. Cristina challenged the teachers' allegations that her sons needed language support as the basis for their participation in the program. Additionally, Cristina bemoaned the impact that being pulled out of the mainstream classroom had on the total instruction time her children missed out:

It is NOT the language! They said it's the language. Really, they [the teachers] say it's the language but they were not able to give me an answer [that explained the children's placement in the LEP program]. They say that the problem is the language because the boys don't understand. That the kids don't understand what they are reading, or what they write. I say, how could it be that they don't understand?

Cristina's frustration with the school's assessment of her children as English language learners is understandable considering the facts that the children are U.S. born, native English speakers, and have scored well on the language component of the standardized state-administered assessment.

Schoolwork and academic preparation.

The mother's language proficiency and the skills they could impart their children to support their schoolwork were common concerns expressed by the mothers in this study. Ana reflected on her oldest son's experience with school

and the overwhelming burden that he experienced resulting being the eldest child at a time when she was not yet able to advocate for him.

My oldest son had a lot of problems because he was the first.

When he started going to school I didn't speak any English whatsoever. I had no resources or means; I could not help him. Another thing about being the oldest is that when I was not home he was the one who was in charge of his little brothers. I had to work at night, from two in the afternoon to almost ten at night, so he was left practically all alone with his brothers all day long.

I began to have a lot of problems with him (pause), he didn't want to continue to go to school. At that time I used to think, "My son, why is he behaving so badly?" but now I think back and I understand that my son needed a lot of help. Now that I know a little more, I understand English better and I know how things work around here a little more, now I feel great sadness to know that my son could not get ahead because he had no one to help him.

Ana reflected on the difficulty to help her children with their school assignments due to the language barrier. This linguistic isolation was exacerbated by the physical loneliness her children confronted when she had to leave them home alone while she went to work. Without anyone to help them with their homework and finding themselves alone, her oldest son sought support with his peers on the street.

First of all, if you don't know the language you cannot help them to succeed in school. This is an important way in which we cannot help our own children. Then when we leave them alone, they start to go out on the streets and hang out with other friends, and before you know it instead of getting ahead, your children will be shocked and traumatized with the need to learn a new language, the need to know how things are, because everything is different. More than helping them get ahead, they get all disoriented in their studies and they don't learn anything at all!

Speaking to the specific support of the kids' schoolwork at home, Cristina encouraged her sons' efforts to do their homework daily but found that she could not help them with the content itself. She counseled the boys to seek help from their teachers at school and prompted them to convey to the school that their mother could not help them because on account of not speaking enough English.

I just simply can't, I don't understand what they want in the homework. María, I have told the teachers about this. The homework my children bring home, I don't understand it. So I tell my children to go and tell their teachers that their mother couldn't help them with their homework. "Tell your teachers that your mother does not speak English or read English. Ask them for their help." ... When they were little they did get a lot of help from their schools. When Ricardo began going to the middle high school, we started having a lot more problems with him. When he was in elementary school the teachers seemed interested in

wanting to help him. But now that he goes to the junior high he has a lot more problems than before.

Erica was surprised that her oldest daughter, Citlalli, was struggling to pass her math class her first year of middle school. Up to that point, she had not had any problems in getting good grades in her elementary school; however, once she was promoted to middle school with children from other elementary schools, her ability to engage in class with her peers on a comparable level of mathematical competency was challenged. When I asked Erica if the students in the class were older as a possible explanation of why they were better prepared to do well in the class relative to her daughter, Erica explained:

No, no, they're the same (age), I mean... What was happening is that she, I don't know... I don't really know what the problem was. She told me that she felt that the math was really different to what she was used to in the other school. I told her that of course it had to be different. As you go to higher grades then things have to change more, right?

Erica could not explain for certain what was the source of Citlalli's problem with being able to keep up with her peers. The only difference between the students who were successful in math class and Citlalli was that the successful children attended a different elementary school.

Information.

The third theme the women in this project identified as an important one when considering the educational challenges faced by their children within the context of the

schools themselves was timely access to reliable and accurate information above and beyond the challenges posed by the language barrier. Gabriela and her sister Fabiola did not have an authentic understanding of the school policies and of their rights as parents. As a result, they were subject to confusion stemming from partial information and misinformation the schools offered them. Fabiola was unaware of her rights as the mother of two students, an awareness that would have helped her assert her right to determine who had permission to pick up her kids from school. She was unaware that the principal or anyone in the school could not unilaterally make this determination on her behalf or against her stated wishes. Since Fabiola didn't know this, she could not insist that her sister Gabriela ought to be allowed to pick up her children.

My sister got really mad and as a consequence they [people at the school] took her off the paperwork—they removed my sister's name. My sister is not allowed to pick up my kids... They told me that what they did is legal. That there are a lot of legal things that I don't know.

Knowing of their parental rights was a key piece of institutional information that the women needed to understand the way schools work. Another important example of information was an understanding of school choice as a right they have within the school district as well as the possible differences between schools and the way one school might meet their children's needs better than others:

I have asked about sixth grade registration. I am aware that he has to go to a different school. I have asked about the schools, I want to know which one is the best school, as far as they know. Which school can they

recommend I should send my son? They only responded with, “Whatever school you want, they are all the same. He can get the same help in all of them.” But I have noticed that not all schools offer the same kind of help... They don’t want to help me with this process!

Notably, Gabriela did request more information about choosing a school for her children but was not given any insight into how to be more discriminating in this process. She read this refusal as a purposeful denial of information that was important for her son’s education.

A salient concern expressed by all mothers was the lack of information about what to do if their children continued to struggle with school even after they had sought all the help readily available to them by the school. When the mothers realized that their children were getting bad grades, they went to talk to the teachers. Often, they also implemented standard strategies of assistance, like having the students stay afterschool for help with their homework, making sure that the children worked on their homework at home, and encouraging the children to ask their teachers for help when there was a concept in the instruction they did not understand.

So what can I do, María? What else can I do to help him? This is what worries me! Sometimes when I am asleep I wake up worrying, “Oh my God! My son is so slow! What can I do to help my child?” Right? I am very worried!

And I am not the only one worried, I hear other parents, other women who work with me, they have the same problems with their

children. I sometimes thought, “Maybe my kids are the only dummy ones. But no, when I hear that other people are complaining about the same thing I realize that we are not alone, there are a lot of us! (laugh)

The concern over her son’s struggles in school caused Cristina tremendous anguish and kept her awake at night. While at first she internalized the situation as one reflective of her son’s cognitive challenges, she soon realized that the problem was one that also impacted other children and their families as well.

Access to information was an important determinant for the mothers’ capacity to support a family environment that was conducive to helping their children focus in school. Many of the illustrative examples so far have had to do with information about the school system and academic support of the students. A more general access to information relating to the basic needs of housing, food, and health care were equally important for the families. Fabiola shared an incident in which her sister, Gabriela, went into a diabetic shock in the middle of the night.

The truth is that nobody knew up until that point that my sister had diabetes. I did not know what to do in that moment because I (pause) I (pause) I was trying to pretend that everything was fine, but (pause) the children were the ones most affected.

Neither Gabriela nor Fabiola were aware that Gabriela’s health was compromised. When she got so sick that the ambulance had to be called, the children’s fear for their mother’s well-being was further compounded by Fabiola’s ignorance about all aspects of diabetes; thus, she could not explain the situation to the children and allay their worst

fears. Although Gabriela's health concerns were not uniquely related to her immigrant status per se, her access to information and healthcare were limited by a lack of money, inability to speak English, ineligibility for healthcare benefits, and an overall fear of exposing her immigrant status to any government institution.

The mothers interviewed in this study shared multiple experiences they have had with the teachers in their children's schools and with the schools as social institutions as well. From these conversations, we were able to identify two main types of obstacles they perceived got in the way of their children's educational success: challenges specific to schools and learning and challenges that they faced that were uniquely related to their immigrant status and ethnic identity. The academic challenges were discussed by differentiating the educational spaces the children needed to navigate. The first obstacle addressed the difficulties in having the students be physically present in school. The second one involved the challenges that were more readily and identifiably school-centered and educational in nature. In the following section, I will present some examples of the educational obstacles to the children's learning as identified by the mothers which were uniquely related to their undocumented immigrant status as well as their ethnic identity.

Immigrant status and moral exclusion.

In the course of the interviews, six women articulated their understanding of the challenges they perceive their children faced as they struggled to do well in public school. All aspects of the participants efforts to raise their families and secure their children's capacity to do well in life, primarily by completing their education, were a

complex interplay of their own educational background, their ability to secure the family with basic needs, as well as their own understanding of the broader socio-historical context of living in the United States. In the section that follows, I will present the mothers' understanding of the ways their immigrant status as undocumented and their family's ethnic identity may have impinged upon their children's educational goals. I have selected some of the most frequent and compelling examples and organized them into three sections: the impact of an undocumented status in the home, at school, and social empathy.

The first section points to the struggles located within the context of the family. Three important topics in this section address the individual awareness of the meaning of undocumented status, the concomitant fear as a psychological cost, and the meaning and pursuit of a national identity as Americans. The second section highlights the ways in which the mothers' immigrant status, specifically an undocumented one, is perceived to have a negative impact on their children's ability to do well in schools. Three key topics in this section include the legal barriers to access of services within the schools as institutions, the psychological barrier experienced in a sense of isolation, and most poignantly, the mothers' awareness of an educational experience that is ideologically separate and inherently unequal. The third and last section explores a prevalent perception expressed by the mothers: that no one cares about their lives or struggles. The section is titled Empathy, and the mothers question the willingness of those within the public school system, and society at large, to care for the needs and plight of the undocumented immigrant community and their children.

The Impact within the Family

The impact of undocumented immigrant status on the children's educational efforts is mediated by whose status is being considered, whether the mother's, the child's, or both. The impact is additive when both mother and child are undocumented immigrants since neither is legally able to fully participate in the community free of fear or marginalization. Ana and Talía were the only mothers participating in this project who had children born in Mexico and remain without legal residency or *papeles*. They both have submitted their application for the legalization of their immigrant status, and both continue to await and hope for the positive resolution of their petition. Talía's mother, a legal resident, sponsored Talía and her daughter in a petition for legalization adjustment in 1994. Ana's second husband, also a legal permanent resident, sponsored the application to adjust Ana's and her five sons' immigrant status. Ana has been waiting since March of 1999. The mothers and their children, while not technically deportable because their cases are pending, are nonetheless excluded from many of the benefits, responsibilities, and protections under the law restricted for legal residents or U.S. citizens. Salient in these rights for the mothers is their ability to obtain a California driver's license (CDL) and the ability to work and earn an income. Both of these rights are mediated through a social security card.

As the years passed, their status continued to be indeterminate. As the children born in Mexico approached the age of 16, the issue of being an undocumented immigrant took on a real significance, directly impacting their lives. Sixteen is a turning-point age for many adolescents in the U.S. because it is the age at which they

can apply for a driver's license and are also legally able to secure employment. Both of these activities are proscribed for children without a social security number.

Awareness of Having an Undocumented Status

An understanding of the long-term ramifications resultant from having an undocumented status and their implications for the future opportunities of the children was expressed at some level by all the mothers I interviewed. In the following example, Ana made a reference to the popular adage that the United States was perceived as the “land of the free” and the “land of opportunities.” She agreed with the premise but made a distinction between the differences in the opportunities available to the children who were legal—to those who were documented, compared to those who were not. She asserted that for undocumented children, the opportunities were limited to participating in the lower levels of the labor sector or to engage in extralegal activities in order to earn a living. Ana believed that the opportunity to become productive citizens was limited to those children who were “legal”,

We live in a world of contradictions here. They [popular media] say, “We live in the land of the free.” This is truly the land of the free, the land of opportunity. This is the land of opportunity but for both good and bad. It is the land of opportunity for our children to become criminalized or to become productive citizens.

