

LOS PROBLEMAS ECO-LÓGICOS ENTRE MI GENTE: UNRAVELING THE  
TRUTH OF THE AMERICAN DREAM FOR MEXICAN IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

by

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## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate my thesis to my parents and siblings; their motivation and support equipped me to achieve excellence. Without my family's influence, I would have never been able to complete such a daunting and rewarding undergraduate honors thesis. My mom and dad have provided so much for me, and their 'American Dream' was extremely hard to acquire. But with their efforts, they have provided my family and I a wonderful 'American Dream.' How we handle their dream is up to us, and I am living proof that their 'American Dream' is a successful one.

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## **ABSTRACT**

It is reported that 11 million undocumented Mexican immigrants reside in the U.S., and more than half have been living in this country for more than a decade (Garcini, 2015). Nonetheless, undocumented Mexican immigrant households have been bound to socioeconomic inequality, a reality often tied to the lack of support through social services. Further, the extant research shows that ecocultural factors (e.g., family, neighborhood, and school environments) can create adverse effects for those living in undocumented Mexican households. As explained by Perreira and Ornelas (2011), “[b]ecause migration exposes children to unique developmental demands and stressors associated with acculturation, it reshapes their normative development, p. (197).” This research is supported by Gelatt (2016), who found that the constant parental stress of deportation may debilitate parents’ mental health and that these worries may also affect the health of their children. Further complicating the issue is the fact that language barriers often prevent immigrants from navigating the complex American health system (Ayón, 2020). Yet, few studies have explored the extent to which immigrants are aware of the ecocultural factors influencing their lives. Essentially, there remains a gap in our understanding of how such factors are mitigated in pursuing the American dream. Thus, the present research aims to document (1) the ecocultural factors perceived to be the most salient in the lives of adult children from Mexican immigrant families; and (2) describe how they combat the factors that threaten their desired achievements.

## **Self Introduction**

Growing up as a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Mexican immigrant has provided me with unique experiences that made me the person I am today. Yet, in seeing my parents try to establish themselves and acquire their American dream, I witnessed delayed or inhibited hopes that were a direct result of a fractured immigration system. This includes memories of having to constantly turn off the lights and duck into a hiding spot when left alone with an older sister or having no audience support for high school or collegiate events due to my immigrant parents' working around the clock to provide their American children a glimpse of the American dream. In my upbringing, I have been truly fortunate enough to have Mexican immigrant parents that fought every battle and overcome any challenge to sustain an American dream, even when all odds were against them. The daily stressors I have encountered have caused me to doubt myself in every sense. Still, through those experiences I have become resilient enough to reach my very own American dream. Through my experiences as a child of Mexican Immigrants, I hope to contrast the needs and hopes of one of the most vulnerable populations within the U.S.

## **Introduction**

The U.S. has always been regarded as a land full of opportunities and prosperity. As a result, the U.S. has seen a mass migration movement from all over the world. One particular issue within the topic of immigration that has received a lot of attention is the adverse effects among specific populations of immigrants living in the U.S. Within recent years, U.S. immigration policies have become politicized, with Mexican immigrants at

the center of the discussion given the large influx of immigrants into the U.S. beginning in the 1990s. In 2015, it was reported that there were around 11 million undocumented Mexican immigrants in the U.S., in which at least half of the 11 million had been living in the U.S. for more than a decade.<sup>1</sup> Despite the presence of this large population, we know truly little about the broader ecocultural factors that may affect the ability of immigrants to settle successfully in the U.S. As undocumented immigrants seek to find new prosperity and hope within the U.S., their ability to thrive is impacted by the inability to receive social benefits and government assistance to establish their new lives. In order to fully understand the ways in which such systems can impact immigrant lives, it is first important to review the ecocultural framework further.

Weisner describes ecocultural factors as the “ecological and institutional forces that impinge on the everyday activities of families by focusing on their impacts on the developmental niche and psychocultural worlds of parents and children.”<sup>2</sup> In this excerpt, the forces that a family encounters daily are essential to the family’s developmental outcomes. However, Weisner describes ecocultural theory as an idea of locally rational action, where the “local situation” consists of everyday routines and activities. Actors use connected, schematized, shared knowledge of this everyday cultural world to adapt and

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<sup>1</sup> Luz M. Garcini et al., “Miles over Mind: Transnational Death and Its Association with Psychological Distress among Undocumented Mexican Immigrants.,” *Death Studies* 44, no. 6 (July 2020): 357.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas S. Weisner, “Ecocultural Understanding of Children’s Developmental Pathways,” *Human Development* 45, no. 4 (2002): 277, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26763688>.



make complex decisions to survive in their local community.”<sup>3</sup> In essence, the locality of ecocultural factors denotes the aspects of daily life influences are critical to the development of children. As everyday impacts or events occur within a family, the effects, or forms in which the family handles such developments could further influence children as they develop into adults. Yet, daily situations are noted as methods of learning how to adapt to their ecocultural environment. Regardless of the roots or the essential effects, daily situations serve the purpose of allowing advances or leeway to enable support for the situations encountered. Yet the intensity of ecocultural factors varies within families. Central to this paper, undocumented Mexican immigrant households often bear the cost of dealing with adverse ecocultural factors that could potentially impede the success of Mexican children. The nature of how children are affected by ecocultural factors could be due to early neural exposure brought on by their daily surroundings.

In general, the connection between a child’s ecocultural surroundings as they mature is critical to their developmental upbringing. According to literature by Weiss and Wagner, evidence demonstrates that “the structure, organization, and activity of the human brain is dramatically affected by early experience. The effects of these vary as a function of what parts of the brain subserve the human faculty in question.”<sup>4</sup> Weiss and Wagner essentially characterize an understanding of how any kind of childhood exposure

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<sup>3</sup> Weisner, “Ecocultural Understanding of Children’s Developmental Pathways,” 277.

<sup>4</sup> Michael J. Salomon Weiss, Sheldon H. Wagner. “What Explains the Negative Consequences of Adverse Childhood Experiences on Adult Health? Insights from Cognitive and Neuroscience Research.,” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 14, no. 4 (May 1998): 356.

could create extraneous concerns for the victim if exposed. In the same manuscript, Weiss and Wagner point out how exposure to deprivation of emotional contact and linguistic input could impact the limbic system and left temporal plane.<sup>5</sup> While the literature by Weiss and Wagner denotes focus on the treatment and exposure to which children are exposed, the reality of varied exposure could potentially lead to various levels of concern within one's projected life. For instance, in a similar idea to Weiss and Wagner, Winter, et al.'s study includes research on the scope of child maltreatment and their trajectories. According to Winter, "Adults with histories of child maltreatment have provided compelling evidence for long-term changes in regulatory systems at neural, physiological, and molecular levels."<sup>6</sup> Within this theory, maltreatment is discussed in reference to the possible vile effects upon adults who have encountered such treatment during their adulthood. Both studies shine light upon the kinds of exposure that children are exposed to when young by placing significance upon the certain kinds of effects amongst adults due to their exposure. The kind of exposure a child may witness could exponentially lead to severe implications and outcomes in their adolescent years and adulthood.

Through my thesis, I examine how adverse ecocultural factors impact undocumented Mexican immigrants. I investigate how adult children and adult immigrants thrive in the U.S. when they are already disadvantaged due to their legal

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Sibylle M. Winter et al., "Immediate Impact of Child Maltreatment on Mental, Developmental, and Physical Health Trajectories.," *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry* 63, no. 9 (September 2022): 1027, <https://doi-org.libproxy.txstate.edu/10.1111/jcpp.13550>.

status. By researching how these broader social forces affect undocumented Mexican immigrants, I aim to examine the ways in which the undocumented Mexican immigrant community within the U.S. is adversely impacted. I argue that the ecocultural factors in the U.S. hinder this community's ability to succeed in a nation full of prosperity.

Furthermore, my paper analyzes how adult children and adult Mexican immigrants are affected by ecocultural effects. Through my study, I contrast the factors inhibiting the ability to fully attain a prosperous American dream so that future Mexican immigrants can combat the effects of ecocultural factors. Since ecocultural factors have prevented Mexican immigrants from attaining their full potential, my goal is also to provide awareness for a minority community that has been bounded by them. By creating awareness, I hope to further progress conversations regarding the inability of undocumented Mexican immigrants to achieve success in America.

