

The Burden of Deportation on Children in Mexican Immigrant Families

In 2011, a record number of foreign-born individuals were detained and removed from the United States. This article looks at the impact enforcement policies have had on Mexican families more broadly and children specifically. Drawing on interviews with 91 parents and 110 children in 80 households, the author suggests that, similar to the injury pyramid used by public health professionals, a deportation pyramid best depicts the burden of deportation on children. At the top of the pyramid are instances that have had the most severe consequences on children's daily lives: families in which a deportation has led to permanent family dissolution. But enforcement policies have had the greatest impact on children at the bottom of the pyramid. Regardless of legal status or their family members' involvement with immigration authorities, children in Mexican immigrant households describe fear about their family stability and confusion over the impact legality has on their lives.

I first met Sofia after she had been released. The reality of her situation did not hit me until she pulled up a pant leg, at the end of the interview, and showed me the tracking device strapped to

her ankle. At the time, Sofia was struggling to support her four U.S.-born citizen children after her husband was deported. Sofia was afraid that she too would get deported and not be able to take her children back with her to Chiapas, Mexico. She was scrambling to save money for the children's passports before her next court date.

Sofia's problems started when she and her husband were detained by local police one night when they went to Wal-Mart for diapers. They had left the couple's four children with Sofia's brother, who lived with them. The arresting officer said Sofia's husband had not stopped at a stop sign in the parking lot. The couple was taken to the local jail for 2 days before being sent to an immigration facility. They got word home about what happened, but Sofia was not able to talk to her children for the 4 days she was detained. A friend went for the children and sent a lawyer to get Sofia released. Sofia's husband was deported directly. Her eldest daughter, age 12, described the day she found out her parents had been arrested:

[My uncle] came in my room and he woke me up and he said that "Your mom is . . . the police got her." I don't know, like—my head almost exploded. . . . It look like it exploded 'cause that's, like, my mom.

A record high of nearly 400,000 individuals were deported from the United States in both 2010 and 2011 (Preston, 2010; U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2011). An even greater number of individuals were returned to their country of origin via voluntary

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departure: 476,000 in 2010 and 580,000 in 2009 (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, 2010a, 2010b). Contrary to popular perception, deportees and returnees are typically not criminal offenders (Human Rights Watch, 2009). Many live in families, with spouses and children; others have family members in their home country who depend on them. More than 100,000 of the individuals deported between 1998 and 2007 were like Sofia; they were parents of U.S.-born citizens (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of the Inspector General, 2009). Today, more than three quarters of the children of immigrants are U.S. citizens and one third live in mixed-status families (Capps & Fortuny, 2006; Fortuny, Capps, Simms, & Chaudry, 2009). Contemporary deportation policies are likely to affect millions of children living in the United States.

Current deportation policies also disproportionately affect Mexicans, who comprise approximately 30% of the foreign-born individuals in the United States and 58% of unauthorized residents (Passel & Cohn, 2011). In 2010, 83% of the detained, 73% of those who were forcibly removed, and 77% of those who signed voluntary departures were Mexican. (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, 2010b). In this article, I look at the impact of enforcement policies on Mexican families more broadly and children specifically. I draw on interviews with 91 parents and 110 children in 80 households, including parents' stories about the impact deportations have had on their families as well as the often overlooked accounts from children. My goal is to document how an emphasis on enforcement that targets Mexicans at the level of public policy has had consequences for young children, many of whom are U.S. citizens, who have Mexican immigrant parents.

I start with families in which a parent had been detained or deported. The experiences of these families show that the most devastating consequence of an act of detention or deportation for children was in the forced formation of single-parent, female-headed households. Whether a temporary or a long-term—or permanent—arrangement, the economic and emotional implications of single parenthood adversely affected children. In this sense, deportation policies are inexorably linked to the intimate politics of gender and family.