But the opportunity to become productive citizens in a positive way is only available if you are legal! Otherwise the children grow up, get out of high school and the only thing they can do is to get a job as a

dishwasher, or a fieldworker, or an employee at the lumber mill.

Whatever job will do, in the ranch milking the cows, anything! This is all they can do! I don't know...

I really think this is what my second son is struggling with. He is going through a difficult stage right now. He is... The younger ones are not there yet, but the second one is in a difficult stage, and I see him suffering right now.

Ana was not the only one who realizes the limits to opportunity that being undocumented entails. Her second son, Bolívar, a senior in high school and an honors student, had realized this as well and had already begun the process of detachment from school along with an increasing depression. Ana assured him constantly and reminded him that “the papers are pending,” a common coping strategy that held on to the hope that becoming legal would materialize a change for the better in their lives. She was also aware of her other sons' imminent and painful realization.

I have always felt this to be true; I believe that kids are not bad or mean because they are born that way! Children are hardened by their situation, because of their poverty, and by realizing that nobody will help them. That no one extends their hand to help them out. So then, I really do believe that all the rebelliousness that they carry is the result of the powerlessness of not being able to do absolutely anything. Just because they are children doesn't mean that they cannot feel or that they cannot see.

Ana claimed that it was precisely this moment – when the children realized that they did not have choices for real social mobility or opportunities, that their families lacked the financial resources to help them, and that no one could help them – that led to a sense of powerlessness that compelled them to rebel.

Talía's oldest daughter, Mariela, had just graduated from high school at the time of Talía's interview. Mariela wanted to continue her education at the community college, but she could not afford it, and her resident status did not qualify her for financial aid.

My daughter says now that she wants to study but that she is stumped because she doesn't have a social security number... If only someone would be willing to lend me the money, or if I could make payments.

Then I could afford to pay for her education... Then I start to think about the needs of my other children, it would be a little bit like giving the others less so that I could give her more. If I paid for her studies, I couldn't pay for food, household expenses, gas, and everything else.

Talía regretted not being able to apply for educational loans in order help Mariela continue her education, because she was also waiting to *arreglar sus papeles*, to legalize her immigrant status. Furthermore, she was cognizant of the zero-sum effect that supporting one child would have on her ability to provide for the rest of her children's basic needs.

Gabriela's narrative about a conversation with her children is a good example of the interplay between information, national identity, and immigrant status and their

combined impact on the children's experiences in schools. All of Gabriela's children were born in the U.S. and as American citizens were entitled to full and equal protection under the law. However, the children at school teased Gabriela's children by calling them pejorative terms that denoted an implied and specific accusation of being undocumented immigrants. Gabriela did not know how to respond to or explain the cruelty of the intent behind the insult because, while the children were U.S. born, she did in fact cross the Rio Grande on foot.

María—Your kids, do they know about the papers?

Gabriela—They don't know anything! They don't know anything. The kids at school just call them things like "wetbacks." My children they come to me and ask me, "What is that, Mami?" I don't explain to them because I even don't (pause) know. I don't know how to explain this to them. They feel that they are the same as everyone else. And they are!

They are born here and everything!

This example, furthermore, illustrates the complicated dynamics of families with members who have members of multiple immigrant-statuses. Very often, undocumented immigrants live in households along with permanent residents and U.S. born citizens. The fears concomitant to being considered undocumented, however, are experienced by all members in the household, especially the children who live in constant fear of being separated from their mothers. Gabriela continues:

When we heard that the *migra* (Immigration agents) was around here

(laugh) I was afraid to go out, I cannot deny it! My kids wanted to go

out to go to the store but I didn't want to go out because I was afraid!
They wanted to know why, so I told them, "Because the *migra* is here!"
"What is that?" I told them that they are people who take people away
who don't have papers. Like the social security number, for example you
have to be born here to get it. "And you are not born here?" "No," I said,
"No, son. I am Mexican." So he said, "I am Mexican too, and I can go
outside!" "Yes, but you were born here." I didn't know how to explain
it better!

Gabriela did not explain to her children about the dangers associated with the *migra* and the reasons why she would be vulnerable to being taken away by the authorities. National identities, both Mexican and American, their place of birth, and having a social security card were three factors that may have seemed too disparate for her children to make the connection as to why it makes sense for their mothers to be afraid to go outside of their home.

Fear of separation.

In a context of silence, fear, and lack of accurate information, the children can perceive the fears of being undocumented in a much more amplified sense. Taking advantage of the vulnerability of being undocumented, Gabriela's husband used to threaten her with betrayal by saying he would call the *migra* or INS. Whether or not he really meant it, or would end up calling at all, the children heard his threats during the marital arguments, and her oldest son, Timothy, believed it to be true. His fear of being kidnapped by his own father, perceived to be a retaliatory response against Gabriela,

and his vague understanding of the *migra* randomly picking people up on the streets resulted in behavior akin to fear-induced post-traumatic stress disorder.

María—Where did he get the fear that he wouldn't see you again?

Gabriela—His father used to tell them... well; he used to tell me that anytime he wanted he would take them from me. Once, when he called the house he said that ... that I shouldn't be too confident in having custody of them. That sooner or later he would return and he would take them away. That just like he could not see them now, that I would never see them again.... Someone from the school called me one day because (pause) my son said that he had seen his father outside of the school and he hid under the bench and began to (pause) to cry. He was just crying and crying and crying, saying that his father was there to pick him up and take him away... This is why my son has fears and they cause him great insecurities. He cannot go anywhere by himself because he's afraid.

Timothy's response to seeing a man outside the school and fearing it was his father that had come to take him away got him upset enough to cry uncontrollably and to hide under his desk. This example highlights the implications for his emotional health if his perceptions of being in danger were not addressed. His ability to focus his attention on learning while in school was seriously compromised by his anxiety over being separated from his mother.

The last example I offer to illustrate the way the undocumented status, within the context of the family, may impact the children's ability to do well in school addresses the families' abilities to sustain their familial relationships. As the most intimate social institution and an important place where the transmission of cultural values occurs, the importance of staying connected to one's family across national borders needs to be explored.

Fabiola pondered on her own change of heart about the value of having immigrant documentation or *papeles*. When she first arrived as a teenager to the United States, she claimed that she did not think that regularizing her immigrant status was important; later on, however, she reconsidered her position. Her father used to live in the U.S. and had a temporary legal resident status as a result of the agricultural provisions in the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. However, he never renewed the permit after it expired. He moved back Mexico, and so the possibility of seeing his children and getting to know his grandchildren living in the United States was slim.

He went back to Mexico because he said he didn't want to stay here. He went back and when it came the time to renew his permit he did not renew it. Now he wants to come back here, it has been many years since we last saw him, he wants to come and see us. Now it is impossible for him to come because so much time has gone by.

Cristina shared during her interview that she constantly agonized over strategies to reconcile the simultaneous and competing pulls for her attention from her mother

who was ill in Mexico and in need of assistance and her school-age children who needed her to be here with them.

It is such a horrible situation that one would not wish it upon anybody else. It is about your family, your children, and your mother in Mexico without anyone to help her... She needs someone to care for her... For example, now that they cut one of her toes off [Cristina's mother suffers from advanced adult-onset diabetes], she needs someone to bring her food in bed, that they prepare her meals, that someone washes her clothes because there are no washing machines over there, or dryers or anything.... Over there you have to wash by hand! Who prepares her meals? No one! Who sweeps and mops the house? Nobody, María! So then I say, "Oh my dear God!..." You feel as if you are going crazy in that moment! It is really hard, María... It is a very hard thing!

Like Cristina, other participants expressed the longing to see one's loved ones, to celebrate life's rites of passage together, and to watch the new generations grow. It was not only increasingly and prohibitively expensive to cross the border undetected but also potentially deadly. All of the mothers stated that they could not take the risk of dying and leaving their children alone. Cristina expanded on the complexity of her problem. Traveling back to Mexico to care for her ailing mother was not an option because the family's survival depended on her ability to work in the United States and send remittances to Mexico.

It is difficult to go out because you are constantly worried. You are worried about the papers, about your kids, about your work! I tell my brother, “Listen, if I go over there, who will give us money then for our Mother? I don’t have any money saved up in a bank!

Fabiola also struggled with the opposing desires to go back to Mexico or stay in the United States, especially when she took into consideration the needs of her children here and the value of her remittances to her mother, however little they were.

There have been times when I have wanted to go back, but it really is very hard. Now, having my children... I do get worried about my Mom, but I also am worried about my children so I have to think things through really well. Sometimes I send money and the little money goes a long way over there.

Erica had not seen her U.S. born, 17-year old son Francisco, who then lived in Mexico with his grandparents for two years because she could not travel without the assurance that she could safely return to her daughters. The cost of the trip was outside of her means as well.

Fabiola’s four-year old daughter, Sofía, loved to talk to her grandmother on the phone. While they had never met in person, the phone was the only means of staying connected and developing a relationship. Fabiola reported that Sofía cried when she did not get to talk to her grandmother and offered the following anecdote:

I tell my daughter, “You need to study. Study and when you finish all your schooling, you can work. If you want to, you can earn money, you

can learn to save and one day you can meet your grandmother... I tell them that they have to put a lot of effort into their education, so tomorrow they can meet their other cousins, their aunts they have never met; their grandmother (silence).

Sofía asks me why don't I take her to see my Mother, since we have the bus stop so close to us... She says, "Mami, can we take this bus?"

Where do you want to go? "To go see grandma, she lives really close to us! So I tell her, "No, your grandma is very far away, *mija!*" She says that when she grows up she is going to go and see her grandma and that she is going to take me too! But, mmmm! Who knows!?

Fabiola and Sofia's conversation revealed their wishes to see their family in Mexico, the impossibility of the immediate prospect to do so, and its connection to the importance for Sofia to get an education. For Fabiola, the hope of seeing her mother again rested on Sofia's successful schooling. It is interesting to note that Fabiola's immigrant status as undocumented was not explicitly addressed. The following section speaks more on the issue of the relationship between undocumented status and academic success, but within the context of the schools.

Empathy.

When asked what message they would send to the school community to help the teachers understand their situation and the needs of their children, several mothers seemed surprised by the question. They all expressed a perception that the teachers

specifically, and the school system in general, were emotionally divested from understanding their perspective. Three explanations were offered: that the people in the schools did not know what their lives were like, that they thought they knew but did not really understand, or that they knew and did not care.

Cristina wanted the teachers to know that the language barrier was first and foremost an important impediment to their ability to advocate on behalf of and support the children's educational needs. Another challenge had to do with their status as undocumented immigrants.

What the teachers need to understand..... Well, first the issue with language. As I have told them at school: the language, María. I can help my children with their math, things like that. But when you get out of work, María, you go to work, without papers, you are really trying to work, you have to work the job that you—do the work that your manager gives you to do because you don't have any papers, you have to tolerate whatever they throw your way and then at school your children don't get the help they need?

Without papers, the women were subject to unpredictable work schedules and other undisclosed working conditions. Erica felt frustrated that she worked hard so that her children could go to school only to discover that the children did not get the educational support they needed from their teacher.

Fabiola conceded that the teachers did not understand because they did not live similar enough experiences and thus were not able to walk in their shoes. Fabiola felt that if the

teacher ever found himself “walking in her shoes” then, and only then, would he be able to understand her struggles as parent on behalf of her daughter. Fabiola credited the teachers’ dismissive attitudes about her concern for her daughter’s safety to the fact that this issue did not impact their own daughters.

If one day, he finds himself in my shoes, tell him that I hope he thinks of me. This is all really easy for him because... and at school too, they were laughing, they acted like nothing had happened. As if nothing happened at all.