### **Adult Ecocultural Factors:**

One of the many factors that hinder undocumented adult Mexican immigrants' ability to thrive in the U.S. is the language barrier. Due to the distinct differences between the languages of Mexico and the U.S., when settling in the U.S., undocumented immigrants are unable to cross the language barrier properly. A study conducted by de Castro found that "workers said that inability to understand English was used as a reason to harass them and threaten them with dismissal."<sup>7</sup> In the same study, it was also found

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<sup>7</sup> Francesca Gany et al., "Urban Occupational Health in the Mexican and Latino/Latina Immigrant Population: A Literature Review," *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health* 16, no. 5 (October 2014): 851, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10903-013-9806-8>.

that “workers reported occasions when they were forced to sign documents in English without knowing what they were signing.”<sup>8</sup> In association with this study, undocumented Mexican immigrants have presented adverse work settings due to their inability to understand English properly. In other words, the language barrier is yet another inequality that Mexican immigrants face. In the same light, one’s immigration status is used to take advantage of those with incredible documentation since they cannot cross language barriers to seek justice.

Further, the language barrier has also caused fears among undocumented immigrants seeking medical assistance. According to Ayón, “Language barriers hinder the ability of immigrants to comprehend and successfully navigate health care systems.”<sup>9</sup> Seemingly, in the same article, Ayón goes on to articulate further the reasoning why undocumented immigrants fear seeking medical assistance, in which their language barrier comes into effect. According to Ayón, “The concern of being detained and deported or placing household members at risk of deportation (e.g., by disclosing their home address when completing paperwork) prevents undocumented immigrants from seeking care, and they may wait until their health exacerbates before they finally seek intervention.”<sup>10</sup> As the fears of deportation appear to be a significant indicator of whether an undocumented Mexican immigrant seeks medical services, it is often the case that

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Cecilia Ayón, Jonathan Ramos Santiago, and Andrea Sthepania López Torres, “Latinx Undocumented Older Adults, Health Needs and Access to Healthcare,” *Journal of Immigrant & Minority Health* 22, no. 5 (October 2020): 998, doi:10.1007/s10903-019-00966-7.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

many wait until health conditions worsen until medical assistance is sought. In reaction, the ecocultural factors affecting adults sends the message to the immigrant community that their health is not valued within the U.S. It appears as if the benefits of living in the U.S. outweigh the consequences of seeking medical assistance if one fears being deported.

Yet, with the inability to acquire social services due to their immigration status, undocumented Mexican immigrants cannot receive support from the government once settling in the U.S. In this sense, since there is the inability to receive financial support in terms of Medicaid, food stamps, and other governmental assistance, undocumented Mexican immigrants are forced to endure the pains of settling into a new nation without the assistance of the government. As a result, according to Shields and Behrman, “Immigrants represent about 11% of the U.S. population, but they account for 20% of the low-wage labor force, often with limited access to benefits.”<sup>11</sup> The lack of compensation does not enable this population to save money in order to stabilize themselves efficiently. Undocumented Mexican immigrants are forced to endure bare minimum survivable wages, while being blocked from receiving any accommodations from the government. In a study conducted by Ayón, it was found that “45% of undocumented immigrants are

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<sup>11</sup> Margie K. Shields and Richard E. Behrman, “Children of Immigrant Families: Analysis and Recommendations,” *The Future of Children* 14, no. 2 (2004): 6, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1602791>.

uninsured.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, most undocumented population are forced to pay for medical emergencies and expenses out of their low-waged labor pockets. If their children are often sick or a member of their family requires medical assistance, there is often the inability to access medical needs due to a lack of decent pay. In the resulting matters, the ecocultural factors prevent undocumented Mexican immigrants from providing essential medical care for their families.

Even though research presents the notion of undocumented Mexican immigrants contributing to society by paying taxes, their inability to attain government assistance evokes stressors of financial security. According to Ayón, “undocumented immigrants contribute an estimated \$11.6 billion in taxes, they remain ineligible from accessing public benefits.”<sup>13</sup> As undocumented immigrants manage to contribute to the U.S.’ Social Security fund in the form of taxes, they cannot reek the benefits of adequately fitting into the labor force of the U.S. Furthermore, as undocumented Mexican immigrants age, “their socioeconomic status and barriers to health care access stand to heighten their disadvantages.”<sup>14</sup> For the average U.S. citizen, as one ages, they are able to prepare for retirement, but that is not the case for undocumented Mexican immigrants.

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<sup>12</sup> Cecilia Ayón, Jonathan Ramos Santiago, and Andrea Sthepania López Torres, “Latinx Undocumented Older Adults, Health Needs and Access to Healthcare,” *Journal of Immigrant & Minority Health* 22, no. 5 (October 2020): 996, doi:10.1007/s10903-019-00966-7.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Combining these factors, Ayón found that the ecocultural factors pose stagnant effects amongst older undocumented immigrants by “their undocumented status restricting their economic prosperity and ability to save for retirement coupled with exclusion from accessing public benefits such as health care, undocumented older adults are unprepared for the health needs and related expenses they will face as they age.”<sup>15</sup> Within this excerpt, the main point presents that older undocumented immigrants face the stressors of having to work even in their retirement years. Since undocumented immigrants do not have access to social services, the inability to depend on a retirement fund enables continuous labor, resulting from their inability to save for the future.

Undocumented immigrants cannot retain social services due to the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). In 1996, PRWORA was incorporated within the U.S. welfare system, which “barred undocumented immigrants from accessing federally-funded insurance programs such as Medicaid and Medicare.”<sup>16</sup> Through PRWORA, the national reform movement from 1996 enabled the inaccessible action of undocumented immigrants from receiving government-funded assistance. Yet, in a similar light, as political parties contrasted sights of hope for reforms to better assist the undocumented immigrant community, with the passing of the Affordable Care Act, the U.S. immigration system diminished the ability to attain much desperate federal-funded medical coverage. When President Barack Obama was in office in 2010, the U.S. implemented the Affordable Care Act, which enabled

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 997.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

expansive coverage, but “undocumented immigrants were excluded from Affordable Care Act provisions as they are prohibited from purchasing insurance through the health exchanges and do not benefit from the Medicaid expansion.”<sup>17</sup> As the U.S. recently sought to reform the healthcare system of the nation, attention to the scope of coverage demonstrates that the government barred undocumented Mexican immigrants from attaining any form of welfare coverage. With the U.S. Government presenting initiatives to expand coverage within their nation and implementing anti-immigration stances, the undocumented Mexican immigrant population has continued to suffer in a depriving society. Even though undocumented Mexican immigrants are barred from attaining social services, undocumented immigrants suffer from similar medical conditions to those found to be covered under the Affordable Care Act. In reaction, undocumented Latinx communities tend to suffer from various diseases that are found to be “among the most expensive to treat: chronic diseases, cognitive disorders, and physical injuries. Diabetes, tuberculosis, and kidney failure are the most common illnesses among the older undocumented community.”<sup>18</sup> As undocumented Mexican immigrants cannot receive government assistance due to their legal status, their health is at risk due to the common diseases prevalent among undocumented immigrants being too expensive to treat. As a result of the excessive cost of treatment of diseases commonly found amongst undocumented Mexican immigrants, often severe diseases are forced to go untreated. Overall, as undocumented Mexican immigrants look for a prosperous future within the

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.



U.S., the ecocultural factors adversely affect the undocumented Mexican immigrant community by forcing older adults to work into retirement. Yet, the lack of social services among older undocumented Mexican immigrants has cast complications in seeking medical assistance due to the cost of medical services. In addition to discussing of the limitations of undocumented Mexican immigrants regarding language, employment, and social support, the distance and inability to travel back to Mexico pose a series of adverse ecocultural factors within the U.S. When looking at how undocumented Mexican immigrants' mental health is impacted by distance, it is essential to discuss the laws within the U.S. that implement harsh realities within the undocumented Mexican immigrant community. Since undocumented immigrants are not U.S. citizens, undocumented immigrants residing within the U.S. cannot travel internationally due to the 1798 Alien and Sedition Act. The 1798 Alien and Sedition Act enabled the "views of foreigners as national threats, restricted immigrant residency, and facilitated the process of deporting immigrants."<sup>19</sup> Seemingly, through the act, the ideals of immigration in 1798 demonstrated the fear of national threats, resulting in the U.S. inserting a fine line of who is allotted the chance to reside within the nation. Yet, as times changed, new immigration policies were incorporated within the U.S. But in 1996, further enforcement within the U.S. enabled stricter reforms for undocumented residents. As undocumented Mexican immigrants looked to immigrate to the U.S. for a better future, in 1996, "The Illegal

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<sup>19</sup> Allison McCord Stafford et al., "Documentation Status and Self-Rated Physical Health Among Latinx Young Adult Immigrants: The Mediating Roles of Immigration and Healthcare Stress," *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities*, (2022): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40615-022-01264-z>.

Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act were passed, which strengthened the enforcement of legal sanctions for undocumented immigrants and increased border control.”<sup>20</sup> Due to the 1996 immigration reform stance, the ability for undocumented Mexican immigrants to attain a better future had become attainable, but at extreme risks. With harsh immigration policies currently impacting the ability of undocumented Mexican immigrants to settle as U.S. residents, the complications of life for undocumented Mexican immigrants are further exacerbated when the death of a loved one results from Mexico. When Mexican immigrants decide to migrate to the U.S., those who are undocumented are aware of the inability to travel back to their homeland. In reaction, once an undocumented Mexican immigrant steps foot on U.S. soil, due to the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act, ability to travel back home is further complicated. If an undocumented Mexican immigrant were to travel for a transnational death, their ability to return home might be bound by deportation. A transnational death is “the death of a loved one in their home country while the immigrant is living in the U.S...they are often faced with having to mourn the death of their loved ones from afar and with limited support and resources.”<sup>21</sup> In reaction, due to deaths occurring over international borders, as undocumented Mexican immigrants are forced to let their loved ones go without seeing them, their mental health could be impacted due to the inability to say goodbye. By remaining in the U.S., undocumented

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Luz M. Garcini et al., “Miles over Mind: Transnational Death and Its Association with Psychological Distress among Undocumented Mexican Immigrants.,” *Death Studies* 44, no. 6 (July 2020): 357, doi:10.1080/07481187.2019.1573862.

immigrants' mental health is damaged by having low support and resources. Within the same study, Garcini correlated how the mental health effects amongst undocumented Mexican immigrants who have experienced transnational death "is significantly associated with clinical levels of psychological distress that may often require psychological intervention, which is not available to this population."<sup>22</sup> As a result, due to the distance and the inability to travel back home for transnational death, undocumented Mexican immigrants are forced to bear the loss of a loved one alone. By association, psychological distress results from the distance barrier from not being able to grieve a goodbye properly. In addition, due to the ecocultural factor imposed by the U.S. Immigration System, the laws constructed to inhibit migration enable the damage to undocumented Mexican immigrants' mental health by causing psychological distress.

#### **Adolescent Ecocultural Factors:**

Immigrant children within the U.S. have been exposed to severe ecocultural factors. As a result of such exposure, Mexican immigrant children have dealt with severe implications within their communities. According to a 2013 study by Pew Hispanic Research Center, it estimated "4.5 million U.S. citizen children live in families in which one or both parents are undocumented."<sup>23</sup> Due to the high estimated amount of U.S. citizen children living with one or both parents presenting undocumented immigration

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 363.

<sup>23</sup> Lauren E. Gulbas and Luis H. Zayas, "Exploring the Effects of U.S. Immigration Enforcement on the Well-Being of Citizen Children in Mexican Immigrant Families," *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 3, no. 4 (July 1, 2017): 567, doi:10.1080/07481187.2019.1573862.

status, the implications of immigration stressors could inhibit a child's ability to prosper within the U.S. It is essential to note that in reaction to the 4.5 million children residing in a household where immigration status is in question, one of the varying effects amongst Mexican immigrant children pertains to their parents' labor. Since undocumented immigrants cannot qualify for decent waged labor due to their immigration status, Mexican immigrant childrens' parents are often forced to eke out a living within low-paying and long labor conditions. According to a study conducted by Hall and Greenman in 2013, "undocumented parents often work in the lowest echelons of the U.S. labor force, meaning many children with undocumented parents grow up in poverty, experiencing higher rates of material hardship and unstable, overcrowded, or poor-quality housing."<sup>24</sup> Through this study, without having legal immigration status, the inability to thrive within the U.S. as an undocumented Mexican immigrant is associated with adverse factors. As a result, children of undocumented immigrants are forced to endure a life of isolation. Still, due to their parents' inability to acquire a suitable job, most undocumented immigrants are prone to a poverty-fated life. In association, due to the extreme working conditions within undocumented Mexican immigrant households, children within these households bare the fate of ecocultural factors posing substantial and adverse effects on their lives.

An important ecocultural factor that impacts the life of Mexican immigrant children lies in the scope of their well-being. The health of Mexican immigrant children,

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<sup>24</sup> Julia Gelatt, "Immigration Status and the Healthcare Access and Health of Children of Immigrants," *Social Science Quarterly* 97, no. 3 (2016): 541, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26612336>.

regardless of their immigration status, is crucially impinged when growing up in the U.S. To the extent of children having to endure the ecocultural factors inhibited by their familiar surroundings, a child could become a severe consequence of the improper immigration system of the U.S. As for native-born children growing up in the U.S., parental placement in one's household often avoids childlike worries. An issue presented throughout Mexican immigrant households are worries about whether one's future is granted the next day. Since one's legal status could determine one's future, "parents' worries about deportation may affect their mental health, which in turn affects children's health."<sup>25</sup> If a child of undocumented immigrants is continuously concerned about family issues, their personal life could begin to develop adverse ecocultural effects. Mexican children living in households of undocumented status could encounter cruel ecocultural factors if deportation were to occur in their households. A study focusing on U.S.-born and foreign children discuss the overstimulated fears of deportation that enable "children in these families [experience] feelings of abandonment, fear, social isolation, and anger."<sup>26</sup> When deportation has been experienced, a child of undocumented Mexican immigrants has been through adverse effects of ecocultural factors that could impact their developmental outcomes. Petterson and Albers found how immigration stressors could affect children by "patterns of substance use, internalizing behavioral problems such as anxiety and depression, and externalizing behavioral problems such as hyperactivity,

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Krista M. Perreira and India J. Ornelas, "The Physical and Psychological Well-Being of Immigrant Children," *The Future of Children* 21, no. 1 (2011): 201, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41229017>.

aggression, and conduct disorders.”<sup>27</sup> In reaction, Mexican immigrant children may not be able to deal with the pain and isolation from the deportation of their parents. Yet, as children are in a position of bijou power to control any situation around their home life, due to the stress caused by the familiar issues of the real world, a child may more likely to get off track. A study conducted by Charles and Hurst reports “evidence of intergenerational similarity in the propensity to hold certain assets, leading them to conclude that children either mimic their parents’ behavior or hold similar preferences.”<sup>28</sup> By the study contrasted by Charles and Hurst, one can view the frame in how children could develop the constant stress of their undocumented parents. As children are found to develop psychological effects from the inhibited stress, some may be unable to manage the ghastly stressors. Due to ecocultural factors posing stagnant risks to Mexican immigrant children, children may result in equipping patterns of substance abuse to deal with the ecocultural factors in their lives. As the research from Petterson and Albers eluded, adverse ecocultural factors could be presented within a child through internalizing and externalizing behaviors, such as anxiety, depression, hyperactivity, and conduct disorders. By children having to stress about their familiar issues and pubescent stress, the total effects upon one could further progress the progression of substance abuse or even severe psychological effects.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 204.

<sup>28</sup> Deborah A. Cobb-Clark and Vincent A. Hildebrand, “The Wealth of Mexican Americans,” *The Journal of Human Resources* 41, no. 4 (2006): 842, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41229017>.

In terms of seeking an explanation for why Mexican children of undocumented immigrants or undocumented children obtain such adverse effects, one could investigate the inability to thrive in the U.S. as an immigrant. A 2011 study found that “[a]mong noncitizen children up to age seventeen, 37 percent lacked a usual source of care and 30 percent had not seen a medical doctor in the past year.”<sup>29</sup> The evidence presented indicates that undocumented children have a disadvantage in attaining required medical assistance. Because undocumented Mexican immigrants cannot qualify for social services due to their immigration status, households who may be in desperate need of government assistance do not even qualify for assistance. Research regarding how the well-being of immigrant children is affected entails “Because most children depend on their parents to obtain health insurance, parental citizenship and immigration status can influence children’s health insurance status.”<sup>30</sup> The research denotes how the role of the parent entails disadvantages in obtaining access to medical services. With children being dependent on their parents, Mexican immigrant children are unable to seek the benefits of medical services. However, within the literature, Gelatt noted that even though Mexican immigrants lack the ability to seek medical assistance due to their legal status, the quality of care was found to be in harm when needing medical assistance. According to Gelatt, “children in immigrant families may have less access to high-quality doctors who can accurately diagnose common childhood ailments, even though they see doctors for annual

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<sup>29</sup> Krista M. Perreira and India J. Ornelas, “The Physical and Psychological Well-Being of Immigrant Children,” *The Future of Children* 21, no. 1 (2011): 208, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41229017>.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 207.

checkups at similar rates as children in native families.”<sup>31</sup> Through the research by Gelatt, since the medical assistance sought by Mexican immigrants is found to be a lesser quality of native-born citizens, children of undocumented immigrants may be bound to improper medical assistance. Due to the lesser quality treatment being implemented, the ability to diagnose common illnesses is bound to be complicated by the resources allotted to Mexican immigrants. Overall, due to undocumented immigrant parents' lack of healthcare coverage, their children are implicated by ecocultural factors. Ecocultural factors are then intertwined into the lives of Mexican immigrant children by their undocumented Mexican parents' inaccessible access to social benefits. The treatment found within undocumented Mexican households denotes that some seek medical treatment at a lesser quality, which could lead to strenuous health complications for Mexican immigrant children, regardless of their legal status.