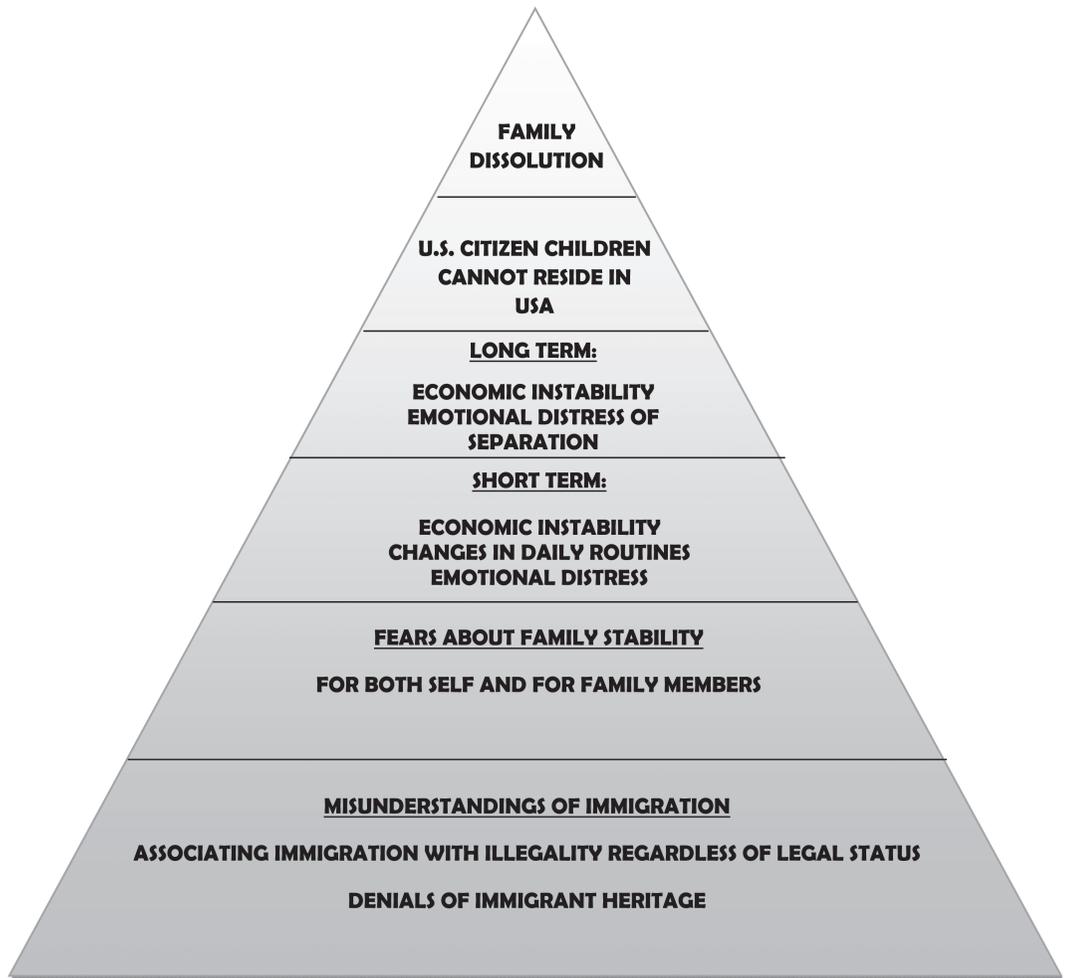
I then turn to the stories of families who have had no direct experience with a detention or deportation. My interviews show that, as De Genova (2010) suggested, it is not the deportation act itself, but the possibility of deportation, or a migrant's "deportability," that has affected an even greater number of children. As children described their fears about their parents'—and, at times, their own—legal status, it became clear that an actual deportation was just the tip of the iceberg. Some children had heard the stories of friends who were detained, but most had only heard about it on the news. The threat of deportability inspired fears of separation among children regardless of their own legal status or family members' actual involvement with immigration officials. It also resulted in U.S. citizen and immigrant children alike conflating immigration with illegality.

Analogous to the injury pyramid used in public health to describe the burden of injury on the population (see, e.g., http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/key_facts/VIP_key_fact_5.pdf), my data suggest that a *deportation pyramid* is the conceptual model that best describes the burden of enforcement policies on children (see Figure 1). In the most severe cases, a child's family may be permanently disrupted when a parent, typically a father, is deported. More frequently, however, deportation tactics have more subtle consequences for a great number of young children who, fearing illegality, begin to dissociate with their immigrant heritage and identity.

BACKGROUND

At the start of the 21st century, the United States, as well as other countries in Europe and around the world, has become quite nearly obsessed with border control and the deportation of noncitizens in the name of national security (De Genova, 2010). Concerns with the removal of criminals and political threats to U.S. sovereignty have been around since the founding of this nation (Kanstroom, 2007). But the rise of what De Genova called the "Deportation Regime" of the modern era can be traced, in part, to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, which prompted recent efforts to crack down on illegal immigration (Peutz & De Genova, 2010). The nearly 400,000 who were deported from the United States in each year of 2010 and 2011 represent more than twice the 189,000 who were deported

FIGURE 1. A DEPORTATION PYRAMID TO ASSESS THE BURDEN OF DEPORTATION POLICIES ON CHILDREN.



in 2001 (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, 2010b). Previously, the most extensive deportation campaign in U.S. history was in the 1930s, when a total of 458,000 Mexicans were forcibly removed from the United States over a 9-year period (Massey, Durand, & Malone, 2002, p. 34).

Although in an ideological sense modern deportation campaigns have aimed to protect U.S. citizens from potential terrorist attacks like those of September 11, just like in the 1930s, those most adversely affected by recent deportations have been Mexicans. In 2010, Mexicans accounted for the highest percentage of any nationality in apprehensions (83%), detentions (61%), removals (73%), and returns

(81%; Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, 2010b).

The apprehension and removal of Mexicans today is likely to have a profound impact on families, including children, living in the United States. Before the mid-1980s, Mexican migration was predominantly composed of seasonal male sojourners whose families remained in Mexico (Massey et al., 2002). Past deportations would have removed a Mexican from his workplace in the United States, but sent him back to his family living in Mexico. Over the past 20 to 30 years, however, there has been a major increase in the settlement patterns of Mexican migrants throughout the United States, primarily due to the militarization of the U.S. – Mexican

border (Massey et al., 2002). As it became more difficult for migrants to return to families in Mexico, many either brought their families with them or formed families here. Female migration rates from Mexico have increased since 1986 (Massey et al.), and the number of U.S.-born children with unauthorized parents rose sharply over the past decade, from 2.7 million in 2003 to 4 million in 2008 (Passel & Cohn, 2009). Estimates suggest that, in 2009, 8% of children born in the United States had at least one unauthorized parent (Passel & Cohn, 2011). Contemporary deportation campaigns are likely to affect millions of U.S. citizen children growing up in Mexican households.

Aside from the obvious personal tragedy that deportations entail, little is known about the systematic effects that contemporary enforcement policies—and forced separations—have had on men, women, and children. Most existing research has focused instead on the social construction of illegality or how communities have responded to the threat of deportation (see Menjivar, 2011; Peutz & De Genova, 2010). Nonetheless, separations are common during international migration. One study found that 80% of children in U.S. immigrant families had been separated from one or both parents prior to migration (Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie, 2002). These types of separations differ from those that result from forcible removals, yet they point to useful themes for exploring the impact of deportation policies on children and families.