In addition to Fabiola’s sense that teachers did not understand their concerns because the issues did not involve the teachers’ own children, another mother expressed her expectation that the teachers empathized with her as a parent, specifically a gendered parent—a mother. She felt that the schools’ inability to communicate with her after an incident involving her daughter’s safety was evidence of the school’s disregard of her maternal right to know what happened to her children during the school day.

Why, I wonder, do the teachers not understand me as a mother? Because they too have children and they don’t know if tomorrow they will pay with their own children. Having said that, I feel bad because my daughter now has a [health problem]. Nobody did anything.

Fabiola cried during this part of the interview, indicating a continued emotional impact more than a year after the incident, already discussed in a previous section, first occurred. Due to the mother’s lack of information on how to navigate the medical system and the legal system and the confidence in her language skills with which to do

so, she remained silent about her own concerns and observations. Furthermore, she stated that no one, neither teachers nor doctors, did anything to address her concerns about her daughter's health status.

One of the mothers brushed off as futile the question of what information should the teachers and administrators in the schools know in order to better teach their children. In her opinion the root of the problem with the children's scholastic achievement, was not a lack of understanding on the part of the teachers of the challenges faced by families headed by undocumented immigrants but an absence of care for their struggle. Exasperated by having already expressed her perception that the teachers already knew about the hardship in their lives and yet did not care she said,

I am trying to tell you, Mari! They already know! They know these things! They know all that we go through it is just that they don't care! It is exactly what I am trying to tell you!...

... I didn't get any help at all. I felt very sad, and even now I still think, "How awful that they can't help us. That the people who are from this country, that they think it appropriate to deny us any help, that they think that their own children, who are born here"... It is as if they thought that only their children are human beings and those who are illegal are not.

They don't care if... (silence).

During the conversation with Ana, she made it clear a number of times that she held no expectations that the educational experiences of her children would change as a consequence of the results of this study. She had already asked for help for her children

at the schools and was given what she perceived to be a run-around until someone told her that she could not get help on account of her immigrant status. This event confirmed for her the marginalized and dehumanized status that she felt she and her children occupied in the schools and society at large.

Maybe some will say, “Look at them, they do suffer greatly. Look, they don’t have anything to eat! I’m so sorry!” However, I guarantee that later, when they sit down to eat, they will not remember. They don’t care! There’s a saying I have told you many times, “El que esta lleno nunca se acuerda de el que tiene hambre.”

Like Fabiola, Ana found that the reason the teachers did care was related to their distance from the problems the women’s families face. This point was expressed by Ana’s use of the popular Mexican saying, “El que esta lleno nunca se acuerda del que tiene hambre,” which literally translated means, “The one who is satiated (or full) never remembers those who are hungry.” Ana suggested that there was a limit to the understanding that people could have of the struggles that undocumented immigrants went through because of the absence of a shared lived experience. However, she did not perceive that inability to empathize as being rigid, stating that one must make an effort to “remember those who are hungry” even when one has never experienced hunger.

Overall, the mothers wanted the teachers to understand that their immigrant status, their concomitant and variable employment demands, and limited language skills precluded them from properly helping their children with their school work at home.

They also hoped that people would try to understand what a difficult situation they lived in, and, even if they were unable to “walk in their shoes,” that they would attempt to empathize on more common human parenting experiences. As discussed in the section relating to positive experiences with the teachers, the mothers who said that they knew teachers did not care also praised specific teachers for caring, thus exhorting all teachers (and people) to care.

The challenges to the educational attainment of the children of the women who participated in this study ranged in complexity and included a sense of cultural and national identity mediated by the relationships they had with their families, and the language that connected them to each other as well as the meaning ascribed to the language. Their children’s understanding of the meaning of living with an undocumented immigrant status was inescapable when they were subjected to harassment in schools and when they perceived that the authority figures in schools, namely the teachers and the principal, did not respond fairly to their concerns. The women expressed a common perception about their understanding of their own isolation from the school system. They perceived a dual-justice system in the schools that privileged American students, and they expressed a belief that people, in general, did not care about the well-being of other people in their own community.

Our understanding of the educational experience of the children raised by these undocumented Mexican mothers may become clearer as the challenges related to immigrant status are taken into consideration with the difficulties that poverty, language barriers, and lack of information can pose.

The narratives shared by the mothers regarding their own formal schooling experience as well as their experiences with their children's schools point to a large range of experiences. These can broadly be clustered by their ability to support or inhibit the continued educational progress of the students. An analysis of the mothers' responses to questions about their children's schooling and their understanding of the factors that have a bearing on them will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS

Sometimes people like to listen to the birds singing. Their song is relaxing, and it helps them forget their sorrows. What people cannot even imagine is that these songs are not joyous songs but sorrow tunes, songs of pain because they don't have enough food to take their baby birds, the ones left in the nest. Who says that animals don't suffer or don't feel? Who says that animals don't have blood in their veins, or a beating heart like you and I?

(Ana)

Introduction

Against the backdrop of a post-9/11 sociopolitical climate, a time when Americans are concerned over national security, of the permeability of the borders to so-called terrorists, and an increasing budget deficit, the rising hostility against immigrants can be understood in its historical predictability. The escalating number of racial profiling incidents and racially or religiously motivated hate crimes (Abdelkarim, 2003; deSilva, 2004) can distract our attention from questioning the broader economic policies of globalization and instead prompt us to explain the animosity by blaming those we are told are the source of our national problems; immigrants are one such group. Immigration has become an issue of such political import that elected officials are compelled to take a stand in support of one of several interests and constituencies affected by immigration, and in particular on the issue of undocumented immigration.

The transnational economic forces that compel people to move across national boundaries continue unchanged; thus, people will continue to immigrate regardless of the deadly risks of crossing the border or of legislation that hinders their access to basic needs. Like the song of the bird in Ana's quote at the beginning of this chapter's, mainstream U.S. society enjoys the song/labor of the bird/undocumented immigrants. However, the bird's life and her struggles to ensure the well-being of her baby birds in addition to her own are inaudible/invisible to us, perhaps because we have convinced ourselves that they are not like us. As others, they are morally excluded from the same considerations of justice and equality for all that the United States purports to represent (Opatow, 1996).

To Ana, one of the participants in this research project, the story of the birds helped her make sense of her life. The bird's song of sorrow represented her own sorrows and those of other undocumented mothers trying to raise their children in a society that she perceived did not understand their struggles anymore than humans really understand a bird's song. She hoped that one day she would have the opportunity to tell her story, perhaps even publish it, that others may then understand. The specific questions that this thesis sought to address is: What is the perspective of the women regarding their children's education, what are their experiences with the schools, and what are the challenges they believe may hinder their children's educational success?

This chapter will explore the narratives told by the mothers and offer an analysis of how their stories can shed new light on our understanding of the educational experiences of their Mexican origin children and to reveal the aspects, both supportive

and detrimental, that impact the nature of the relationship between the families and the schools. I will also seek to identify some of the obstacles the mothers perceived as hindrances to their children's successful educational attainment. Of these, I will first address the scholastic hurdles that are specific to the schools' physical, curricular, and social context. Subsequently, I will focus on the educational challenges uniquely related to the mother's undocumented immigrant status and the family's racial and cultural identities. As is true with qualitative phenomenological methodologies, the analysis is limited to and applicable only to the lived experience as undocumented Mexican mothers of the women who participated in this project. The limitations of the research, application of the results and analysis outlined in the last two chapters, and implications for future research will be discussed in the Conclusion chapter that follows this one.

I have made an effort to represent all of the women's views by drawing examples from their narratives outlined in the Results chapter. However, the designation of the events as representative or reflective of possible factors that impinge upon the successful educational achievement of their children necessitated my own interpretations as well. My participation became an important necessity when the women's perception of the challenges to their children's education involved a lack of information or understanding on their part about the school system and one to which I was privy.

The Formal Education of the Women

The educational attainment among the six women who participated in this project varied greatly and ranged from having completed one year of schooling in Mexico to having finished a high school degree in the United States. Two common themes in their education experience in Mexico were revealed that directly impacted their ability to continue with their own education there. The women, in general, came from families that relied heavily on the daughters to assist with the household and family responsibilities. The families either could not afford to continue to support the women's educational goals, or they were already sending another sibling to school. The women started working for a wage to contribute to their household's income beginning early in their adolescence. Often they helped their mothers by helping with their younger siblings so that the mothers could go to work.

Gender behavior expectations as they relate with educational and family goals, inadequate financial resources, and poverty all played an important role in the participant's limited educational opportunities in Mexico. Even Gabriela, who arrived to the United States as an adolescent, was not allowed to enroll in high school because of her brother's perception that pregnant women should not go to school anymore, presumably because her new family obligations preempted her need to get an education. Gabriela wished she had continued with school but did not express disapproval of her brother's decision.

Regardless of the level of education that each woman achieved, they all expressed the desire to continue their education because they perceived their education

to be integrally related with the kinds of jobs for which they could apply. The type of work they had to do and the wage levels they could earn were both linked to jobs regulated by their educational level. In their opinion, educational attainment was a factor equal in importance to the goal of *salir adelante* (getting ahead) as having a legally sanctioned immigrant status.

The Formal Education of the Children

The mothers interviewed for this thesis are raising children who were attending the K-12 public school system in a rural community of Northern California. The mothers' inability to complete or pursue a formal education on their own is helpful in understanding the priority that they have placed on the importance for their children on getting an education. This section explores the two components outlined in the Results relating to the formal education of the children. One will examine the experiences the women have had with the teachers, administrators, and the school community.

The narratives illustrate some of the specific aspects of the experiences that result in meaningful connections with the schools or conversely of those that create a disconnection and a sense of isolation. A second component that I will examine brings attention to the various factors the mothers reported as those that hinder their children's potential to be academically successful. The factors represent the obstacles to the children's education that are directly related to the schools and those that are mediated by the mothers' undocumented immigrant status.

Experiences with the public K-12 school system: Meaningful connections.

The mothers shared examples of incidents with school personnel when their interactions were characterized as helpful, leaving a positive impression of the potential supportive relationship between the families and the schools. There were three important features to those incidents: the teachers' ability to see and hear their children, the school's willingness to communicate with the mothers, and the teachers' inclination to develop a relationship with the students that involved more than the subject being taught or the content of instruction.

For the first feature, in saying that the mothers appreciated the teachers' ability to see the children, the mothers did not mean the literal ability to visually perceive them, but a real interest in noticing the children, their needs, aptitudes, interests, and overall personality. By hearing the children, the mothers meant that the teachers were willing to listen to the students' ideas and concerns, especially that the teachers believed their children's side of the story when they were involved in a dispute with other students.

They very much appreciated the second feature, the willingness of school staff to communicate with them. Considering the difficulties the families encountered in negotiating possibly unfamiliar institutions and perhaps not being able to fully express themselves in English, the mothers acknowledged the times when the teachers took the initiative to let them know what was happening at school with their child. This was especially true when the teacher-initiated communication was related to a concern that, once addressed, resulted in a positive outcome for the child. An example of this happened when Patty's teacher asked Fabiola about her daughter after noticing a change

in Patty's affect, or when Talía's son's Kindergarten teacher initiated communication about his drawings reflecting his sadness over his parents divorce.

Lastly, the teachers' interest in developing a relationship with the students was described as particularly important to the mothers who had sons. Some of these boys had a father living at home, and others did not. The mothers described raising boys through adolescence as a uniquely difficult challenge. Two of them, Ana and Erica, actively sought help from the schools, law enforcement agencies, and social services and found their pleas for help unanswered. It is not likely that the documented status of the children was the limiting factor because some of the boys were born in the United States.