In continuation, it is essential to analyze further the surrounding research about one's ecocultural factors at home. Due to the fears of deportation occurring, where one's household could be displaced, a cloud of silence has reigned over Mexican immigrants. An article where interviews were conducted to discuss the impacts of being a Mexican immigrant in the U.S., discussed the pressures of adolescents to keep their families' immigration status a secret. According to Gulbas, "the cultural script of silence could set into motion a series of emotional or family dynamics that negatively affected the well-being of citizen children. The cultural script of silence shaped children's cognitive and

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<sup>31</sup> Julia Gelatt, “Immigration Status and the Healthcare Access and Health of Children of Immigrants,” *Social Science Quarterly* 97, no. 3 (2016): 551, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26612336>.



emotional expression."<sup>32</sup> Through this research conducted by Gulbas, one can view the reasoning behind why silence occurs. Due to the possibility of families being split up, deportation has caused a significant rise in silence among undocumented Mexican immigrants, as fears of speaking about one's immigration status, Mexican communities have been bound to silence in pressure to prevent any risk of deportation. In the essence of how children could be at the hands of experiencing adverse ecocultural factors, it is vital to discuss how discrimination inhibits the success of Mexican immigrant children. According to Perreira and Ornelas, immigrant youth exposed to or are taunted by discrimination "report more anxiety, more depressive symptoms, more risky health behaviors, lower self-esteem, and reduced academic motivations and expectations."<sup>33</sup> As a result of the study conducted, one can see the ways in which discrimination affects the youth and enables adverse mental health behaviors. As ecocultural factors impose risks of developing low-self-esteem and reduced academic motivations, Mexican immigrant children may have to deal with such effects as they mature. Yet, due to the extraneous effects of discrimination on children, their ability to achieve a successful developmental outcome could be jeopardized. Through exposure to discrimination and the cultural script of silence, children tend to adhere to odd mental stability, developing anxiety, depression, lack of motivation, and low morale.

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<sup>32</sup> Lauren E. Gulbas and Luis H. Zayas, "Exploring the Effects of U.S. Immigration Enforcement on the Well-Being of Citizen Children in Mexican Immigrant Families," *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 3, no. 4 (July 1, 2017): 59, doi:10.1080/07481187.2019.1573862.

<sup>33</sup> Krista M. Perreira and India J. Ornelas, "The Physical and Psychological Well-Being of Immigrant Children," *The Future of Children* 21, no. 1 (2011): 200, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41229017>.

## **American Dream and Criminalization:**

When seeking to conceptualize what is the American dream, there are many components that make up the qualification of attaining a successful dream. In research Schudson, derivations of the American dream illustrate the different conceptions of individuals. Schudson writes, “The American dream is “the great national suggestion” that anyone, with hard work according to the rules, has a reasonable prospect of succeeding in life.”<sup>34</sup> As such, the main perception of the American dream evolves into the belief that by working hard, one can attain the overall goal in this new land. In different literature written by Hauhart, the focus is centered on the evolution of the American dream. In the literature, discussion persists with Adams’ interpretation, which declares “the American *dream*, that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement.”<sup>35</sup> Adams’ interpretation closely reflects varied interpretations of what ought to be of the American dream: any individual, equipped by their ability and capability, can reach desired goals due to the greater prospects of the U.S. Often, dreaming of being able to have a better future for an individual and or their families are the conditional perceptions for trying to reach an American dream. However, the issues remain regarding the goals of undocumented Mexican immigrants as they bear depictions associated with criminalization.

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<sup>34</sup> Michael Schudson, “American Dreams,” *American Literary History* 16, no. 3 (2004): 568, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3568068>.

<sup>35</sup> Robert C. Hauhart, “American Sociology’s Investigations of the American Dream: Retrospect and Prospect.” *The American Sociologist* 46, no. 1 (2015): 66, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43955567>.

Criminalization is critical to discuss as its formulation and effects, regardless of one's immigration status, depicts Mexican immigrants (and Mexicans in general) as a criminal. The process of criminalization within the community of Mexican immigrants denotes conflict within the scope of laws of the U.S. and the perceptions of Mexican immigrants. Rios discusses the criminalization of young men of color within the U.S. Criminalization does not only coexist within the field of law, but also expels the association of a criminal. As Rios explains:

“hypercriminalization empowers and emboldens the criminal justice system, law enforcement, and vigilantes to harass, arrest, and shoot these young men at will. This youth control complex-the coalescing of various social institutions to punish, stigmatize, and dehumanize marginalized young people- provides the justification for law enforcement try to render young black and Latino bodies as disposable.”<sup>36</sup>

In general, the concept of hypercriminalization shines upon the injustices that Mexican immigrants face due to their apparent conception of being of Mexican descent or descriptions. Through Rios' excerpt, the criminal justice system and law enforcement have provoked harassment and vicious treatment that jeopardize the stability of Mexican young men. Often, the societal conceptional view of identifying as Mexican entails one to be part of activities that would harm the community. In reaction to being viewed as a culprit of illegal activities and interfere with the safety of the American public, Mexican young men are dehumanized and treated as unworthy of respect and civility. The treatment experienced by these young Mexican men and their resulting behavior in

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<sup>36</sup> Victor M. Rios, “Deadly Injustice,” in *Trayvon Martin, Race, and the Criminal Justice System*, ed. Devon Johnson, Amy Farrell, and Patricia Y. Warren (New York University Press, 2015), 60, <https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9781479849680.003.0008>.

response to this treatment confirms the stigma that authority figures, when in reality, the behavior is more of a protest to the authoritative attempt at social control.

### **Mexico's Stance:**

The criminalization depicted within the undocumented Mexican immigrants presents unequal and injustice-filled nodes of institutional discrimination. On the account that Mexican immigrants are frowned upon based on the preconception that a skin tone would provoke one to take part in illicit actions, Mexican immigrants also bear the cost of being criminalized for simply seeking a prosperous future for themselves and their loved ones. Soltero's work on Mexican-born immigrants living in Chicago, describes such acts through the remittances migrants provide to better sustain their beloved ones from afar: "People send money as part of a social obligation and to affirm their ongoing role as members of a family or social network. The social regulation regime that shapes these exchanges is based on ideologies of kinship, gender, and intergenerational relations, which are in turn part of broader social and cultural processes."<sup>37</sup> In fact, remittances are so common, they are seen as an obligation of living and working in the U.S. However, loved one's reliance on them have caused a form of dependency from those working from afar.

The reasoning behind the pragmatic push to migrate into the U.S. has been further facilitated by the state of economic and social conditions in Mexico. According to Morris,

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<sup>37</sup> Jose Soltero, "Determinants of Remittances to Mexico From Mexican-Born Immigrants in Chicago.," *Journal of Poverty* 13, no. 3 (July 2009): 322, doi: 10.1080/10875540903164008.

Mexico has been dealing with low economic activity due to the corruption across the country. Morris outlines that Columbian cartels turned to Mexico supplies when the U.S. government shut down Columbian's South Florida supply chain access.<sup>38</sup> This allowed Mexican cartels to thrive in their respect due to their geographical location. Further evidence is documented by Morris when he states, "By the turn of the century, over 70 percent of cocaine and a large portion of the marijuana entering the U.S. market were coming through Mexico."<sup>39</sup> By the end of the century, the illicit actions of illegal drugs distribution were sought by those seeking wealth amongst those seeking the narcotic association, including law enforcement. As *The Reforma* reports, "of the 357 Mexican law enforcement officials detained in 2009 for assisting narco-traffickers, 90 percent belonged to local police."<sup>40</sup> *The Reforma* reported there seemed to be a significant level of corruption within the actors that are supposed to prevent such corruption. Even so, the report highlights serious issues within the economy of Mexico. By the nature and extent of how many police officers were found to be involved within drug corruption, an avid factor could be linked to the low work and wage prosperity of Mexico. In "Immigration from the Inside Out: Understanding Mexico's Job(less) Situation" written by Carmen Ochoa Álvarez, discussion is placed on the jobless and low wages job sector of Mexico and how these factors project emigration of the Mexican population. Examples of the factors that pose as an igniter to migrate to the U.S. could be found by the research Ochoa

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<sup>38</sup> Stephen D. Morris, "Corruption, Drug Trafficking, and Violence in Mexico," *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 18, no. 2 (2012): 35, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24590861>.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 30.