Historically, men have most often migrated first (Foner, 2000). Male-led migration patterns have had a series of consequences for family relationships, creating tensions between the men who migrate and the women who stay home. Accusations of infidelities, for example, may strain relationships from a distance, both between partners and between parents and children (Menjivar & Agadjanian, 2007). In Mexico, fathers who do not send money home may be viewed as being unsuccessful family providers; fathers may avoid communication with their family members when they are unemployed and cannot send money (Dreby, 2010).

Female-led migration is much less common historically. Today, however, the demands of the service economy mean that many more groups of women have migrated with—or at times, before—men (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2002). Mexican and Central American women have crossed the border illegally to work as caretakers

of other people's children in order to provide for their own children and/or parents who remain in their home countries, creating what scholars call *global care chains* (Ehrenreich & Hochschild). These difficult decisions to leave family members behind have been often described, by women themselves, as painful sacrifices made for the sake of their families (Dreby, 2010; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Parreñas, 2001).

Gender expectations shape family relationships from a distance. When women are labor migrants, they may take on caregiving roles in transnational families (Perez, 2004). Although in some ways, women's migrations have challenged gender divisions of labor within families, gender expectations have continued to be salient in transnational spheres (Parreñas, 2005). Because mothers and fathers may be judged differently for leaving their children to migrate, "migrant mothers bear the moral burdens of transnational parenting" (Dreby, 2010, p. 204).

Children's experiences in families are often overlooked; when children have been studied, it is often as "adults in the making" (Thorne, 1987). For example, scholars have studied the lives of the children of immigrants extensively insofar as they are indicative of different groups' experiences with assimilation (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters, & Holdaway, 2008; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). When parents and children live apart during migration, however, children's experiences may vary from those of their parents. Scholars of transnational families have focused on how migration affects children independently from their parents and have shown that separation has mixed consequences for children.

In some ways, international separation has had positive payoffs for nonmigrant children due to the economic benefits of remittances. Infant health has been better in Mexican households with U.S. migrants (Frank, 2005; Kanaiaupuni & Donato, 1999). Some migrant parents have used their remittances to improve children's educational prospects by sending them to private schools (Moran-Taylor, 2008). In some cases, nonmigrant children in migrant households have been found to have different types of social and educational aspirations than their peers (Schmalzbauer, 2008; Smith, 2006).

In other ways, parental migration has had negative consequences for nonmigrant children. Children of migrants living in places with high

rates of migration may get caught up with the community-wide “culture of migration”: When they have seen most members of their community, regardless of education level, go north (i.e., to the United States), children have little incentive to do well in school (Kandel & Massey, 2002). Separation also has had emotional repercussions for children. Children have felt resentful of parents’ absences despite understanding the economic rationale of the separation (Coe, 2008). Many have exhibited behavioral problems during adolescence (Dreby, 2007). Gender expectations of migrant men and women have also affected children—what Parreñas (2005) has described as the “gendered woes” of migration; children have felt the most resentful of migrant mothers who cannot be caregivers from a distance (see also Dreby, 2010). Difficulties in intergenerational relationships may continue after reunification (Artico, 2003; Menjivar & Abrego, 2009).

Compared with voluntary separations during migration, little is known about how forced separations have affected children and their families or how children have reacted to them. In response to a series of large-scale workplace raids between 2006 and 2008, legalistic accounts and policy reports documented the negative impact raids have had on children, who were, at times, left at school with no one to pick them up after a parent was apprehended (Capps, Castañeda, Chaudry, & Santos, 2007; Chaudry et al., 2010; Thronson, 2008). Although the Obama Administration scaled back on workplace raids, enforcement has increased over the past few years.

Researchers do know that parents’ legal status affects children. Brubeck and Xu (2010), for example, found a statistical relationship between parents’ legal vulnerability and child well-being. Yoshikawa’s (2011) qualitative interviews and field work with immigrant families in New York City showed that unauthorized parents experienced disadvantages that were passed on to U.S.-citizen children, such as less information about and access to social services.

Moreover, the mere threat of deportation has affected communities as a whole, making some groups “hyper-aware” of legality (Menjivar, 2011, p. 378; see also Hagan, Castro, & Rodriguez, 2010). One study, conducted in Texas, found that the fear of deportability is often expressed in concerns of being separated from family members and friends (Talavera,

Núñez-Mchiri, & Heyman, 2010). Nationwide, Latinos have felt the threat of deportability: A Pew Hispanic Center survey found that, in 2008, a full 68% of Latino respondents worried that they, a family member, or close friend might be deported (Lopez & Minushkin, 2008). This finding attests to the impossibility of separating communities of the unauthorized from those who are legal migrants, because today’s immigrant families are typically composed of members with various legal statuses (see Menjivar & Abrego, 2009).

Forced separations of family members are different from those in which family members choose to live apart. In the case of the former, the intervention of the state in family life is clear. In addition, parents’ ability to provide for their families after deportation is limited. Parents have no choice regarding their returns; narratives of sacrifice common among parents in transnational families are likely to differ. Nonetheless, the comparison reveals useful themes for analysis.

First, one can expect that family structure matters during forced separations. When families choose to separate, men and women play different roles in their families depending on who has left home and who remains behind. The Department of Homeland Security does not release information on deportees’ gender, yet research has found that the majority of deportees are male (Golash-Boza, 2011; Kohli, Markowitz, & Chavez, 2011). What happens to families when men are more frequently forcibly removed than women? As with voluntary transnational families, who leaves and who stays behind is likely to shape experiences of forced separation.