In the context of the difficulties of raising young men in a culture unfamiliar to the mothers, perhaps without ready access to family support and feeling so isolated from the resources in the community, the mothers were extremely grateful to the teachers who, in their capacity of positive role models, developed relationships with their sons. When teachers and school administrators were willing and able to notice the students, to have accessible communication with the mothers, and develop a better relationship with the students, the mothers perceived the event, however small or insignificant to the school, as important evidence of the school staff's interest in their child's education. Ana, for example, credited Mr. Arroyo amply for his efforts to connect to her boys even after many years had passed since her sons were in his classroom.

The events and experiences the women had that were supportive of their connection to the children's schools, although greatly significant to the families, were fewer and less frequent than the experiences that had the opposite effect. The following section will examine some of the dis-connecting experiences that the women recounted.

Experiences with the public K-12 school system: Dis-connections.

In the process of narrating the multiple experiences the mothers had with their children's public schools, I was immediately struck by the many dis-connecting experiences versus the ones that fostered an auspicious relationship with the school personnel. The concerns the mothers expressed were specific to the sex and age of their children; however, the overarching themes that emerged were the feeling of being invisible to the teachers and administrators, the sense that the schools made no effort to communicate with them, and the perception that the teachers were not interested in forming caring relationships with their children. It is easy to see why the women reached those alienating conclusions. However, it is also true that the lack of communication between the mothers and the teachers enabled both of them to reach their own conclusions about the other one without the benefit of the other one's point of view.

One such example is illustrated when Fabiola was concerned about the nutritional value of the school lunches because her daughter Sofia was losing weight. Fabiola tried to share her concern with the teacher, and her efforts were met with dismissal. Furthermore, when Fabiola offered to send her daughter to school with her own lunch, the teacher stated that Fabiola would have to comply with what the school

served or find another school program. Not having any other viable school choices or enough understanding of the school system to question the teacher's response, Fabiola had no choice but to acquiesce.

Thus, Fabiola was both worried about her daughter and feeling guilty for having to go to work and for not being able to change the situation for her daughter. She internalized the problems at schools as hers because, she figured, if she could stay home and care for Sofia then there would be no problems in dealing with schools. This expectation that the problem with the school lunch was a reflection of her fault may indicate her own traditional expectations, as the mother, to be the best care-provider for her children. The teacher, on the other hand, was not effective in communicating what, if any, choices Fabiola had about school meals nor her own understanding of children's normal weight fluctuations during their growth and development. Fabiola remained feeling like the teacher did not care about Sofia's well-being.

The mothers' level of English proficiency differed from a very basic understanding of oral English to very confident levels of spoken English. Only two stated that they could write in English, but then only very basic communication phrases. The mothers' concern over the school's lack of communication with them was not that they expected the teachers to learn Spanish, nor that the mothers shirked their commitment to learn English better. The mothers felt that the problem was an absence of intent on the part of the schools to understand that they were learning English, and that the mothers were trying the best they could given their limited resources. Fabiola started ESL classes at the adult school, but she quit after a couple of years because she

said that the hours were limited, the teacher never moved beyond a very rudimentary level of English instruction, and the funds for on-site childcare were cut. Fabiola understood that the constantly changing student composition in the class made it very difficult for the teacher to address the needs of the students with intermediate language skills.

On the other hand, she could not afford to sit in the class without learning more, while she paid her sister to watch her own children only to be distracted by the children of other parents who were unable to secure child care. The mothers felt that their own efforts to learn English were not matched by the schools' in a reliable way. Every time the mothers called the school, and no one was available to understand them over the phone, when the children got home with papers in English only and it was the children who had to translate what the paper said, and when the mothers assisted meetings at the school without an interpreter available each of these instances were perceived as examples of the schools not intending to communicate with them and by extension of not caring what they had to say. In light of their own efforts, the absence of care was perceived as a lack of respect for their families.

Adding insult to injury, the mothers of boys expressed indignation that in those instances when the teachers did make an effort to communicate with them and called their home, invariably the call was an indication that their sons were in trouble, specifically that the teachers had a problem with the boys' behavior because they had been disruptive or had gotten into a fight. The mothers did not tell of a single event when the teachers called their home to compliment their children or to bring to their

attention a potential academic problem so that it could be addressed before the student fell too far behind.

As a whole, the mothers felt that they and their children were invisible to the teachers and other employees at the schools. As people who were not seen, the schools' reticence to call before trouble began, to communicate effectively with them, or to relay information about the positive progress of their children made sense to the mothers. The mothers also felt that the teachers' inability to see them did not stem from some real invisibility but from the teachers' unwillingness to come to terms with the fact that they had children whose needs they were not meeting.

In general, the students became visible in gendered ways. The girls were noticed when they were emotionally out of sorts, as was the case with Patty's emotional outburst the day her mother was hospitalized. The boys were noticed when their behavior was disruptive to the classroom environment or when they got into fights in the playground. The academic pitfalls and concerns never elicited a proactive approach on behalf of the teachers to communicate with the mothers. One explanation that the mothers offered as to why the teachers would not warn them about their children's academic challenges was that perhaps the teachers had internalized the belief that their children were not expected to finish school. Ana went even further in her explanation. She made an explicit connection between the convenience of the alleged educational failure of the Latino students and the U.S. economy's need for low-wage workers. Following this reasoning, any investment of energy in an effort to teach the children, however manageable, would not be an efficient expenditure of the teachers' time.

Furthermore, the over-crowded classes, diminishing school budgets to provide support staff and classroom aides, and an accountability movement demanding standardized examinations may have also forced the teachers to focus their instruction on the median students at the expense of those on the margins.

The varied experiences that the women interviewed in this project shared regarding their encounters with their children's schools and their representatives were roughly characterized as being either an experience that contributed to their sense of connection to the school or one that exacerbated their sense of dis-connectedness from the schools specifically and from dominant social institutions as well. The nature of the relationships between the school personnel and the families as well as their intent and ability to communicate effectively were two important mediators of their overall experiences. The mothers' and the children's attitudes toward school resultant from these experiences may have a significant impact on the children's ability to succeed in their scholastic endeavors.

Challenges to the Children's Academic Success

This section delves into the mothers' narratives in regard to the factors that they perceived interfered with their children's ability to excel in school. The following section will direct our attention to the challenges to the children's education that the mothers identified. I have divided these experiences into two general themes: the challenges to the children's education that are related to the schools and the ways in which the mothers' undocumented immigrant status may have uniquely impacted their children's educational achievement.

School environment and pedagogy.

In order for students to be successful and learn in school, they must first get to school and stay in school. While this may appear to be a truism, for the women who participated in this research project, getting their children to school was at times a daunting task. Their work schedules sometimes prevented them from being home during the times when school started or ended. They needed to trust that their children made it to school on their own. While the policy at the school district was that the families could choose to enroll their children in the school campus of their choice, the mothers in this project enrolled their children in their neighborhood school because of the challenges presented by their work schedules and transportation issues. Although the task of getting their children to school reliably was a challenge most of the mothers who did have a car chose to take their children to school whenever their schedules allowed.

Talia spoke of the surprise she felt when she found out the unexpected news that her son was regularly truant to school. More than that she was frustrated that not even the police were able to ensure that he got to school. In addition to getting the children physically to school, there were two other themes that emerged on the issue of the school's physical environment as an obstacle to student success.

The first theme addressed the mothers' perception that the school's policies for disruptive behavior were counterproductive. Ana felt that sending home children who misbehaved at school actually ended up reinforcing a disconnection between the student and the school. She alleged that if the student does not want to be at school, simply not

showing up would get him in trouble, but being disruptive in school and getting sent home was like getting permission from the school to take a vacation. The objectives met by removing the disruptive student from the classroom may be two-fold: to protect the instructional time of the rest of the students who were presumably trying to pay attention, and to relinquish the responsibility for the education of the child whose behavior was troublesome. However, if the purpose of removing the disruptive child was an effort to figure out what issues may have led to the disruption or a deterrent to future disconnections between the students and the school, then the policies failed to meet these objectives. The possibility that suspending the student may be a deterrent effort by punishing the student would be undermined by the student's perception that having to leave school was not a punishment.

Suspended students missed instruction time and their absence from class compounded any scholastic difficulties they already had. Although the children's absence from class was not technically considered cutting, it is likely that its impact on their learning could include a loss of a sense of continuity, and a general difficulty in keeping up, finishing their assignments, and doing well in exams (Fallis & Opotow, 2003). Essentially, Cristina's sons experienced school-imposed class-cutting and were left to struggle with the task of catching up relying on their own effort.

There appears to be a gendered dynamic in the disciplinary policies of schools: the mothers of boys were the ones who expressed dissatisfaction with the policies and the ways in which they were implemented. The mothers did not mention that their daughters were disciplined at school but did note that their sons were frequently

suspended and sent home. The girls may have been socialized to be quieter than the boys were. If the girls spent most of their school day quiet and without causing any trouble, their presence in the classroom and their educational needs could be easily go unnoticed by the teachers. In both instances, the mothers perceived that the boys and the girls were removed from the schools, the boys physically and the girls socially and emotionally. The dynamic interplay between the children's behavior and the schools' response to it exemplifies the complex maintenance and mutual reinforcement of gender norms in society.

The second theme also related to the mothers' concerns about the safety of their children. Although all of the women interviewed expressed this concern, the specific characteristics of their worries were gendered. The mothers of boys worried their sons would get into fights, join gangs, use drugs, or drink alcohol. They worried because they knew that their sons did not have the opportunity that other young people born in this country had: the ability to make mistakes and learn from them. For their sons, especially for those children who did not have a legal resident status, the consequences of getting in serious trouble had the potential of placing the whole family at risk by exposing the mother's undocumented status and giving the authorities the opportunity to initiate deportation proceedings against her.

Although none of the women knew of anyone who had been deported as a result of their child getting into trouble, the fear and concern for the mothers was real and independent of the actual likelihood that it could happen. A more detailed review of the role of fear of being deported in the perception and choices of the women will follow in

the section addressing the impact of the mothers' undocumented immigrant status on their children's educational process.

For the mothers of girls the issue involved the fear that their daughters would be subjected to sexual violence. In their perception, the cultural stigma in being sexually assaulted or abused cast a negative reflection on the woman's character and family, thus preventing the mothers from seeking information or help. All but two of the women in the course of their interviews shared stories that revealed personal and direct understand of abuse and violence. Their concerns about their daughters were specific to the child's age. The mothers of young daughters worried about their girls being molested, the mothers of teenage girls worried about them getting pregnant, and all of the mothers worried about their daughters being raped at some point in their lives. Many of the mothers' concerns were grounded on the sexual violence they themselves had survived in their lives. However, the real threat of sexual violence may also have served to control women's freedom of movement and independence by limiting their choices, and in doing so reinforced a male-dominant social order.

Hoping to teach their daughters to protect themselves, they admonished them about being in isolated and dark places alone lest they run into potentially dangerous strangers. Poignantly, the stories the mothers told about their own abuse reveal the perpetrators as acquaintances or family members—not as strangers. The mothers' decision to not talk to their daughters about the possibility of being hurt by someone they knew would have compelled them to confront their own experience, their understanding of it, and perhaps ultimately their attackers. The coping strategies the

women admitted to using invariably involved their own silence. The insistence in protecting their daughters was projected to a general lack of trust of the schools' ability to ensure their daughters' safety and a feeling of being alone burdened by the silence and lack of information.

Instead of understanding their isolation as a situation that could be addressed by seeking information and establishing contacts and a relationship with service providers, the mothers internalized their seclusion as evidence of their own personal inability to provide for and protect their daughters, thus fueling their ambivalence about sending their daughters to school as a means to salir adelante (to get ahead) and be safe at the same time.