Álvarez equipped. For instance, it was reported that the wages being administered were insufficient, by which “professionals (including jobs from newspaper reporter to social worker to nurse) earned from US\$6 to \$15 a day.<sup>41</sup> In this excerpt it is apparent that by professionals receiving insufficient and low wages, there is a critical demand to provide sufficient paying jobs for the overall Mexican population. Within the same literature, another scholar, Rodolfo Turan, describes the mass migration from Mexico as an exodus of Mexican immigrants, in which, he states “in the past two decades, 1 out of 17 professionals has left the country.<sup>42</sup> By this report, evidence has displayed how the insufficient pay and jobless labor market of Mexico has resulted in a mass movement. However, to understand the trajectory of youth involvement in the mass migration of Mexican immigrants, it is critical to discuss the significant numbers that solely represent the youthful population of Mexico. Considering the mass migration pertaining to insufficient jobs, Zinser reported that “50 percent of young people aged 15 to 24, including the most educated, are leaving Mexico in search of better opportunities.<sup>43</sup> As reports denote the youth is critically impacted by the low job prosperity within their nation, many have resorted to seeking emigration as a method to resolve their low job prospects. However, the result of having to leave their homeland enables greater risk within the population of Mexico to depend upon the remittances and low job wages available to condition their needs once their beloved ones set upon migrating to the U.S.

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<sup>41</sup> Carmen Ochoa Álvarez, “Immigration from the inside out: Understanding Mexico’s Job(Less) Situation through the Views of Middle-Class Mexicans,” *Latin American Perspectives* 35, no. 1 (2008): 128, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27648077>.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 129.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

## **The Present Study**

The sections provided so far have summarized the general issues affecting undocumented Mexican immigrants when they migrate to the U.S., which only further exacerbates existing inequalities. The present study seeks to understand the extent of the influence of these issues using qualitative interviews that are equipped to capture the lived experiences articulated within the Mexican immigrant community. In order to understand the forces implicated within the scope of ecocultural factors amongst Mexican immigrant children, I sought to interview parent-adult child pairs in which at least the parent was a Mexican immigrant. Questions varied into their personal lives and sought to uncover any adverse consequences of ecocultural factors. Interviews were conducted with Mexican immigrants living in Northeast Central Texas. Participants were recruited through emails and social media posts. Pre-screen questions were asked to uncover if the interviewee would meet the study's requirements. In total 10 interviews were conducted (or five parent-adult child pairs). The interviews took place through Zoom and interviews were transcribed for later qualitative coding and analysis. The recruitment of participants, the interview method and script were approved by Texas State University's Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A). All protocols were followed to protect the identity of the participants.

The interview regarded questions for separate sets of adult children and their parents to try to counter the issues they may or may not have faced due to ecocultural factors in their environment. By seeking a pair of interview candidates, the concept of family relations is targeted within the ecocultural relationship to decipher how a child's

adult life has been impacted by their surrounding environment. The interviews began on October 18th, 2022 and concluded November 27th, 2022. The qualitative analysis revealed several themes that emerged from the interviews in which ecocultural factors were found to have detrimental on the lives of children of undocumented Mexican immigrants.

### **Findings:**

Based on the extant literature, I originally hypothesized that the stressors created by ecocultural factors have progressed vicariously into the lives of adult Mexican children if their parents are of undocumented status. Interestingly, the responses revealed that if one's parents were of mixed status (one parent was a citizen and another was undocumented), the child still encountered fears, but reported more stability within their household while growing up. The issues transposed from being children to undocumented Mexican immigrants pertain to the separation of families, the appeals of society, the mental health effects imposed by silencing and fearing deportation, and the deepening impacts from socioeconomic inequalities. Below, I present the participants' life stories and recollections of their upbringing that highlight heavy themes of gratitude, resilience, and determination. But first, I discuss the answers to questions asked with the intention to having the adult children reflect about their upbringings and how they handled their parents' status in U.S. society, while also dealing with their daily struggles. These responses revealed some of the most important themes of the study.

*How do you feel about being from an immigrant family? Do you think this is a significant part of your identity?:* This question found all adolescents to discuss honor



and respect for their Mexican heritage. The significance of this question denotes that the ecocultural factors presented to the broad Mexican immigrant children to be considerate of one's culture as they grew up.

*Did being from an immigrant family create any barriers for you?:* Through asking this question, the main point in question reached the feelings of one's younger core memories. Even though most interview subjects found difficulty recalling their age, they denoted minor nodes of isolation and silence within their communication skills.

*Out of all the stressors you have, which one is the most draining?:* In asking this question, most responses detailed the issues of communicating with their parents about their issues, but the main stressor varied depending one's immigration status. Those who did not have to worry about deportation anymore were found to worry about materialized items, in as looking for homes, settling in new towns-practically normalized their concerns as their parents' immigration status improved. Individuals who still had undocumented immigrant parents, they still immersed themselves within their parents' fears, meaning they worried about deportation and high portion labor.

*How did you communicate with your parent(s) about your struggles as a young adult in America? How has being a child of Mexican immigrants impacted your ability to discuss your adolescent issues in comparison to their own struggles as an immigrant?:*

These questions created a connection between a young adult's issues in comparison with the issues found to impact their parents. Many found it easy to just communicate with their parents because they were close, however, discussion also rose in line with

understanding how their parents' struggles posed too difficult to even mention one's own issues.

*Do you feel that your parents have accomplished the American Dream? Does this dream differ from yours?:* This question required the interviewees to compare the perspectives between children of Mexican immigrants and their parents. In terms of seeking a certain response, the question sought to construct the dreams, hopes, and aspects of the interview subjects. This question dealt with the most critical responses of adolescents due to their ecocultural factors posed in their life.

### **Their Stories:**

#### *Interview of Parent Participant No. 1*

Within the interview conducted with parent participant no. 1, fears and isolation were discussed as they recounted their journey toward attaining the successful American dream. When asked about the process of acquiring proper immigration status, the individual discussed how when they first migrated into the U.S., they tried to receive proper immigration status to sustain a successful life for them and their future children. By seeking assistance within the Mexican community of their town, they managed to attain a lawyer that could begin the process for receiving resident status. Parent participant no. 1 discussed the stress about having to work many hours to extend the wages received. For instance, they mentioned the long grueling hours they worked at first because one must start from the bottom to find a respectable job path. However, upon finding labor, expenses and remittances have caused a major effort for continuing working. When asked about their reasoning for migrating to the U.S., they mentioned

how they understood the U.S. would provide a mixture of better opportunities than Mexico, and upon getting married in Mexico, parent participant no. 1 found that Mexico would not be the home for their family due to low economic prosperity.

When parent participant no. 1 was asked about the concept of the American dream, parent participant no. 1 found that the American dream pertained to the actions of one leaving their homeland, migrating into the U.S. with the ability to provide and build for one's future endeavors. Participant no. 1 mentioned that they had attained a successful American dream. They described the process of trying to acquire resident status was pivotal to reaching a successful American dream due to no longer having to fear deportation. Parent participant no. 1 went on to mention that before their resident status, they feared that the work they had put to their American dream, starting a business and having raised young adults who benefit society, would be destroyed by being separated. However, with the open access of resources available to them, the American dream had become a reality due to being legally accepted in the U.S.

*Interview of Parent Participant No. 2:*

By interviewing parent participant no. 2, focus on family and protection was heavy for them since their family heavily relied upon one another. As the interview began, parent participant no. 2 mentioned how their journey into the U.S. was due to their parents forcing him to migrate into the U.S. to follow their other family at the age of 11. By moving to the U.S., they found support from their family to help their process of migrating into a new country. For instance, they worked at a restaurant when they first arrived to save up money for any necessities. They described not being able to go to

school because of having to work. When they met their spouse, they were able to work on their residency application. The issues described by participant no. 2 when they first arrived highlighted issues with the language barrier and acquiring specific items because of the inability to communicate. Once they had children, they discovered the language barrier persisted when their children seeking homework help from their other parent. In the long run, the parent also noted how they were able to fix the barrier by seeking other forces to understand English, such as taking English classes to help migrating into the U.S. easier.