Second, deportation policies are likely to affect child well-being. A report by the Urban Institute found numerous changes in behavior among children whose parents were detained or deported as reported by their families, including increased frequency of crying, loss of appetite, sleeplessness, clingy behavior, an increase in fear and anxiety, and generic fears of law enforcement officials (Chaudry et al., 2010). Unlike children in voluntary transnational families who experience a disjuncture between the economic benefits and emotional costs of separation, enforcement policies are unlikely to have financial benefits for children.

Finally, community-level variables may shape children’s experiences. Deportation policies have had a widespread impact on U.S. Latino immigrant communities. One might

expect that, as with children of migrants in Mexico who are affected by high levels of communitywide migration, heightened awareness of enforcement tactics among Latinos makes salient the threat of deportability for children living in Mexican immigrant households.

METHOD

Drawing on theories that suggest that children are unique individuals whose experiences may vary significantly from those of other members of their families (Thorne, 1987), in this article I consider children as the primary unit of analysis. In the case of deportation, the need to focus on children's unique experiences is clear. In theory, U.S.-born citizen children of immigrants have the same rights afforded any child in the United States but, in practice, children of unauthorized migrants may be disadvantaged because of their parents' legal status (Yoshikawa, 2011).

In order to focus on the meaning enforcement policies have for children's lives, I drew on data from a larger ethnographic study I completed between 2009 and 2012 that was designed to explore various aspects of children's experiences growing up in different types of Mexican immigrant households. My study included interviews with parents and their children in northeast Ohio (2009–2011), where the Mexican community is relatively small and dispersed, as well as in central New Jersey (2011–2012), where the Mexican community is concentrated. The larger study emphasized differences between the two sites. Indeed, I found differences in enforcement practices. In Ohio, stories of deportations often started with arrests for minor traffic infractions. Sofia, mentioned in the opening vignette, is a case in point; she was reported to U.S. Customs and Immigration Enforcement (ICE) after being arrested as a passenger in a vehicle whose driver, her husband, had failed to stop for a stop sign. In New Jersey, stories of deportations most often started with more severe encounters with the law, such as a DUI in one case or a speeding ticket in another. The local context is crucial, but in this article I focus on the experiences that were similar for families in New Jersey and Ohio. The cross-site comparison identifies themes that may apply to Mexican children living elsewhere.

The larger study also purposively sampled different types of families, including those in which children were U.S. born, legal migrants,

and undocumented as well as parents in the same three categories. I interviewed parents and children in a total of 80 families. Of the 110 children interviewed, 71 were U.S.-born children, eight were legal migrants, and 31 were undocumented. I also learned of 16 families' experiences with deportation. In nine cases, one or both of the children's parents had been detained or deported, and those I interviewed reported detailed accounts of an additional seven families who were close friends or extended family members. I tried to interview these families but, wanting to keep a low profile, they declined formal interviews.

In northeast Ohio, I interviewed families in and around a mid-size city with a population of approximately 200,000. The Mexican immigrant population was quite small but had grown significantly since the 1990s. There were no community-based organizations that catered to the needs of the Latino community and few Spanish speakers at area social service organizations. There was a Catholic church that offered Spanish Mass. I gained access to families in Ohio with the benediction of those at the church. I am not Latina, but I began taking my children—whose father is Mexican—to a bimonthly youth program church staff organized for Latino children. I participated for over a year before approaching church staff about my intended study. I initially relied on a community member to identify families. I then used snowball sampling with participants and through my own networks to identify families outside of the church.

At the New Jersey site, the Mexican immigrant population also had grown significantly since the 1990s; however, at this site the population is highly concentrated. Of the 55,000 city residents in 2010, approximately 35% were foreign born, and 50% were Latino or Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). The school superintendent estimated that at one of the city's elementary schools, 80% of the students lived in Mexican immigrant families. There were numerous churches of various denominations that offered services in Spanish, and community health clinics had Spanish speakers on staff. I did not rely on any of these organizations but instead used my own networks to locate those who met the sample criteria. I had previously lived in the city for 10 years and knew many families personally, whom I asked for interviews

and for recommendations of other families to contact.

At each site I first interviewed the mother, although in a few cases I interviewed fathers as well. I gave parents the option to do the interview in Spanish or English; most I did in Spanish. These interviews were semistructured and covered a wide range of topics, including the family migration history, transnational ties, daily routines, language practices in the home, children's health and child-care history, children's school experiences and peer group relationships, and any comments children had made about their race or immigration status. The parents chose where the interview took place. The majority occurred in the families' homes. I then interviewed all children ages 5 through 15 in the family who were willing. Some occurred on the same day as the parent interview; in other cases, I returned later, visiting the family home twice. Again, I gave children a choice of Spanish or English. Interviews followed a structured format. I asked children about their families, their language use, schools and friendships, daily routines, family activities, and awareness of class and identity. I ended with questions to measure their awareness of immigration status. I adapted the questions to the child's age, posing more simple questions to younger children and using more in-depth questions with older children.

I had repeated contact with many children and families in the study. I did home and school visits with a smaller group of 12 families. This enabled me to observe children in these families as well as other children I had interviewed in their neighborhoods and schools. In Ohio, I participated in many church-based activities, where I came into contact with families. In New Jersey, approximately one third of the families were people I had known for years. Contact with families outside the interview setting contextualized information gathered in interviews.

I obtained approval from the institutional review boards at both Kent State University and the University at Albany, State University of New York for all phases of this study. I also received a Certificate of Confidentiality from the National Institutes of Health to further protect the identities of the study participants. All names that appear in this article are pseudonyms.