Language

Two salient instructional issues surfaced in regard to the Spanish/English language barrier that hindered both the communication between the mothers and the schools and the children's academic success. The first issue relates to the process the schools relied on to identify students as English learners and the programs established to meet their needs. The second issue relates to the bilingual upbringing of the children being raised in homes where Spanish was the primary language and attending schools where English was the only language of instruction. The point of contention specifically questions the consistency of the information the mothers received regarding their own role in their children's education and the academic value of speaking Spanish in their homes.

Notwithstanding the continuously debated merits of the effects of Proposition 227 on the educational outcome of English learners in schools, the intended implementation of the provisions of the proposition does not appear to have occurred in the public school to which Cristina sent her children. Without the state's approval, the school could not support a bilingual education program and resorted to pull-out Limited English Proficient (LEP) programs. This program pulled children with English language needs out of the mainstream classroom to provide language support and remedial tutoring on classroom content subjects. While on the surface the claimed purpose of the program, according to Cristina, was to facilitate the educational success of English language learners, the steps the school took in identifying and enrolling the students seems educationally dubious. The process appeared to target students from homes where the spoken language is Spanish and the educational benefits from participating in the program seem questionable. Although it was not clear that the outcomes of the LEP program were purposeful, the administration's disregard of the mothers' concerns did passively implement a discriminatory practice against the Latino students.

Against her explicit objections and without offering a convincing explanation for the decision, the school administrator placed Cristina's sons in the LEP program. After futile efforts to meet with the teachers and school's principal, Cristina concluded that the reason her children were placed in the program was racial discrimination against them for being Latino. She asserted that all the children in the program had

Spanish surnames and furthermore, that Latino children were the only students in the program.

In light of these observations, she concluded that her children were being racially profiled by the school, targeted for the program on the basis of their last name and/or home language, and forced to participate in the LEP pull-out program. As a result, the LEP program reduced her son's actual time in the mainstream classroom, and he missed out on instruction. Cristina felt ambivalent about the school's use of her middle son's language skills. While claiming that he needed to participate in an LEP program, they also relied on him to translate for the teachers or administrative staff in the absence of another translator. Not only was this yet another moment when Rafael missed instruction time, the schools' practice of relying on him to serve as an interpreter put a heavy burden on him (and other children asked to interpret) to negotiate issues of power, privilege, and different levels of language competency that are highly contextualized.

Cristina's interpretation of the school's policy for identifying the LEP students was no less informative than the school's insistence that the students were placed in the class as a result of their score in a language proficiency test. Cristina did not know how the students were selected to take the test in the first place or how the school handled students who scored low on the test but did not come from Spanish-speaking homes. From Cristina's narrative, there was no evidence that any efforts were made by the school to assess the Latino students in the LEP program for learning disabilities as a possible alternative explanation for their alleged low scores on the test other than their

assumed limited English language proficiency. What was most revealing about the school's unwillingness to listen to and work with Cristina as she attempted to advocate for her sons' education was the overt disregard for her concerns and requests to pull her children from the LEP program. The school administrator was not able to clearly explain the reasoning for refusing to comply with her request or why she believed the program could enhance the educational outcome of her U.S. born, native-English-speaking sons.

The inconsistent message about the use of Spanish language at home is another concerning example relating to the consideration of language as a factor that had a detrimental impact on the educational outcome of the participants' children. Of the mothers who were interviewed, Gabriela had the least amount of English language proficiency. However, her own struggles of living in the United States and being unable to communicate in English served her as a daily reminder that a mastery of English language was a paramount necessity for her children's scholastic success.

Given this awareness, Gabriela recalled asking her children's teachers if they supported her speaking Spanish at home. The teachers invariably were very supportive and encouraged the children's opportunity to grow up bilingual. It is interesting that Gabriela sought the teacher's approval for her use of Spanish at home given that it was the only language she knew so speaking English or any other language to her children was not a viable choice for her. By the time I interviewed Gabriela, however, the support from the teachers had reversed.

The same teacher who in the past had been encouraging Gabriela to speak Spanish at home changed her position and strongly admonished her to learn and speak only in English to her children at home. Gabriela recounts her sense of surprise and frustration resulting from the teacher's change of heart, particularly the implications of the teacher's statement.

I was left speechless, like... I didn't know what to tell her because she continued to tell me that I must speak in English to my boys so that they would not be held back in school any further. I don't want my children, to go to school talking like this and think that it (the way I speak) is correct. I really thought that what she said was not right, but... she said that I have to think about my children, so that they see that I am trying to get ahead, make an effort, so they too make an effort. She said that I have to speak English at home so that my children learn English better.

The teacher accused Gabriela's unwillingness to speak English as the reason for the sons' challenges at school including having to be held back. Furthermore, she implied that Gabriela's limited English language skills were indicative of her failure to think about her children, that the children were not making an effort and that the only way, or best way, to motivate them would be for them to see their mother making an effort—again implying that she was not already doing so. The implications of the teacher's statement, problematic on several counts, reveal a perspective that is consistent with the theories of cultural deficiency that attempt to locate the source of the problems with Latino children's education in their home, by labeling their culture, their

family, and the language at home as characteristics that are inherently incompatible with scholastic achievement (Bernhard, Freire, & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 1998; Villenas, 2001).

From a traditional Mexican cultural perspective, teachers command respect and a high social status in the community. Teachers are regarded as the experts in questions relating to education, and many parents may consider it inappropriate and even disrespectful if parents question the teacher's views. The teacher's change of heart, in light of Gabriela's concern over her children's educational outcome and her own English language limitations, may have further weakened Gabriela's sense of self-efficacy to support her children's education. Furthermore, the teacher's likely intent to encourage Gabriela to learn English by telling her to make an effort, to think of her children exposed a set of beliefs that could not have been further from the truth.

Gabriela's inability to be proficient in English did not reflect an absence of willingness on her part or a lack of understanding of the importance of being able to communicate in English while living in the United States. Her limited English language skills are better explained by a contextualized evaluation of her daily hardships in raising a family added to the limited opportunities available to her to learn English. The teacher's efforts to help Gabriela by framing the problem of the children's struggles in school in terms of cultural and linguistic deficits is an example of a form of racism, one Villenas (2001) calls benevolent racism, that the mothers often confronted when dealing with school representatives.

Consistent with the findings of Villenas's research (2001) with Latina mothers in North Carolina, Gabriela's narratives challenged the dominant community's perception that she was not a mother who cared for her children's education because her own language and culture did not reflect society's norm. Gabriela's choices and lived experience are strong indicators that she did indeed make an effort, that in fact she worked very hard to provide for her children and encouraged them to do well in school. Gabriela's story, as do the narratives of the other participants in this project, belie theories of cultural deficiency as viable explanations of the struggles Latino children experience in schools.

The interpretation of the problem with the performance of language minority students in schools places the responsibility for the acquisition of language proficiency on their mothers instead of the schools. The displacement of the responsibility for language instruction from the schools onto the mothers is an effective condemnation relegating the child to the margins of educational attainment within a system that relies heavily and exclusively on the mastery of English language. Ultimately, as long as English continues to be the official and sole language of instruction, it precludes a conversation about the relative value of bilingual education pedagogies in the education of bilingual students.

Schoolwork and Academic Preparation

A strong basis of academic preparation is foundational in the pursuit of successful educational attainment. While several factors influence and mediate a child's elementary academic preparation, I will address an example of the relative

magnitude of educational success. Erica, mother of two daughters in fourth and sixth grade, noticed that her oldest daughter Citlalli was increasingly resistant to going to school and that her daughter's demeanor had grown sullen. When Citlalli's report card arrived Erica realized that Citlalli was failing math, a very surprising event because Citlalli had always been a good student and received good grades.

Erica felt that her daughter Citlalli was failing the class because somehow, when she started going to middle school, she got placed in a class much more advanced than her current ability level. When asked about a possible explanation of why the class was difficult for her daughter, Erica said that the other students were more advanced. She could not say why the other students were more advanced given that they were in the same grade as Citlalli and were the same age. Erica shared with a sense of pride for her intervention when she told of going to the school and talking to the counselor about Citlalli's troubles with math class. Erica felt that doing well in school was measured by getting good grades, and a "no news is good news" policy reinforced that notion.

The counselor offered to change Citlalli's math class to one that better matched her abilities, presumably because the class covered less advanced mathematics content. The result was that Citlalli's grades in her new math class improved, and her mother was pleased. Erica did not appear to be aware of the different educational tracks or understand that taking some classes results in different opportunities for continued education past high school. Therefore, Erica did not question why it was that other children the same age as her own daughter's did not experience the same level of difficulty.

Furthermore, she did not ask what Citlalli needed to do to catch up in the class she was in or what kinds of resources were available to her, such as tutoring, to help her catch up. It is possible that once Citlalli moved from her elementary school to middle school, she was placed in a classroom with a mixed student population from the different elementary schools in the area. Even though there was an open enrollment policy in the city's public schools, the schools did end up having a majority of their students representing the socioeconomic level of the school's community. The reason Citlalli may have had a harder time doing well in her math class could have resulted from the shift she experienced from being a good student in a working class community public school to being in a class with students whose socioeconomic status afforded them additional educational preparation.

Erica's intention to intervene on behalf of her daughter was thwarted by her lack of information about the educational process, the importance of the scope and sequence in the mathematics curriculum, and its related impact on Citlalli's ability to take college preparatory math courses. Most disconcerting was that neither Erica nor Citlalli were aware that Citlalli was already falling behind in relation to some of her peers given that her intent was to attend college some day. The school counselor, did not appear to have explained to Erica the rationale behind moving Citlalli to a different without pursuing other strategies to support her success in the more rigorous class or the possible implications of changing classes for Citlalli's educational ambitions. The educational success as measured by Citlalli's good grades in her lower math class are relative to the usefulness such class can offer to her long-term educational goals.

Information.

Information is power is a dictum of significant consequences for the mothers who were interviewed in this research project. Not having access to accurate and timely information was a paramount obstacle in the women's ability to understand their children's educational problems enough to know how to intervene on their behalf, what to do, or even know what questions they needed to ask. In the case of Cristina and her son Ricardo's struggle to do well in his mathematics class, Cristina felt that she was constantly running behind the problem. She did not know that her son was failing math until the first report card was out. Cristina said that she did not get any calls from the teacher informing her of Ricardo's academic difficulties.

Once realizing that Ricardo had a difficult time understanding the content of his math class, Cristina enrolled him in the after-school program hoping that the tutors there would be able to help him. Unfortunately, Ricardo, despite his best efforts, continued to do poorly in his examinations. Again, Cristina found herself at a loss of what to do or how to proceed in getting help for Ricardo. Not only did she not know what to do, but she also did not know where the source of the problem was, whether with the teacher, the class, the school, or her son. Cristina, with exasperation stated that the school was not very forthcoming in informing her about Ricardo's academic challenges. On the other hand, in the event of a behavioral problem, the school did seem responsive

in sending a note home to let her know what happened as was the case when Ricardo got into a fight with another student in school.

When problems were identified early enough and a clear plan of action was set in place to address the problem, then the student's chances of improvement increased. The difficulties were not always academic in nature. The hardships that hindered the student's ability to do well in school could be social, emotional or physical. Without open communication between the schools and the mothers, the nature of the difficulties remained speculative and unresolved. It is understandable that the mothers' perception that the teacher's did not place importance on their children's educational success when the school-initiated communication to their home only involved disorderly behavior on the part of boys while ignoring the equally concerning but less disruptive academic problems for both the boys and the girls. The mothers' experiences with schools were divergent in several respects depending on their own education and their child's sex and grade level. The obstacles they identified as having a limiting effect on their children's education and impacted upon by the schools were also related to the specific educational needs of the children.

Immigrant status.