When seeking to uncover the ecocultural factors most potent to parent participant no. 2, the parent found that when they first moved, not knowing English was the biggest challenge. The interviewee articulated that the language barrier posed issues with feeling isolated from their surroundings and even discrimination due to not speaking English swiftly. They also emphasized the importance of speaking English to not only provide a better future for themselves, but to be able to protect and provide for their future family. As their children grew, they denoted that isolation derived in their family due to having to work many hours a week to provide for the high cost of living. When asked about the American dream, parent participant no. 2 argued that they are living the American dream. They were fortunate enough to migrate into the U.S. at a young age and were able to adapt to the U.S. successfully once learning English. Parent participant no. 2 worked and learned about their new culture, which prompted their parents' American dream to be broadcasted to them at a young age, and they were slowly able to reach it by furthering their adaptation to U.S. culture.

### *Interview of Parent Participant No. 3*

Parent participant no. 3's interview denoted nodes of the struggles an undocumented Mexican immigrant in current light. The interview conducted, described the process of trying to migrate into the U.S. and through the process the inability to acquire social services held back the prosperity of the individual. The parent discussed entering the U.S. in 1996 undocumented and worked in the U.S. from 2000. During their first time in the U.S., they worked to provide remittances to their family and they only left after disease struck their family. The parent mentioned how they feared not being able to say goodbye to their loved ones, so they risked the ability to live in the U.S. to assist their loved ones in Mexico. Upon returning to Mexico, they felt unsatisfied with their labor and placement in their society due to the low economic position in their community.

As time passed, they re-entered the U.S. and their new stay was brought with forming a family. Parent participant no. 3 started a family and with time, they were able to form a family. Yet, with time going on, they remained undocumented until their partner received their residency. But before their partner received their residency, they both worked endlessly to provide enough for their children. Parent participant no. 3 argued that they felt obligated to work endlessly to give their family anything they needed. But, with having to work long hours, they believed that their American dream was to migrate into a new country, where they were able to work hard for their dreams and provide a sufficient future for their loved ones. Eventually, their ecological surroundings posed for their family to work hard for anything they wanted. Parent participants mentioned how they understood their life was not easy, but it was not impossible to improve. Through

their efforts, parent participant no. 3 mentioned that their American dream had posed difficulty with the language barrier but did not prevent their dreams.

*Interview of Parent Participant No. 4*

The interview conducted with the participation of parent participants no. 4, my study was able to include the scope of how a Mexican immigrant's American dream was attained through the abiding and navigating a complex immigration process. Parent participant no. 4 discussed how their journey to the U.S. was rather out of the blue due to never really thinking about migrating to the U.S. when they were younger. Instead, parent participant no. 4 mentioned that by being married, her interest in emigrating into the U.S. were prominent due to wanting to provide a better future for their children. The process of emigrating into the U.S. was further accelerated by parent participant no. 4 marrying into a family that had begun their assimilation process. Parent participant no. 4 moved to U.S. under their partners work permit being expedited by their in-laws anteriorly acquiring their U.S. residency, working under an oil company. Eventually, parent participant no. 4, through their partner were able to migrate legally into the U.S. and receive the proper access to American resident benefits. As time went on, parent participant no. 4 discussed they were able to find labor without having to speak much English due to their employer only requiring a social security to work. Essentially, the process toward becoming a resident and citizen became rudimental by seeking lawyers and working to pay their fees.

During the time of parent participant no. 4 settling process, the ecocultural factors presented in the life of their children detailed elements of being isolated from one's own

culture due to their parents' focusing on meshing into their new ecological environment. The employment acquired by parent participant no. 4 allotted them to focus and be present in their children's life. Through their effortless process of attaining residency and citizenship, their worry in the U.S. was uncanny in comparison to the worries of an undocumented Mexican immigrant. When asked about whether they had acquired a successful American dream, parent participant no. 4 broached about how their American dream was easily accessed due to their marriage unraveling into living in the U.S. Seemingly, through the connection of their partner, the American dream was journeyed to portray and influence an extraordinary future for their children. By the connections entailed by parent participant no. 4, they managed to combat the adverse ecocultural factors that inhibit the emigration process for some undocumented Mexican immigrants.

#### *Interview of Parent Participant No. 5*

The interview conducted by parent participant no. 5 included the narrative of an undocumented Mexican single parent striving through the U.S immigration process in order to sustain a prosperous and protected future within the U.S. When parent participant was younger, they mentioned how in Mexico, they went to the university and studied public administration. But as they met their husband, they agreed on emigrating into the U.S. to provide an ideal future for their children. Parent participant no. 5 argued that the potential life they could have had in Mexico would have been limited due to the resources and opportunism being unparalleled to the U.S. Even through parent participant no. 5 had a degree and career in Mexico, they chose to leave their previous life and hard efforts to better boost their family projections and dreams. Eventually, the parent

participant lost her partner when their second child was recently born. The passing of their partner caused many hardships and issues in their personal life, but due to their close relationship with their loved in-laws, they were able to receive an extension of help in terms of raising their children.

Ultimately, through their journey in the U.S., parent participant no. 5 tried to navigate the immigration process but are left with no solution other than waiting for their eldest child to acquire their residency through them at the age of 21. Parent participant no. 5 mentioned how difficult it is to become a proper resident of the U.S. due to it being too costly and often taking 21 years to attain residency. Through this light, they discussed how not being a proper resident has caused fears toward I.C.E. and their actions.

Eventually, discussion of living in silence due to not having proper immigration status has made them cautious of their every action and how they are portrayed due to their children depending on them. But due to not having proper immigration status, parent participant no. 5 discussed how their American dream is mostly to help their children. Being left without their partner had caused many painful issues in their life, but they understand that being there for their children is a form of keeping the memory of their loved one. But they also discussed the need to work constantly to better assist their family. As they continue living in the U.S., they feel that their American dream is met by having a job and being able to provide every need necessary for their family. Overall, their ecocultural factors broadcast a close family that is assisted by in-laws, but due to their immigration status, they have much less time with family since they are the sole-providers for their family. Parent participant no. 5 understands that their American dream



is to provide everything for their family because their effort is the key to keeping hope and striving for a better future for their children.

*Interview of Adult Child Participant No. 1*

When discussing the prominent ecocultural factors within the Zoom interview, participant no. 1 noted good and negative ecocultural factors, which were subject to change along with their parents' immigration status. Participant no. 1 had been fortunate enough to help their parents with acquiring their proper immigration status as they turned 21. Yet, participant no. 1 found the U.S. Immigration system to present extravagant stressors in their early childhood because of their parent's undocumented immigration status. Understanding how participant no. 1's parents were undocumented, they worried about deportation constantly. Participant no. 1 noted in the interview how after 9/11, the tension, treatment, and hostility toward Mexican immigrants shifted due to the importance and implementation of homeland security.

Among the fears of deportation present in this interview, other ecocultural factors posed within their ecological environment remained, such as fearing deportation. Participant no. 1 mentioned fearing traveling to major cities with their family because if one were to be questioned by police for their immigration status, one could face deportation and suddenly alter lives. Along the realm of destroying lives, if one were to be deported, the opportunities of many could be diminished by a traffic stop. Thus, haunting fears prevalent within participant no. 1 were developed throughout most of their life until their parents became properly documented immigrants. As their parents no longer face the passivity of deportation, their concerns over having their life altered are

not prevalent any longer. By seeing the dominant fears dictate the access of their local surroundings, participant no. 1 found less stress as they grew in age.

Ultimately, when asked whether if their parents had attained the American dream, participant no. 1 felt that their parents had taught them how to measure their success without the need to measure success in a materialized manner. Instead, they responded “the American dream is just the opportunity to do whatever it is that you want to do without fear. I think the immigrant parents for a lot of their life. They were struggling to get basic footing, and by basic footing.” In this quote, participant no. 1 mentions their contextual understanding of what the American dream is but proceeds to elaborate upon how their parents may view the dream. By participant no. 1 understanding the demanding work and skills posed by their parent, they construct the underlying basic needs of fulfillment to determine the rate of success of one’s American dream. Rather than deeming the amount of money one makes-the materialized obsession is obsolete in their reality. In matters of having sufficient resources, if bountiful then success if equivalent. Being the first born within their family, the importance to excel and reach far held them pressured to reach success, yet the manner of success was reached by setting the standard high.