The analysis involved systematic manual review of field notes and transcriptions of the

taped interviews, focusing on the interviews with children, to identify salient themes. I considered a theme salient, such as the fear of family separation, when it had been repeated by children of various ages, both genders and across sites. I also triangulated children's accounts to those of adults: The themes below arose, for the most part, in both parent and child interviews. Finally, because I used many closed-ended questions with young respondents, I used SPSS to code for children's answers to certain questions, such as whether or not they knew what an immigrant was. This allowed for comparisons of children's responses by site, age, location, and household type. Although I anticipated conducting the analysis solely on families in which a parent had been detained or deported, I found that enforcement policies have an impact on children across all types of immigrant households. In the following section, I focus on similarities in children's experiences across the two sites.

RESULTS

One common fear parents expressed in interviews is that they could lose custody of U.S.-born children if detained or deported. A recent study found cause for parents' concerns: In 2011, more than 5,100 U.S. children were living in foster care after a parent's detention or deportation (Wessler, 2011). These extreme cases exist, but focusing on such outcomes obscures the more insidious ways deportation policies affect a greater number of children. Although a deportation can permanently alter a child's life, I learned more often about the short- and long-term consequences of apprehensions. Moreover, the majority of the children I met had not had a parent deported, yet the threat of deportability affected them profoundly.

Public health workers routinely use an injury pyramid to visually depict how severe fatal accidents can obscure the much more numerous incidences that would otherwise be overlooked (see Segui-Gomez & MacKenzie, 2003). At the top of the injury pyramid are incidents that are few in number but with serious consequences, such as a fatal drowning. Those at the bottom of the pyramid are less severe, but more numerous, such as a drowning incident in which no medical care is required. Drownings that have long-term health consequences lie closer to the top of the pyramid, and those

with short-term effects, such as an visit to the emergency room, are located closer to the bottom. Public health professionals use the injury pyramid to more effectively describe the burden of injury associated with different types of incidents (Wadmann, Muelleman, Coto, & Kellerman, 2003).

In a similar manner, my findings suggest that, to fully capture the impact of deportation policies on children, one must consider how children's lives are changed by both the relatively infrequent, more intrusive cases of deportation and the more common instances in which it is the politics of deportation that affect children. In the following sections, I start by discussing the impact acts of deportation have had on children and their families, and then I turn to the way the threat of deportation has shaped children's emerging identities. I suggest that, like the injury pyramid, a deportation pyramid can serve as a conceptual model that helps illustrate the burden of deportation for children.

Forced Separations and Children's Families

The most detrimental effect of forced separation on children was the abrupt shift from living with two parents to living with just a mother, because most children in my sample had lived with both parents, at least for a time (see also Chaudry et al., 2010). Of the 80 families I interviewed, eight were single-parent households, but in all but two families the mothers had previously lived with their children's father. For some, single parenthood was short lived, and families experienced great hardship for the period of time surrounding the incident. Others described long-standing effects even after the family was reunited. Finally, for some children, a father's deportation led to a permanent change in the family structure. I interviewed two mothers who were in deportation proceedings, but both were able to live with their children. Thus, deportation was also a gendered process in that it resulted not just in single parenthood, but sudden single motherhood.

"I don't really have much contact with him": Permanent repercussions. For three of the 16 families who had an experience with immigration officials, a deportation act marked a permanent change in the family configuration. These are the types of instances that lie at the top

of the deportation pyramid. Perla's experiences provide an illustration.

Perla's oldest daughter was an infant when her ex-husband was first arrested. He was accused of being involved in gang violence and was sent to prison to await trial. As a new mother suffering from postpartum depression, Perla struggled and moved in with her in-laws for a time. She was angry with her husband, but when he was released, they reconciled, but the relationship was tumultuous. He was physically and emotionally abusive. "Sometimes I ended up sleeping all alone on the floor of the room" she explained. Perla stayed with him, however, because she was pregnant with their second child. Then he was arrested again. This time, he was found guilty, served a 5-year sentence, and was deported. At first, Perla waited for him, but with time she gained perspective and moved on. Perla's new boyfriend accepts her children as his own. Although they have had their ups and downs and do not live together, Perla's daughters consider him their father. At the eldest's 9th birthday party, I watched the young girl excitedly grab his arm, saying, "Papa," whispering about a new present.

In many ways, the deportation of Perla's ex-husband was a blessing in disguise because she was ultimately able to get out of an abusive relationship. Nonetheless, Perla struggled as a single mother. She worked two jobs, one at a gas station in the mornings and another cleaning at night. She would not be able to afford her one-room apartment if her younger brother had not moved in with her. She also depended on him for child care. Perla has had no help from her ex-husband or his family since his deportation. "Only once did his brother come and take the girls out to eat." Perla's ex-husband has no communication with the girls. Once, she said, he called from Mexico, but he didn't seem to know what to say.

Gladys's story is similar. Her husband was deported after he was arrested for involvement in illicit business activities. Gladys described him, too, as being abusive, and her life turned upside down after his arrest. Before he was deported, she was a stay-at-home mother. Once, they separated temporarily, and Gladys's husband supported her financially throughout. But with his arrest, she was on her own. She began to work an afternoon shift. When I interviewed the family 3 years later, Gladys saw her children, ages 14 and 7, only a few hours per day during

the week. Her ex-husband occasionally called from Mexico, but 14-year-old Marjorie had little to say about her father: "I don't really have much contact with him." Her 7-year-old brother said, "I just say hi and pass [the phone] to my sister."