Sólo el que trae el costal sabe lo que trae adentro. (Only he, who carries the sack, knows what's inside.) - Popular saying in Mexico

This section will consider how both the mothers' undocumented immigrant status and their ethnic identity are reflected in, or have a hindering impact on, the

children's educational process. Ethnoecological methodology take into account the individuals' understandings as they make sense of their own lives from their perspectives as insiders in their environment (Nazarea, 2003). Thus, the educational obstacles the mothers identified need to be understood in light of their contemporary sociopolitical context: the immigrant rights struggle, the backlash against immigrants, the dismantling of bilingual education programs from public schools, and the social construction of an alleged illegal status as a strategy to dehumanize the immigrants.

Impact within the family.

No puedes tapar el sol con un dedo. (You cannot block the sun with a finger.) –

Popular saying in Mexico

The challenges faced by the mothers in this study stemming from their undocumented immigrant status were not so much from not having specific documents per se, but from the significant restrictions to their lives for not having them. One notable strategy all the women made regarding the fear of being detained by the Immigration Service and deported was the decision to live in a small and rural community in Northern California. Although they acknowledged that bigger cities have larger Latino communities, more opportunities for employment, and possibly more community organizations addressing their needs, the woman also stated that they wanted to raise their children in a place where the risk of the *migra* (immigration agents) roaming the community looking for immigrants would be less. They figured that it was precisely the small size of the Latino community and the remoteness of the community that made the trip to come and get them not worth their while—or so they hoped.

However, the absence of reliable networks of communication in the community, independent of public agencies, compounded the women's fears. Speculation alone was a significant activating factor to the mothers' perceived sense of threat and resulting fear. The threat of the migra being around, of losing their job, or of being arrested did not have to be an actual and imminent threat. The only requirement for the fear to be real in their minds was that it was possible. When word was out on the grapevine that people were being detained, some of the mothers said that they chose to stay home; they would not send the children to school for several days, attend their appointments at the clinic, go to work, and most times not even go to the store. Other women, who did drive to their work and the children's schools, stated that they did not go out on the weekends or take the kids for a ride to the park, to the movies, or to the mall. The limiting impact that the fear of being discovered as undocumented immigrants to the choices available to the women, and to the emotional health of the family as a whole, was significant.

The community in which the women lived is on the coast of Northern California, yet the fears one mother had of being pulled over and of losing the car she worked so hard to get, prevented her children from having ever been to the beach. This same fear may silence some women from calling the police when they were victims of a crime or of violence. Concerned about losing their job or their homes, the women endured exploitative working conditions without repercussions and lived in substandard housing tenements without complaints. The children living in these homes quickly internalized

the fears and concerns; however, they did not have the information or understanding to mitigate the emotional consequences of the fears.

The mothers talked about their children being very clingy and fearful of trying new things, and they believed that their children's behavior indicated the children's fear that they were going to be separated from their mothers. Timothy, Gabriela's oldest son, worried that he'd come home from school, and his mother would be gone. When Gabriela lapsed into diabetic shock, and Fabiola had to call an ambulance, the children were very frightened. It is very likely that their lack of understanding on their mother's health condition, against the constant fear of being separated from her, exacerbated and produced an emotional impact that equaled more than the sum of the two events.

Two factors compounded the children's fear of being separated from their mothers: 1) not having a good understanding of what it means to have an undocumented immigrant status, of the reasoning behind the risks, and 2) not really being able to talk openly about this issue with accurate information. Gabriela's children worried about losing their mother due to forces they did not understand and were unpredictable out of their control. Without papers, Gabriela did not have access to medical care or medical information. She could not afford the medicines she needed to take to control her blood sugar or the type of nutrition that would have helped her manage her diabetes with a regulated diet. Exacerbating her medical condition, Gabriela underplayed her physical discomforts to keep her job, to avoid scaring her sister and children, perhaps because she too was unaware of what was going on with her own health status.

On a separate incident, Gabriela's children asked her why they could not go to the store during an episode of a migra scare, she responded by telling them that the migra was out and that they were people who take people away. Gabriela did not have the language to explain the fear to her children or a strategic answer that would help them understand without fueling their own fears. If other parents have similar difficulty in relaying to their children an age appropriate explanation of an undocumented immigrant status and the attendant risks then it is possible that the migra takes on an identity in the children's imagination similar to a cultural and contextual boogeyman. The sole mentioning of the migra would suffice to cause fear in the children, elevate their emotional stress and certainly impact their ability to learn.

Furthermore, as they grow and learn more information about what institution migra refers to, and they link their initial emotional response to governmental institutions, the result may have a negative impact on their ability or desire to engage with sociopolitical institutions—including schools. One consequence of the fear is a resultant impact on the families' perception of safety, even if the majority of the family members are U.S. citizens since, "the sense of safety of the whole family is only as strong as the sense of safety of its most vulnerable member" (Chang, 2006).

La Familia

Having an undocumented immigrant status compromised the women's ability to sustain familial relationships in Mexico and in the United States was increasingly compromised. Historically, Mexican nationals were able to cross the border between Mexico and the United States without excessive bureaucracy or legal restrictions. Since

the implementation of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 and then with the signing of Operation Gatekeeper by President Bill Clinton in 1994, the costs of crossing the border without immigration consent became exorbitant. The militarization of border entry points and the added environmental risks from having to cross through hostile desert and mountainous regions caused the dollar price of crossing the border with the aid of underground border guides, known as coyotes, to skyrocket.

Historically Mexican nationals used to migrate to the United States on a seasonal basis, work for agribusiness during high labor demand periods and then return to Mexico to reconnect with the family they likely left behind. However, the legislation seeking to stop the flow of undocumented immigrants into the United States had two important consequences for the women in this research project: 1) Mexican sojourners could no longer afford the cost or risks of returning to Mexico and having to cross the border again decided to stay in the United States, and 2) having to stay in the United States, the immigrants no longer had the ability to sustain practical and tangible connections with their families in Mexico.

Cristina best expressed the anguish she felt by feeling caught between two homelands. Her mother was ill in Mexico and required personal care and attention, her son's born in the United States barely could speak Spanish and were working very hard to do well in school. Not being able to pull her sons out of school and offer them the same educational opportunities in Mexico, and not being able to go take care of her mother because she had her own children here caused in Cristina a deep sense of emotional fragmentation that could not meet the needs of both her parents and her

children. Fortunately, Cristina realized that her mother's needs were best met by Cristina's ability to work in the United States because of the mounting medical bills that needed to be paid.

Fabiola spoke of the difficulty of raising children in the United States and in not being able to afford crossing the border to go see her mother in Mexico. She worried that, even if she could save the \$1,500.00 for the crossing fee, she could not risk her life in the process because she worried about her children being left alone in the world. Ana had not returned to Mexico in 12 years, and Erica had not seen her teenage son in two years. The mothers in this project rued that they had missed the births and deaths of family members in Mexico and conversely that their children had not met their family in Mexico. The impermeability of the Mexico/U.S. border to Mexican citizens does not successfully deter the flow of undocumented immigration. What it does accomplish, however, is force those immigrants already in the United States to stay in the U.S. at the expense of family cohesion and the support of intergenerational relationships.

Consejos to the Schools

El que esta lleno nunca se acuerda del que tiene hambre.

He who is satiated never remembers those who still hunger.

During the interviews, the mothers had an opportunity to reflect on their experiences with the children's schools and to offer consejos, advice, to the teachers, administrators, or staff in the schools. Some participants immediately knew what they wanted to communicate to the teachers, others had to think for a moment but once they

articulated their message it was clear to me that they were taking their time to compose their statements. They all showed great enthusiasm for the opportunity to send a message to the teachers, for the chance to speak up and candidly express what they thought would be helpful information for the teachers to know to better understand and teach their children. The mothers offered consejos, grounded in their own experience and personal wisdom, and offered them to the teachers, to the administrators, and for their own children regarding the importance of education.

The consejos revealed that the women are aware of the limits in their own understanding of the educational system. Rather than explaining their informational barrier as a cultural characteristic they attributed the communication limitation to the realm of the school's responsibility. The consejos to the teachers and school administrators broadly addressed three explanations for the breach of communication with the schools, namely that the teachers and administrators 1) do not know of their struggles as unauthorized immigrants, 2) that they somewhat know but lack the contextual information to understand, or 3) that they simply do not care to know or understand. The first two situations reflect a hopeful scenario for potentially positive interventions to improve the educational outcomes of the participants' children because it is easier to increase understanding once accurate information is available. The difficulty in communicating and the language barrier between the schools and the families was a theme that emerged over and over.

Some of the mothers talked about the need to have the schools understand that their lack of involvement in school activities or their compromised ability to meet with

them on a regular basis reflected the irregularity of their work schedule. Another consideration the mothers wanted the school representatives to know was that their immigrant status impeded the range of jobs available to them and that the family's daily survival depended on the wages they earned. Even when the mothers were able to find fulltime employment their low salaries relegated them to the ranks of the working poor along with other segments of the U.S. labor force. However, on account of their unauthorized immigrant status, the women's likelihood of surpassing their socioeconomic position appeared to be almost non-existent.

The third situation, that the school officials do not care, reflects a lack of hope and expectations from the mothers' perspective that positive changes can happen in the schools for their children because, if true, no amount of dialogue or information can change the educational limits bolstered by institutional apathy. The interviews with the mothers who felt like this were particularly challenging from my perspective as a researcher and a member of the women's community.

I asked the women about their motivation to participate if they perceived that their involvement would not result in a better educational outcome for their children and I was humbled by their responses. A couple of women discussed the reassurance they felt when talking to someone who could understand. Others acknowledged their need of talking about what is important to them and in not feeling silenced. Another woman affirmed my membership in her community, by stating that she wanted to participate in this project not to help her children, but to help me finish my own education. She told

me repeatedly that her contribution to my education could perhaps help others understand the plight of Latino children and those of unauthorized families.

Her position illustrates a concept of *salir adelante*, of getting ahead, and of success that is more inclusive of a broader community instead of focusing on the accomplishments of an individual. This difference in cultural expectations of success defined by one's alliance to the family, contributions to the family's well-being, and maintenance of inter-generational relationships were consistent with Guadalupe Valdés case study of Mexican-origin families in the borderlands of Mexico and the United States (Valdés, 1996). Ana, one of the mothers who felt strongly that the problem was that the dominant population, including the teachers in schools, did not care about her children went one step further. She charged the dominant population of the United States with not caring about Mexican immigrants—or anyone else. She found evidence to support her perception of social apathy in the persistent problem with poverty, homelessness, hunger, and increasing anger that are so prevalent in our communities everyday.

The women's claim that the educational institutions are not sensitive to their needs nor vested in their children's success while and at the same time assert that education is the most important and available strategy of empowerment may seem contradictory. I posit that such split logic makes sense. In the context of living in the U.S. as unauthorized immigrants and being politically, economically, and socially marginalized thinking that social institutions and those individuals who have power

within them are apathetic about them serves as a coping mechanism to confront the significance of their social status.

A popular saying in Spanish helps illustrate this point—*bajo aviso no hay engaño* (if warned there can be no deceit). This popular saying is used as a social disclaimer of responsibility for negative outcomes. If someone has previous knowledge or understanding of an unfair situation or of the possibility for undesirable consequences then their participation in the situation is an implicit waiver of their right to complain of the injustice. Thus, the mothers can explain the challenges in their lives resultant from their marginalized status as those stemming from social apathy and thus avoid the cognitive dissonance that believing in more idealistic and equitable notions would pose.

On the other hand, the mothers must continue to believe that the same exclusionary context that operates in their own lives does not apply to their children, that education must be the vehicle for inclusion into dominant American society, and that their children's ability to get ahead hinges on their success in schools. The mothers' continued belief in the redemptory powers of educational achievement for their children is what ultimately sustains their daily struggles.