#### *Interview of Adult Child Participant No. 2*

The aspects found within the ecological environment of participant no. 2 denoted aspects of distant communication, fears only silenced by progression of their parent’s immigration status, and resiliency. In the life of participant no. 2, they discuss how at an early age, their father was undocumented and due to their economic status, their parents

struggled economically until their father became able to work legally in the U.S. Before their father was able to gain residency, participant no. 2 felt distant from their father growing up. In the interview, when asked how they were able to communicate with their parents about their issues, they responded with how distant she felt from their father. Growing up, when they needed help with school, they would rather have to wait for their parent who was a U.S. citizen, to get home from working long hours to understand their homework. In reaction, participant no. 2 blames the distance between their parents on having to go to one parent for something and the other for another need. Considering seeking to comprehend the ecocultural within participant no. 2, by having to favor one parent for assistance, the socially deprived aspects of the participant had become havoc in their adulthood.

Participant no. 2 discussed how prideful they were of their heritage. As the interview proceeded, the interview focused on the personal development of the adolescent and how they felt about their perspective life. When asked about their development as children, they mentioned how they feared deportation due to their father being undocumented. By constantly fearing or thinking about their worst-case scenario, their family being separated by deportation, participant no. 2 mentioned as a result, continuous fears and anxiety promulgated throughout their childhood until their father became a proper residing immigrant.

#### *Interview of Adult Child Participant No. 3*

Interview Participant no. 3 found fondness of their culture when asked about how they felt about being from an immigrant family. In response, participant no. 3 mentioned

how difficult it had been to pursue higher education at a similar pace to others his age. At a younger age, interview participant no. 3 noted how difficult it had been going to school and being placed in advanced classes caused him to work hard for his grade.

Understanding the importance of being from an immigrant family, participant no. 3 mentioned how they valued their efforts with education because their parents were not fortunate enough to have the same opportunities as their children. By understanding their gifted opportunities, interview participant no. 3 often stressed about making their parents proud and succeeding in school became easy due to placing focus on their motivating reasons.

When asked about the specific ecocultural factors that impacted their development, participant no. 3 mentioned fears of deportation were often overwhelming and disruptive peace within them. As they matured and grew, participant no. 3 noted the fears of deportation slowly drifted as one of their parents became a resident. In deepening matters, due to the safety net provided by one parent having residency, the fears of deportation are prevalent, but are over sought by the protection of one family member. As their parent became a proper documented immigrant, the aspects and hopes of their American dream slightly became aligned and sufficient to further promote their motivating needs for succeeding in the U.S. as an immigrant.

#### *Interview of Adult Child Participant No. 4*

Participant no. 4 grew up receiving the benefits of a successful American dream. When looking into the early childhood development of the participant no. 4, their parents legally migrated from Mexico together, but through their grandfather, their parents were

able to get citizenship right before the birth of the participant. As their parents were fortunate to receive citizenship by parental advisor, the ability to emigrate into the U.S. were posed with easy access, where they were able to assimilate into their ecological environment. When asked how they felt about their heritage, participant no. 4 discussed issuance with keeping intact with their Mexican heritage. Since their parents were citizens, he grew up under the direct scope of American culture influence into their ecocultural development by means of their parents seeking to honor their American dream. In this light, participant no. 4 mentioned how they ended up having an issue of identity due to being Mexican heritage and American nationality. For instance, participant no. 4 mentioned how in school, they did not fit in with their culture due to not having much exposure to it in their development in their early years. As they discussed not fitting in well at a young age, the interview found notes of seeking to attain aspects of their culture by only speaking in Spanish in their home. Participant no. 4 regarded the benefits offered to him due to their parent's immigration status as significant influential into their development into adulthood.

As participant no. 4 began to grow up, they understood that their work ethic and motivation was their form of achieving their American dream. While going to school, participant no. 4 focused severely on attaining great grades to be able to graduate debt free from college. Along with attaining higher education at a great price, their ability to triumph in their adulthood was furthered by their ambitious goals. Due to the motivation perceived by understanding the hardships assumed by their parents in México, the influence to attain a successful future was amplified into their work ethic of

understanding social conditions are much better in U.S. than in Mexico. Considering their parents being American Citizens, participant no. 4 felt that there was no issue in discussing their issues with their parents. But in terms of understanding the hardships heavily present in the Mexican economy, participant no. 4 did find difficulty comparing their social development with their parents since they had a much harder life growing up in Mexico, the need to complain about issues is refrained by knowing of their parents' hardships and experiences in Mexico.

*Interview of Adult Child Participant No. 5*

The interview conducted with participant no. 5 showcased the reality of being raised by a widowed single mother that is an undocumented Mexican immigrant. When asked about how participant no. 5 felt about their culture, the response denoted prideful notes of being a part of Mexican heritage. As they grew up, they found themselves to be amongst one of the few Mexican children in their classes in school. Participant no. 5 found themselves struggling to immerse themselves with their culture in school since there were very few individuals like them. By being a part of an ecological environment consisting of a single mother, the resources surrounding their environment were critical to the social development of participant no. 5. For instance, participant no. 5 recalled that their mother would often have major support after their father's passing by the family of their father stepping in to help raise their children. Furthering the conversation, participant no. 5 found that through their academics, they could assess the full potential of their American dream. In terms of analyzing their American dream, they felt that their role to attain a successful dream depended on their ability to exceed in school. As a

measure, participant no. 5 worked hard in high school to receive great assistance in their college education. Due to the varying ecocultural factors found within the ecological environment of participant no. 5, they felt pressured to succeed in their education to make their mother proud.

When analyzing the communication efforts with their parent, participant no. 5 felt that there were no complex relations that would infer their ability to communicate in any aspect. When asked about their communication with their parents and how they managed to discuss their personal issues with their parents, participant no. 5 mentioned their bond was so close that there was nothing that could not be discussed. In relating nature, they felt their bond strengthen due to their parent having similar notes of experiences as she studied the university in Mexico, they felt that they are the same but in distant years. The top priority of participant no. 5 deciphers nodes of ecocultural factors imposing the need to work hard and stay motivated in the effort to succeed in their own life and thank their parent for the great sacrifices made to acquire their version of the American dream. To fully complete the American dream, participant no. 5 discussed that by reaching the goals they have determined, they will not only make their parents proud, but will improve the type of lifestyle trended within their Mexican community.

**Summary:**

The results from this study revealed varying ecocultural effects impacting the lives of Mexican immigrants and their children attaining their American dream. The adult children interviewed discussed similar experiences of isolation. Participants reported feeling distant from their parents because the knowledge of their parents' experiences

inhibited adolescents from sharing portions of their life. Participant no. 2 discussed how as they grew up, they understood the difficulties their parents had been through as they lived and tried to establish themselves in a new country. By understanding the difficulties their parents faced, the hardships that were told as stories to them posed barriers of communication within their relationship. Not only did participant no. 2 feel isolated from their parents, but due to the work environment they equipped, they learned how to be alone. In another story, participant no. 4 talked about also feeling isolated from their culture due to not following the cultural preconditions found within Mexican cultural settings. Due to their parents acquiring a legal pathway when entering the U.S., the ecocultural factors in their environment pushed them away from their Mexican heritage. The key concept of participant no. 4 interview grasped a dimension of being isolated from their original culture due to assimilating into a new society.

As a part of the interviews conducted, nodes of mental and physical effects are coexistent within the data collected for adolescents. A complex trigger for adolescent Mexican immigrant found within the study pertained to the fears of I.C.E., which posed threats and concerns to many undocumented Mexican immigrant's children through fears of deportation. In the discussion involving participant no. 5, the conversation regarding I.C.E. detailed the fear of being a part of a separated family. In the discussion, since participant no. 5's parent is undocumented, participant no. 5 was found to have an ongoing fear of what if and how would they survive if they were to be separated. The ongoing fear provoked by I.C.E.'s method of deportation denotes variances of fears amongst others of similar nature. In a similar light, participant no. 1 included the



perception of being the eldest and carrying the fear of deportation constantly when growing up. In the interview, participant no. 1 articulated having random discussion growing up knowing plans of what to do once their parents were ever detained by I.C.E. In doing so, continuously having to worry and stress about their parent's safety and their future in the U.S., the never-ending fear peaks into their world. By continuing to carry this agonizing fear, their focus in school and home are affected by thinking about their deportation fears. These sorts of stressors, when looking at the study of Weisner, where early development exposure is important to the development of adults, construct the importance of ecocultural factors exposure to children when young. In this frame, the development of adolescents could detail issues of mental health like anxiety and depression, along with physical health matters such as panic attacks due to fearing a stressful inducing situation: deportation.