Few women and children I interviewed described such severe domestic violence. Nonetheless, I chose these families to exemplify the permanent effects a deportation has on children even when one might expect that preexisting marital problems would likely have also led to single parenthood. When temporarily separated from their children because of incarceration in Perla's case and a trial separation in Gladys's case, both fathers remained in contact with their children. As deportees, neither did. Fathers in transnational families often use frequent phone calls, gifts, and remittances to stay connected to the children with whom they do not live (Dreby, 2010). Deportees, however, cannot earn enough money to support their children living in the United States. In the absence of an economic tie to their children, fathers' emotional connection also falters, as evidenced by the lack of communication Perla's and Gladys's children reported with their fathers. These cases also illustrate the gendered impact of contemporary deportation policies. Although mothers and children did not describe children as feeling outwardly resentful of deported fathers, the deportation most often severs paternal bonds with children and could very well lead to children's resentment of their fathers as they age.

"And this is why we still can't be together": Lingering consequences. On the deportation pyramid, underneath instances in which families are permanently altered lie those in which families experience long-term emotional and financial consequences even after they have been reunited. Vanessa is a case in point.

About a year into their marriage, when Vanessa was 5 months pregnant, Vanessa's husband was deported. Late one night, when he was returning from his shift as a cook at a Mexican restaurant, the police stopped him and asked for an ID. He showed them his Mexican license. They reported him to ICE. Vanessa did not get to see him before they sent him back to Mexico, 10 days later dressed in the same grease-covered clothes he had worn when arrested. During the first few days of his detention, Vanessa ended up in the emergency room; she was diagnosed with thrombosis and

lost her baby. Vanessa could have lost her baby regardless of whether her husband had been deported, but she believed—and it is certainly plausible—that the stress of the deportation sparked her health problems. To make matters worse, Vanessa could no longer afford the two-bedroom condo they rented, and their car was impounded. But she borrowed money so that her husband could return to Ohio within 5 months.

Vanessa's problems did not end when her husband returned, because he could not get his old job back:

He asked, but they didn't want to give it to him because of what happened. Somebody told me that they were worried what would happen if the police got him again . . . since he had already been deported.

Her husband did find a job at a restaurant over an hour away; he moved there, and Vanessa remained near her job and family. She explained that her husband did not want to drive anymore: "He was left traumatized by what happened." They continued this arrangement for more than 2 years, even after the birth of their son. Vanessa explained, "And this is why we still can't be together."

The financial effects of a deportation are long reaching even after reunification. Suddenly single mothers like Vanessa have to figure out how to reunify their families, whether it is by bringing their husbands back north or by moving back to Mexico. Brandon's mother described a price tag of \$3,600 to bring her husband back from Mexico. Another mother paid \$2,500. Clara's husband was detained for just 9 days; her brothers, picked up at the same time, signed a voluntary removal and were deported. Her husband refused to sign the voluntary removal form, and she was able to get him a lawyer, but it cost them \$5,000 for bail and another \$5,000 in legal fees over the next 2 years. Clara explained that they borrowed money to pay off the debts they had accrued. Two years later, she said, "Right now, we are in the black. . . . Sometimes we don't have enough even for food." Women typically bear the financial burdens of a husband's deportation.

Few of the children I interviewed described long-term emotional trauma after being reunited with their parents, although most were quite aware of legality, as I elaborate on below. Nonetheless, I was not able to interview children

sent into foster care after a deportation or children who had returned to Mexico. Both scenarios are likely to have severe, long-term emotional consequences for U.S.-born children.

The women I interviewed, however, described how they, and especially their partners, felt traumatized after a deportation or detention. Vanessa said, "I don't feel safe talking to the police. . . . Sometimes I want to dye my hair blond and have blue eyes." She also explained how hard it was for her husband back in Mexico: "You see, in your country, when you go back, everyone adores you. But he arrived and everything was bad, and he was ashamed. He almost never went out of the house. He felt awful. He didn't have money." Maria felt extremely frustrated when her Honduran husband acted defeated after he was deported to Mexico. The day of his arrival, he was robbed and had his Mexican ID stolen.

They were going to deport him all the way to Honduras, and I said to him, "Here; I have some copies of the IDs," and I said, "I will send you the papers." And he said, "What for?" I told him, "I sent a copy to my father so that he can go and get you wherever you are, or give me a fax number, something where I can send some proof, the children's birth certificates that prove you are their father or our wedding certificate. That way they can let you go." He said, "No, don't do anything."

I found in previous research that men who leave their families to work in the United States believe they are making a sacrifice that will be worthwhile, because they expect to be able to fulfill their roles as economic providers for their families (Dreby, 2010). But men who are deported are emasculated; they cannot provide for their families economically anymore and have become an economic burden. A deportation drastically alters men's relationships with their wives and children.

"*They got them*": *The short-term effects.* I asked Maria's son Brandon, who said his mother was Mexican and his father Honduran, if anyone in his family had been back to Honduras. "My dad and my uncle, . . . they got them," he answered. "Who got them?" I asked. "The police." Brandon went on to explain, "Well, they were going to work, and they went down a street they didn't know. And there was a police [car] there. My uncle was driving, but they took them." The day before our

interview, Brandon had turned 5. The incident had happened 6 months before. Brandon's father was already back living with him; they had been apart for just 4 months, yet the incident clearly stuck out in his mind, and Maria described how upset Brandon had been during the months his father was away.

Brandon was remarkable in that he was fully aware of his father's deportation. Many children his age did not know why their fathers had been away. This may be in part because they were too young to understand. But parents were also reluctant to explain the circumstances to young children, to protect them from worrying about such matters. One mother whose husband had been deported explained, "I always tell [my 5-year-old son] that he is at work or playing soccer."

Regardless of whether children felt emotional distress during short-term separations, being thrust from a family in which a father is the primary wage earner to one in which a mother is the sole provider affected their lives. Unlike when a husband is laid off or hurt at work, suddenly single mothers could not rely on unemployment or worker's compensation. Their income dropped drastically one day to the next, which was a shock for families already getting by on low wages. The immediate short-term economic fallout of a deportation act affected children's families greatly.