Conclusion

The narratives shared by the mothers about their experiences with their children's schools indicate a wide range of experiences specific to their child's sex and age and are indicative of patterns mediated by their immigrant status and racial designation. An analysis of the mothers' responses to questions about their children's

schooling has revealed that, notwithstanding some exceptional events and individuals, the majority of the encounters between the mothers and school officials have left the mothers feeling like their children, and their families by extension, are not valued by the schools. The specific events in which they reported feeling invisible, ignored, dismissed, misled, or discriminated against reinforced the mothers' perception that the schools are not interested in them or their children's academic, social, or emotional needs. The mothers identified several factors that they perceived as barriers to their children's academic success. Salient among these barriers were the multiple manifestations of the Spanish/English barrier, a linguistic border the mothers continuously crossed as they attempted to advocate for their children's academic preparation and to seek the information they needed to do so.

The specificities of their family's experiences related to the mothers' immigrant status are overarching themes that the mothers named as obstacles to their children's education. Four important aspects of having an undocumented status are outlined as follows. First was the chronic fear that the mothers could be deported along with the concomitant psychological costs to all family members. Secondly, the structural hindrances to the mechanisms that enabled the mothers to meet their family's basic needs were addressed. Thirdly was the caustic effect on the children's national and cultural identity ensuing from the criminalization of their mothers for evading the legal mechanisms designed to hinder their ability to seek employment with a living wage, to find and afford habitable housing, to drive and be independently mobile, and the ability to support their families.

Their understanding of these factors was inextricably related to the unwavering conviction that education is *el buen camino* (the good path) that their children must follow to *salir adelante* (get ahead in life). Tempering this conviction was their emergent realization that the schools were not interested in helping their children achieve scholastic success. As undocumented immigrants, the mothers were keenly aware of their sociopolitical position in society and their role as, using Grace Chang's term, "disposable workers" in the labor force (Chang, 2000). It is the mothers' unrelenting hope that their children, armed with an education and free from the fetters of undocumented immigrant designation, will be able to pursue the same American Dream that until now continues to be a structurally unrealizable dream for themselves.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Six undocumented Mexican women who are currently raising school-age children in a rural community of Northern California shared their life stories, struggles, and hopes with me. As a researcher, I sought to gain an insight into their understanding of their lives and specifically about their perceptions of their children's schools, education, and the obstacles that hinder their academic success. To the women, on the other hand, their participation in this research project meant an opportunity to speak about their lives and articulate their own perspectives regarding their children's education, with the hope of communicating those perspectives to school officials.

The qualitative methods used allowed the women to share rich stories about multiple moments and aspects of their lives. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the impossibility of reducing anyone's life to a narrative of four hours or fewer. The results presented in this thesis were limited to the experiences the women have had with their children's schools. From those experiences, the women identified some of the educational hindrances their children encountered. Finally they offered *consejos*, or advice, for the teachers and school administrators to better serve the educational needs of their children.

Salient themes that emerged included the importance of considering the language barrier as a limiting factor in their ability to communicate effectively with the schools, in building meaningful relationships with the teachers, and in supporting their children's academic work. The language barrier compounded their sense of

disconnection resulting from an immigrant experience and a different cultural framework. Furthermore, the women expressed a perception that their experiences with schools were mediated by racist and nationalistic attitudes. Thus, the mothers explained their negative experiences in schools as being the result of ignorance, the consequences of racial prejudice and nativist hostility, or simply as a convenient manifestation of social apathy.

In addition to the themes related to the women's experiences with schools, their stories revealed aspects about having an undocumented immigrant status and the ways in which that status may impinge on their children's ability to do well in school. Three salient aspects were their concern for their children's safety, chronic fear of the consequences to their families' survival in the event of being discovered as undocumented immigrants, and the challenges in sustaining inter-generational relationships with family members residing in Mexico.

Limitations of the Research

The same methodological aspects that resulted in richly detailed life stories also posed some of the limitations for this project. The sample was too small to generalize the meaning ascribed to the experiences of the women interviewed to other Mexican mothers or undocumented immigrants.

Given the complex nuances surrounding survival for unauthorized Mexican immigrants, the sample available for inclusion in this project necessarily excluded a group of women whose voices are still more marginalized than the group I did interview—namely the women who did not reside in the community, including those

who were unsuccessful in their attempts to get to the United States or those for whom the struggles for survival in the United States were too colossal to overcome and who chose to return to Mexico. Other women not available for inclusion were those whose male partners restricted their ability to talk and socialize with other people. Three of the participants expressed that this used to be the case with their former husbands.

Therefore, the narratives collected in this project reflect the experience of only those women who have and continue to overcome the struggles inherent to an immigrant experience with an unauthorized status.

Though the intent of this case study was to elicit the mothers' perspectives, the consideration of the teachers' and administrators' perspectives regarding the specific incidents could have provided an opportunity to focus and clarify specific gaps in understanding. Notwithstanding the absence of the teachers' perspectives, the narratives and perspectives of the mothers remain complete and valid since it was their interpretation and the meaning they ascribed to their own experiences that informed their reality.

The amount of data generated from the interviews surpassed what could be explored within the scope of a thesis. Thus, I was able to extrapolate the common themes of only one aspect of the participants' lives. Additional research and analysis of the other aspects of their lives revealed in the interviews may foster increased understanding of the educational experiences of Mexican-origin children in mixed-status homes.

Recommendations for Further Research

The narratives and analysis in this project illuminated multiple possibilities for further research. It might be useful to conduct a study that utilized a larger sample group of participants or a sample group from other rural communities across the United States. Other research might explore the specific communication gaps that occur between teachers and immigrant mothers.

The analysis of the narratives took into account the unauthorized immigrant status of the participants, and the conclusions reflect that perspective. Research that interviewed mothers upon arrival to the United States, five years later, and then post-immigrant status adjustment may offer important information about the specific impact an unauthorized immigrant status identity bears on their experiences across time.

The mothers' perspectives and their articulation of specific areas of disconnect between the school and their homes could result in a restructuring blueprint that suggests programmatic, curricular, and institutional changes on the part of the schools. Some possibilities include, but are not limited to, forming better alliances with the mothers and being better positioned to meet the students' educational needs. Standard markers of scholastic achievement such as increased attendance, better grades, higher rates of retention, and promotion at all levels can be broad indicators of the impact that suggested and implemented changes have on the academic success of Latino students.

A poignant consequence for mixed-status families is that everyone experiences the fears related to the vulnerable immigrant status of some of its members. For example, some mothers in this research talked about the fear the children expressed of

being separated from them. Considering the growing number of children who live in mixed-status homes, educational researchers could seek to find out the long-term effects to the psychological development of those children who live with chronic fear of separation from their mothers. Additionally, a research study could probe into the interconnections between the mixed-status families and the children's educational outcomes by specifically correlating status and markers of academic achievement.

Some participants shared the difficulty of talking to their children about the meaning and implications of an unauthorized immigrant status. It may be useful to explore development of a model to provide appropriate and accurate explanations for children about the meaning and consequences of unauthorized immigrant status. Additionally, for those children who live in mixed-status homes in which their siblings have a different status, a comparative study may be able to reveal what if any is the actual impact of status on the individuals. Following these recommendations for exploratory research, further studies that identify possible interventions on behalf of those children to support their educational achievement may result in more effective programs than those designed without the foundational research. Addressing the specific educational needs of children who live in mixed-status homes by implementing programs and interventions at the school level obscures the source of their central obstacle, namely the social construction and consequences of their families' immigrant status. Although it is true that important changes need to occur on macro socio-political and economic levels, the children of unauthorized immigrants are attending public

schools now and their educational interests cannot afford to wait for systemic policy changes.

Several recommendations can be made to facilitate undocumented immigrant families in their transition and successful incorporation into their new community. The language barrier was a dominant theme across the board for all participants, involving all aspects of their lives. Research that identifies accessible and effective delivery of English language instruction for the adults in immigrant families would be an important contribution. Alternative pedagogies need to take into account the families' limited time, few resources, and varying amounts of access to technological equipment.

A consequence of legislation that seeks to prevent further migration by militarizing the Mexico-U.S. border is a rupture in the continuity of inter-generational relationships within families. Further research can explore the impact that familial fragmentation has on the transmission of cultural values, traditions, and historical knowledge to the new generation of Mexican-origin U.S. born children.

Summary

This thesis contributes the perspectives of unauthorized Mexican mothers who live in a rural community about the educational experiences of their children. The women revealed their life stories that resonate with the experiences of other immigrant groups, yet remain experientially different as a result of their status as undocumented. My hope in doing this research was to give the women an opportunity to voice their perspectives so as to potentially decrease the gap in understanding that exists between

them and school personnel and in the process improve their children's educational outcomes.

Ana shared her story about the birds and the songs they sing as a metaphor for her own struggles. She noted that while no one understands the songs of the bird, much like the struggles of the undocumented community, that the bird must sing as a strategy for survival. At the conclusion of our interview, Ana reflected on the possibility that this research has to positively impact the educational experience of her children. She called on our social conscience and invited the teachers at the schools to have the desire and will to "do things better" as an important next step.

Like I said, if all the teachers in your school, if all of them know this kind of information from all of the many people who find themselves with these problems then perhaps something good will come out of this. Perhaps it will be only you..., but... it also depends on the conscience of all of those who get to read this paper. -- Ana

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APPENDIX A

ACUERDO DE PARTICIPACION COMO SUJETO DE INVESTIGACION

Aquí expreso mi acuerdo de participar en las series de entrevistas que serán llevadas a cabo por Investigadora Principal María Corral-Ribordy. Ella estudia en el Departamento de Educacion de la Universidad Estatal de Humboldt. Estoy de acuerdo en participar en un mínimo de dos entrevistas que serán audiograbadas. Es posible que se tenga que hacer una tercer entrevista con el propósito de explorar temas discutidos en las entrevistas previas y también para aclarar dudas que pueda tener la IP de mis relatos. La información podra ser utilizada por la IP en sus investigaciones y producción de la tesis para su maestría cuyo titulo es, “Entre dos patrias: Un Estudio de las Experiencias de Madres Mexicanas Indocumentadas con el Sistema Escolar Primario en una Comunidad Rural.”

Las entrevistas se llevarán a cabo en el hogar de la IP y ella proporcionará transporte a su casa si es necesario. Cada una de las primeras dos entrevistas durarán de 45-60 minutos. La tercer entrevista, si es necesaria, no excedera 60 minutos de duración. El propósito de esta investigación es de obtener información de las participantes acerca de sus experiencias, de sus obligaciones como madres, y sus percepciones hacerca de sus vidas como residentes indocumentadas. La información que se obtenga aumentará el entendimiento de sus familias y el contexto dentro del cual se desarroyan y crecen tanto ellas como sus hijos. Entiendo que el proceso descrito involucra una serie de riesgos y malestares posibles, pero que también incluyen posibles beneficios. Entiendo cuales son los riesgos y que ellos existen independientemente de

mi participación en este proyecto. Entiendo que voy a escoger un pseudónimo para mi y que toda información que pudiera identificarme a mi y a mis hijos sera cambiada para proteger nuestra identidad. Tambien entiendo que los beneficios son factibles. Los beneficios incluyen, pero no estan limitados a la oportunidad de expresar mis experiencias y mis perspectives usando mis propias palabras; las maestras, las escuelas, y la comunidad escolar en general podra tener un mejor entendimiento de los problemas que se atribuyen directamente a nuestra situación con respecto a nuestra residencia. Toda esta información puede ser útil para mejorar la experiencia educativa de mis hijos y de otros niños en situaciones similares.

La Investigadora Principal María Corral-Ribordy me explicó toda esta información en español. Estoy conciente de que ella contestará cualquier y todas las preguntas que pueda yo tener acerca de esta investigación o de sus procedimientos en todo momento. También entiendo que mi participación en este proyecto es completamente voluntaria y que puedo negar mi participación desde el principio o terminarla en cualquier momento sin ser sujeta a ninguna consecuencia negativa. Entiendo que la investigadora tambien puede terminar, en cualquier momento, mi participacion en susodicho proyecto. Entiendo que no voy a recibir pago monetario por mi participación en este proyecto.