Seemingly, through conducting interviews with adolescent children of Mexican immigrants, even though many adolescent children were dealt with a mixture of complications when trying to attain their own American dream, wholesome ecocultural factors are also prompted in one's life. When asked about how they feel about their parent's American dream and how they can interpret their own dream, all participants included nodes to their parent's efforts in trying to reach their American dream. In terms of understanding wholesome ecocultural factors, when the adolescent participants responded, even though their answers depicted varied versions of a credible American dream for their parents, they each acknowledge the valiant effort displayed by their parents in order to help sustain their American lifestyle. In the eyes of the interviewed

adolescent children of Mexican immigrants, their ecocultural environment dealt with hardships in school, home, and in their own self-being, but throughout each story nodes to how critical their parents' continuous efforts to improve their lives and work hard to provide all necessary things impacted their ability to work hard for in their endeavors. By most of the participants seeing their parents face complete odds and fears when trying to attain their American dream, not only altered them of how to work hard but has procreated an ignition to exceed their parents' expectations.

In the scope of the interviews conducted with the adolescent participants' parents, the data collected included ceaseless amounts of dedication to acquiring an American dream. However, just as how participant's parent no. 4 had an effortless transmission into the U.S. due to their immigration status, parent participant no. 1,2,3, and 5 had difficulty assimilating into the U.S. In the interview conducted with parent participant 1, they discussed how at first, they had difficulty finding labor or assistance on account that a language barrier impeded resource. Eventually, by taking English classes, parent participant no. 1 was able to acquire a stable income under the table and provide resources to their family by speaking English and contributing to their income. In a contributing light, parent participant no. 3 also described the language barrier to impact their initial ability to progress as an immigrant in the U.S. Parent participant no. 3 further detailed how the American dream for them was to work to provide for their children, in hopes of sustaining an American dream where their children could receive the necessary recourses to succeed. On the concept of having to endlessly work, parent participant no. 5, discussed how one's immigration status is always at fault for not being able to qualify

for better paying labor. Because of undocumented Mexican immigrants having to work many hours to help sustain their family, parent participant no. 5 mentioned that their American dream was to help equip their children through school and into college no matter what. By this, parent participant no. 5 had to work many shifts as a waitress and promote good education in their home to accomplish their goal of sending their children to college.

With trying to conceptualize how ecocultural factors imposed and promoted Mexican immigrants' American dream ideals of hope and strength persevered when toxic ecocultural factors were impinged into their environment. For instance, ecocultural factors that posed threats were fears about deportation, I.C.E., and policing. In the case of parent participant no. 1,2,3, and 5, their undocumented immigration status promoted fears into their household, in which stemmed into the ecological factors of their children. Since their children discussed how fearful and anxious, they were towards the general topic of deportation, their ecocultural factors when growing up consisted of worrying about their safety and existence in the U.S. Yet, with being mindful of how tomorrow is not promised for undocumented Mexican immigrants, their efforts toward attaining their American dream were further fostered by their hopes toward helping their children reach their American dreams. For instance, parent participant no. 2, when asked if they had reached the American dream, articulated how their American dream was already being lived in. In their view, parent participant no. 2 felt that by coming into the U.S. at such a young age and becoming financially independent helped promote their work ethic to reaching their goals. By having to work from such a young age, parent participant no. 2 noticed that

with effort and work, accomplishments and goals can be equipped even when one is not a proper documented immigrant. Through incessant strives to reach their goals, Mexican immigrants like parent participant no. 2 had valued their American dreams as a transmission where one is able to succeed on their own by working hard. In fine, through the interviews composed alongside Mexican immigrants, the general value of their American dream is prominent and a core component toward trying to acquire a successful American dream. In the view of adolescent Mexican children of Mexican immigrants, their parent's efforts toward helping sustain a normal household, when facing adversity through ecocultural factors in new country further prompted their desire to prove their parent's American dream efforts purposeful.

**Conclusion:**

To conclude, the focus on my thesis persisted within finding out the forms in which ecocultural factors impact the lives of Mexican Immigrants. As a Mexican American immigrant, I have witnessed and seen deepened variances of ecocultural factors that impacted my view on how Mexican immigrants struggle trying to assimilate to a new environment. Understanding the arduous process of migrating to a new country as Mexican immigrant further prompted my ambition to look directly into the lives of adolescent immigrants. Through my research, literature was amassed surrounding the deepening ecocultural factors impacting the lives of Mexican immigrants and found adults struggling due to the lack of social security. Due to employers requiring a social security, undocumented Mexican immigrants are forced to find labor with low wages and poor conditions. The literature discussed restricted availability to resources for Mexican

immigrant families depending on their immigrant status. As Mexican immigrants focused on working for bare pay, they often were distant from their children due to having to work more rather than spend time with their offspring. Research also displayed the effects of mental and physical well-being by undocumented Mexican immigrants having to work endlessly in their older age and constantly fearing deportation. When looking at the research surrounding adolescent Mexican immigrants, the literature generally revealed issues related to their development into adulthood stemming from isolation, mental, and physical effects of broader ecocultural factors. Yet, within the literature, discussion also centered on the reciprocal relationship between a child and their parent due to children depending on their parents throughout their development, which impacts their ecological environment. In the same light, undocumented parents were posed with language barriers and cultural barriers when seeking to assimilate into their new environment, which would impact the reality of their offspring. In the research provided, there is discussion on why particular forces are against the allowance of undocumented Mexican immigrants. A factor found to be a relying reasoning for not wanting to allow mass immigration is due to hypercriminalization, which prompted parallels of criminalizing Mexican immigrants seeking to provide a better life for their families by continuous labor. A reasoning for why Mexican immigrants seek to assimilate into the U.S. is found to be that the economy of Mexico has been infiltrated by too much violence and corruption, which has posed low economic prosperity within the labor forces. The focus on my study eventually found that Mexican immigrant parents want the absolute best for their children. The sacrifices made by Mexican immigrant parents were worth the

adverse ecocultural factors presented in their lives, as long as their children were the beneficiaries of their efforts. Mexican immigrant parents in my study composed how their American dream were accomplished or will be accomplished by seeing their children prosper within their new home country. With the data collected from interviewing children of Mexican immigrant, their parents work, and efforts were a deed that did not go unnoticed by their children. As adolescents discussed their varying fears of I.C.E. and policing, deportation was a major contributor to why such fears were prominent in their lives. Adolescents also mentioned how there was a distant relationship or a close relationship with their parents, all of which depended on the efforts of seeking a close relationship. Overall, their parents' valiant efforts promoted the ecocultural factors of learning to work hard toward a goal because as their parents' immigration status improved, their goals and dreams were met, which improved their overall lifestyle. By adolescent Mexican immigrant children witnessing their parents accomplish outstanding dreams, like living in the U.S. as an undocumented resident and working hard to attain successful 'American Dream,' their own work ethic was prompted by valuing their parents' efforts and exceeding their expectations.

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## APPENDIX A. IRB Approval Letter, Texas State University.



*The rising STAR of Texas*

In future correspondence please refer to 8392

August 25, 2022

Axeel Rodriguez  
Texas State University  
601 University Dr.  
San Marcos, TX 78666

Dear Mr. Axeel Rodriguez,

Your application titled, '*Plantar pressure and kinematic gait assessment for individuals with chronic ankle instability*,' was reviewed by the Texas State University IRB and approved. It was determined there are: (1) research procedures consistent with a sound research design and they did not expose the subjects to unnecessary risk; (2) benefits to subjects are considered along with the importance of the topic and that outcomes are reasonable; (3) selection of subjects are equitable; and (4) the purposes of the research and the research setting are amenable to subjects' welfare and produced desired outcomes; indications of coercion or prejudice are absent, and participation is clearly voluntary.

In addition, the IRB found you will orient participants as follows: (1) signed informed consent is not required participation implies consent; (2) Provision is made for collecting, using and storing data in a manner that protects the safety and privacy of the subjects and the confidentiality of the data; (3) Appropriate safeguards are included to protect the rights and welfare of the subjects; (4) Participants will not compensation .

**This project was approved at the Expedited Review Level until July 31, 2023**

**Check the IRB website frequently for guidance on how to protect participants. It is the expectation that all researchers follow current federal and state guidelines.**

2. An amendment should be submitted in Kualii if there are changes to the protocol. The institution is not responsible for any actions regarding this protocol before approval. If you expand the project at a later date to use other instruments, please re-apply. Copies of your request for human subject's review, your application, and this approval are maintained in the Office of Research Integrity and Compliance.

Report any changes to this approved protocol to this office. Notify the IRB of any unanticipated events, serious adverse events, and breach of confidentiality within 3 days.

Sincerely,

Kaitlenn Ledford  
IRB Compliance Specialist  
Research Integrity and Compliance  
Texas State University  
CC: Dr. Ashley Arnio

OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND SPONSORED PROGRAMS  
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*This letter is an electronic communication from Texas State University-San Marcos, a member of The Texas State University System.*