All of the 16 mothers in families affected directly by an act of detention or deportation had difficulties paying the rent afterward. In fact, an Urban Institute report revealed that one effect of deportations is housing insecurity (Chaudry et al., 2010). Gladys, for example, moved eight times with her two children in the 3 years after her husband's deportation, and Sofia had problems with housing even after she was released. When Sofia returned home with the ankle bracelet around her leg, her cousins—who shared her home with her—moved out because they did not want to risk ICE finding them there. Sofia could not pay the rent on her income alone.

Sudden single motherhood also resulted in numerous changes in a family's daily routines, especially child care. Gladys entered the workforce for the first time in 12 years after her husband was imprisoned and then deported. Her daughter, 11 at the time, became the primary child-care provider for her 4-year-old son in the after-school hours. Marjorie, now 14, explained:

My mom started working when I was in fifth grade. So I've been pretty much taking care of my brother since like fifth grade. . . . It was a lot harder for me because I never really experienced my mom going to work.

Mothers also described changes in their house-keeping habits. Sofia, for example, said she had not been able to go to the Laundromat: "What I do is wash the clothes by hand." Because Sofia did not drive, she—like many I interviewed—depended on her husband for transportation. Similarly, another mother said, "When my husband was here we would go out together to wash [the clothes], but now there is a building across the street that has a laundry room, so we use that." She added, chuckling, "We'll see if one day we get in trouble." Change in daily routines, short-term economic instability, and short-term emotional distress constitute the next echelon of the deportation pyramid.

The Threat of Deportation

The deportation pyramid does not bottom out with the families in which a member is deported or detained; instead, a much broader sector of children in Mexican households have been affected by today's emphasis on enforcement. Many of the 110 children I interviewed talked about the possibility of a deportation even if it had not directly affected their immediate family. Twenty-nine children I interviewed were undocumented themselves; most were aware of the fact. Even U.S.-born children described the possibility of their families being split up because of enforcement practices. Moreover, a widespread misconception among the children I interviewed was that *immigrant* was synonymous with *undocumented*. Fears of deportation were common among children regardless of their own legal status or that of their parents. The lower half of the deportation pyramid represents the impact the threat of deportability has on children.

"*We might be apart*": *Fears of family separation*. "When we came here, the first time the police fined us, the second time they sent us back to Mexico, the third they let us go, and the fourth time they let us go too," explained 9-year-old Adrian as he recounted his experience crossing the border with his brother 2 years earlier. Neither Adrian nor his

brother distinguished between the police and immigration officials in the retelling. Over a thousand miles from the U.S. – Mexican border, they continued to view police as synonymous with trouble. Their mother explained:

They know [about their legal status] and sometimes when I see a patrol car, I say "police in sight," and they know that they have to sit up straight. . . . Then they see that it has gone by and the danger is gone, then they relax.

The children I interviewed who were old enough to remember coming to the United States reacted like Adrian; they were afraid of the police or, at the very least, were aware that they needed to be careful around the police. One mother said the following of her 9-year-old son:

He is conscious [of the family's legal status] because when we are in the van he puts on his seat belt and he checks on the other [4-year-old brother] in his car seat . . . or he sees a police and he says [to his brother], "Here comes the police, sit good."

Anita, a legal permanent resident who has been unable to legalize the status of four of her five children, explained that the girls could not distinguish between the police and immigration officials when they first got here. Her 11-year-old daughter Carmen, who was 9 when she came to the United States from Mexico, "has a great fear of the police. She was afraid that they would send her back to Mexico." At school,

her biggest worry is [her legal status]. She used to evade people so they would not ask her questions because she was afraid that they would ask her for a social security number. . . . She started biting her nails out of worry.

U.S. citizen children also expressed fears of deportation disrupting their lives. I asked a 6-year-old whether she ever felt scared that her parents are immigrants. She said yes, "because if I am here and my mom goes to Mexico I am going to be sad because I would miss her." A 10-year-old U.S. citizen whose mother had severe kidney disease and received dialysis biweekly thought her family is going to have to go back to Mexico some day, "'Cause the *policiales* [police] are looking for people that don't have papers to be here." A 10-year-old boy said,

What happens if some cop comes into our house and wants to see our papers and then when we don't have it. My little brother and my other cousin have theirs and we have to go and that's what is scary about it.

Some of these children had a friend or extended family member detained by immigration officials. For example, one mother told me that after a close friend of the family was deported she and her husband got their children passports and explained to them that if something like this happened, they would all go back to Mexico together. Most children I interviewed, however, had never known anyone who was detained or deported, but talked about the possibility of being separated from their parents. Often they had seen news coverage about the increase in enforcement tactics nationwide. A 10-year-old told me, when I asked her if she had ever seen someone have his or her parents taken away, "Yes, I've seen it on TV." Twelve-year-old Osvelia said she is scared that the members of her family are immigrants "Because when that happened on the news that a lot of people were getting liked caught, like um, came to the door random and just took them. Yeah, I got really scared that time." When I asked a 9-year-old about what she thought it is like to be an immigrant, she answered "Sad." "Why?" I asked her. She replied,

I saw a video of people and they are immigrants and one time they were going back to Mexico and the policeman caught them and they took them. And they had a daughter and they left the daughter in the car.

Fears of separation, whether it is the separation of family members or the separation of undocumented children from the lifestyle and friendships they have forged in the United States, are the penultimate echelon of the deportation pyramid.