Firma de la Participante

Fecha

APPENDIX B

CONSENT TO ACT AS RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I hereby agree to participate in a series of interviews that will be performed by María Corral-Ribordy, the Primary Investigator (PI) and a graduate student at the Department of Education of Humboldt State University. I agree to participate in a minimum of two audio-taped interviews. A follow-up third interview will be scheduled as necessary, to further explore the topics that became manifest from the initial interviews and to clarify the PI's understanding of my account. The information gathered may be used by the PI in the research and writing of her masters' thesis entitled, *Between Two Homelands: The Experiences of Undocumented Mexican Mothers in a Rural Community*.

The interviews will be conducted at the PI's home and she will provide transportation to and from the interview as necessary. Each of the first two interviews will be 45-60 minutes in duration. A third interview will be conducted, if necessary, and it is not expected to exceed 60 minutes in duration.

The purpose of this research is to elude information from the participants about their experiences, their roles as mothers, and perceptions about their lives as undocumented residents. This information will increase understanding about their families and about the context within which they and their children live and learn. I understand that the procedures described involve the following possible risks and/or discomforts and that they also have possible benefits. I understand what the risks are and that they may exist independently of my participation in this project. I understand

that I will chose a pseudonym and that all identifying information about me and my children will be concealed.

I further understand that the benefits from my participation are likely. The benefits include but are not limited to the opportunity of communicating my experience and perspectives in my own words; the teachers, schools and educational community at-large may have a better understanding about our specific access to resources, contributions and needs that stem from my residency status; and, this information can be used to improve the educational experience of all children in a similar situation.

This information was explained to me by the Principal Investigator, María Corral-Ribordy. I understand that she will answer any questions I may have concerning this investigation or the procedures at any time. I also understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may decline to enter this study or may withdraw from it at any time without jeopardy. I also understand that the investigator may terminate my participation in the study at any time. I am not receiving any compensation for my participating in this study.

Participant's Signature

Date

APPENDIX C

GUIA PARA LA ENTREVISTA

1) INFORMACION GENERAL

- a) Pláticame porfavor de tí.
- b) Pláticame de dónde eres y como es ese lugar (nombre, urbano o rural, tipo de comunidad)
- c) Que recuerdas de cómo era la vida en México?
- d) Pláticame porfavor acerca de tu decisión de venirte a los E.U.
- e) Pláticame del proceso de venir, cómo, con quién, cuándo, etc.

2) FAMILIA

- a) Pláticame porfavor de tu familia.
- b) Pláticame mas de tus hijos por favor.
- c) Qué les gusta hacer?
- d) Para ti, qué valores son importantes que puedas inculcarles a tus hijos?
- e) Quiénes son sus amigos?
- f) Que haces en tus días de descanso, en los fines de semana y días festivos?

3) SALIENDO ADELANTE

- a) Empleo
 - i) Pláticame de tus experiencias trabajando.
 - ii) Pláticame cómo has podido salir adelante.

b) Vivienda

- i) Dónde vives y como es el lugar?
- ii) Cómo encontraste donde vivir?

c) Necesidades Básicas

- i) Qué haces de comer en tu casa?
- ii) Salud
 - (1) Qué pasa cuando alguien de tu familia se enferma?
 - (2) Qué tal la salud de tu familia?
- iii) Hay cosas o motivos que te hayan causado no poder dormir? Que te quita el sueño. Si hay, cuales son?

4) ESCUELAS

a) Personal

- i) Dime porfavor acerca de tu educacion formal.
- ii) Si pudieras cambiar algo hacerca de tu educación, que cambiarías?

b) De los Niños

- i) Cómo van tus hijos en la escuela? Cómo sabes?
- ii) Tus hijos tienen papeles? Les afecta su habilidad de poder salir adelante en la escuela? Cómo?
- iii) Como es su escuela?
 - (1) Que estan aprendiendo tus hijos en la escuela? Que te parece o que opinas de lo que estan aprendiendo?
 - (2) Relaciones

- (a) A quien conoces en la escuela?
- (b) Con cuánta frecuencia les hablas o te comunicas con ellos?
- (c) Pláticame acerca de esas relaciones.

(3) Retos

- (a) Cuales han sido algunos de los retos con los que te has enfrentado en la escuela?
- (b) Que hiciste?
- (c) Que hizo la escuela?
- (d) Como te sentiste?

(4) Impresiones de la escuela

- (a) Que opinas de las escuela?
- (b) Que te gusta?
- (c) Que te frustra?
- (d) Que informacion te gustaria saber de la escuela?

(5) Alguna ves te has sentido excluida de cualquier aspecto de la educacion de tus hijos? De que manera?

(6) De lo que tu sabes, como se comparan las escuelas de aqui con las que fuiste en México.

(7) Comunicación

- (a) Como te enteras de lo que esta pasando en la escuela?
- (b) Que haces cuando tienes alguna pregunta o duda de lo que pasa en la escuela o del progreso de tus hijos?

5) COMUNIDAD

- a) Conocias a alguien en esta area antes de venir aqui. Pláticame de ellos.
- b) Ves alguna diferencia entre tu hogar y la comunidad en grande? Cuales son algunas diferencias?
- c) Como obtienes noticias de acontecimientos locales?
- d) Como obtienes noticias de acontecimientos de E.U., de México y del mundo?

6) ESPERANZAS

- a) Para ti, que significa ser inmigrante documentada?
- b) Como piensas que la vida de tus hijos y la tuya cambiarían al obtener sus papeles?
- c) Cuales son tus sueños para ti?
- d) Cuales son tus sueños para tus hijos?
- e) Que tendrá que suceder para que esos sueños se hagan realidad?
- f) Que puedes hacer tu para realizar tus sueños?

APPENDIX D
OPEN INTERVIEW GUIDE

1) BACKGROUND

- a) Please tell me about yourself.
- b) Tell me about the place that you are from? (name, urban/rural, community,)
- c) What was life like in Mexico?
- d) Please tell me about your decision to come to the U.S.
- e) Please tell me about the process of getting to the United States and to this county.

2) FAMILY

- a) Please tell me about your family.
- b) Tell me more about your children.
- c) What do they like to do?
- d) What values are important to you that your children have?
- e) Who are their friends?
- f) Who do you spend your free time, your holidays, or weekends with?

3) GETTING AHEAD (SALIENDO ADELANTE)

- a) Employment
 - i) Tell me about your job experiences?
 - ii) Tell me about “making-ends meet”.
- b) Housing
 - i) Where do you live and what is it like?
 - ii) How did you go about finding a place to live?

- c) Basic Needs
 - i) What does your family eat?
 - ii) Health
 - (1) What happens when someone in your family gets sick?
 - (2) How is your family's health?
 - iii) Do any issues in your life cause you to lose sleep? If so, please tell me about it/them?
- 4) SCHOOLS
 - a) Personal
 - i) Please tell me about your formal education.
 - ii) If you could change anything about your own education, what would it be?
 - b) Your Child
 - i) How are your children doing in school? How do you know?
 - ii) Do your children have an undocumented status?
 - iii) Does it affect their ability to do well in school? If so, how?
 - iv) What is their school like?
 - (1) What are your children learning in school? How do you feel about what they are learning?
 - (2) Relationships
 - (a) Who do you know in the school?
 - (b) How frequently do you talk or communicate with them?
 - (c) Tell me about those relationships.

(3) Challenges

- (a) What have been some of the challenges you have encountered with the schools?
- (b) How did you handle these challenges?
- (c) What did the school do?
- (d) How do you feel about them?

(4) General Impressions

- (a) How do you feel about the schools?
 - (b) What do you like?
 - (c) What frustrates you?
 - (d) What would you like to know about the schools?
- (5) Have you ever felt excluded from any component of your kids' education? If so, in what ways?
- (6) As far as you know, how are the schools here different than the ones you may have attended in Mexico?

(7) Communication

- (a) How do you get information regarding the school's events?
- (b) What do you do when you have a question about what is going on in school or about your child's performance?

5) COMMUNITY

- a) Did you know anyone in this community before you moved here?

- b) Do you see any differences between your home-life and the community? If so, what are they?
 - c) How do you get information about what is going on in the community?
 - d) How do you get information about the U.S., Mexico, and the rest of the world?
- 6) HOPES
- a) To you, what does it mean to be a documented resident?
 - b) What do you think changing your residency status would do for your and your family's lives?
 - c) What are your dreams for your life?
 - d) What are your dreams for your children's lives?
 - e) What would have to change to make those dreams come true?
 - f) What can you do to bring about those changes?

APPENDIX E

GLOSSARY

arreglar los papeles: “to fix the papers.” In Spanish people say they “fix their papers” to say that they are in the process of legalizing their immigrant status. Using the word *fix* is semantically revealing of a strategy that undocumented immigrants use in response to the criminalization of their identity. In stating that they have to “fix” their papers, they assert that the problem lies with “broken or malfunctioning” papers (State issued legal documentation) and not within themselves as people.

bajo aviso no hay engaño: Popular saying: “If warned there can be no deceit.”

comadres: Comadre is a term recognizing a mutual relationship and kinship. Literally, it means co-mother, but the socially a comadre is the godmother of one’s child. Catholic doctrine and tradition in Mexico recognize comadres (and compadres – for men) as the individuals who are chosen by the birth parents to help in the moral and religious upbringing of the child. They also serve as more versatile and practical parenting role models. These roles are often conferred to very close friends of the parents as a way to acknowledge their kinship and membership as part of their extended family network. Sometimes the relationships of comadres are informally acknowledged without officially participating in a religious sacrament.

consejos: Consejos are statements of advice that are much more emotionally invested than mere recommendations on mundane topics. Consejos are bits of wisdom that when offered represent the essence of what the person offering the consejo believes to be an important value or life principle. Consejos are generally offered by the elders in the community or by those individuals held with high social esteem. The consejos, in turn, are received with a reciprocal understanding of import and respect.

El que esta lleno nunca se acuerda del que tiene hambre: Popular saying: ‘He who is satiated never remembers those who still hunger.’”

hecharle ganas: To sustain great effort. To work diligently to achieve a goal, especially a one that is perceived to be a worthy and valuable goal, such as an education.

migra: Abbreviated form of Imigración, the Spanish word for Immigration. Migra, in context, refers to representatives of the Immigration and Naturalization Service or INS. The migra implicitly represents a threat to the undocumented immigrant community in that it is the government representatives empowered to apprehend, detain, and deport undocumented immigrants. Following the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, the Immigration and Naturalization Service was restructured and became the U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement.

mocho: Adjective used to describe someone who speaks a language poorly or choppy, whether English or Spanish, but enough to make themselves understood.

No puedes tapar el sol con un dedo: Popular saying: “You cannot cover the sun with a finger.” Said when things are so obvious that any effort to deny them would seem as ineffective as trying to cover the sun with one’s finger.

papeles: Literally, papeles means “papers.” Commonly, papeles refers to the paper documentation that is needed to demonstrate legal resident status. These papeles refer to the state-issued identification such as a driver’s license or a state ID or a social security card. Saying that someone has papeles means that he or she has legal U.S. residence and as such is able to get the state issued documentation. Conversely, not having papeles means that the individual does not have a current legal immigrant status and is thus considered an undocumented immigrant.

Que sigan el buen camino: Popular saying: “That they follow the good (right) path.” An important and typical consejo or advice that the mothers in this project wanted for their children.

salir adelante: To get ahead in life, to overcome obstacles and succeed.

Solo el que trae el costal sabe lo que trae adentro: Popular saying: “Only he who carries the sack knows what is inside.”