"They are not supposed to be here": Children's (mis)understandings of immigration. I asked 10-year-old Andrea whether she knew what an immigrant is. "Yeah, it is when someone is illegal in this country and the police-ICE come to look for them to send them back to their country." Her eyes started watering when she then told me her parents are immigrants. I asked if she is proud that her parents are immigrants. She said "No."

"Do you ever feel scared that they are immigrants?" I continued.

"Yeah," she said as her chin quivered.

"What scares you?" I asked.

"When the police-ICE come, they will take them." Andrea confused being an immigrant with being undocumented. I asked, "What do you think it is like to be an immigrant?" She answered, "I think it is hard because you have to, like, try not to be caught by police-ICE and you would like to stay in this country to like have jobs and children to be legal in this country."

Like Andrea, a number of children born in both Ohio and New Jersey equated immigration with illegality. A 12-year-old U.S. citizen boy told me when I asked him what he thought it was like to be an immigrant: "Like they must be like scared when like they, if they catch them, then they have to go back to their country." A 10-year-old said that most in his family are immigrants and that he thinks it would be "weird" to be an immigrant. "What's weird about it?" I asked him. "I think that like the people that are not from here, they are not supposed to be here." Interestingly, children responded this way even after I gave them a definition for an immigrant as simply being someone who is born in one country and then moves to another country to live. Children who were immigrants themselves even made this mistake. I asked 13-year-old Cristina, who is a legal migrant, what she thinks it is like to be an immigrant. She answered, "Well, I think it is very difficult because you can't . . . like if you leave and then they ask you for your papers and you don't have them, they will call immigration." The only children who did not make such a conflation were U.S.-born children who had one parent who was also a U.S. citizen. The unquestioned citizenship of both parent and child perhaps shielded children from thinking critically about the impact legal status has on people's lives.

In contrast to U.S.-born children, many older undocumented children had a sophisticated understanding of how legality affected them. For example, a 14-year-girl shared the following with me:

[It's] kind of unfair for us because, for example, I want to become a doctor. But I probably can't do college here because first of all, it's so expensive and you need to like have papers, I guess. My, well, my mentality has been, well I'm not going to

do college here, I'm going to do it in Mexico. But to the kids that want to do it here, that's not fair for them. Especially if they're like really good in school.

Younger undocumented children were not nearly as articulate; indeed, they often seemed confused about legality just as U.S.-born children were. This was true for Belen, Margarita, and Gregorio, all of whom I interviewed at age 6. All three said they were born in Mexico. Then I gave them a definition of an immigrant. I was surprised when I then asked if they knew anyone who was an immigrant: All three said they did not. I had been told by some parents, as these cases perhaps confirm, that their children did not really understand legality. Although this is true to some extent, some interviews suggested that young children are aware that there are social differences based on legal status at very young ages even if this was difficult for them to articulate. For example, 7-year-old Kevin said he was born in Mexico but did not know anyone in his family who is an immigrant, just like Belen, Margarita, and Gregorio did. This was after I gave him a definition of an immigrant. But when I later asked him point blank, "Are you an immigrant?" he admitted "Yes."

"Would you want your friends to know that you are an immigrant?" I asked.

"No," he answered.

"Why?"

"Because I would be ashamed."

At some point, young children may realize that the word *immigration* and its variants has a negative connotation. In fact, nearly all the children I interviewed, of all ages and at both sites, said that they preferred that others not know that either they or their parents are immigrants.

According to Gonzales (2011), children's awareness of illegality is not fully realized until they confront external, structural discrimination. This helps explain the differences between the older and younger undocumented children I interviewed; the former understood the issue of legal status more clearly. Yet younger children appeared to also be aware of status differences related to immigration. They knew it is a private family matter, not to be shared with others.

U.S.-born children were especially aware of the stigma associated with being an immigrant,

even though most parents reported that they did not talk to their children directly about legality. Although most children said they preferred that their friends at school not know that their mother or father are immigrants, they also said that they would want their friends to know that their parents speak Spanish or are from Mexico. One 8-year-old girl said she needed to be careful about whom she told.

"Would you want your friends to know your Mom is an immigrant?" I asked.

"Not every, every single friend, but some of them."

"How come?"

"They are like mean because I was born in a different place from my mom."

When I asked her if she ever felt scared that her mom is from another country, she answered, "Because I feel a little bit nervous and scared. Because people are mean. They are so mean. They make you think, and make you mad and be scared." Twelve-year-old Osvelia wavered when I asked about whether she wanted people to know about her parents' undocumented status: "I really don't—like, um, I want some people to know."

"So which people would you feel okay knowing?"

I asked her.

"My friends that I feel like keep secrets well."

A 10-year-old boy told me he did not want people to know "because then it spreads around the whole school, [and] they start rumors."

Both U.S.-citizen and undocumented children expressed some confusion about immigration statuses. More important, like older undocumented students interviewed by Abrego (2011), the young children I met associated stigma with immigration regardless of their own legal status. Although most told me they were proud that either they or their parents were from Mexico, few felt proud that they or their parents were immigrants. The conflation that children made between immigration and illegality is particularly devastating for children's identity and sense of self. This is the bottom echelon of the deportation pyramid.

DISCUSSION

To explore the burden of deportation policies on children, I considered severe cases, in

which a deportation act permanently restructured children's families, as well as less dramatic cases, in which children experienced short- and long-term changes in their families when their mothers took on the economic and emotional burdens of sudden single motherhood. I also included the ways that the "threat of deportability" (see De Genova, 2010) affected children, including their fears of separation, awareness of illegality, and dissociation with their immigrant heritage.

To fully capture the burden of deportation policies on children, I suggest that social scientists, policy makers, and other associated professionals use a deportation pyramid analogous to the injury pyramid used in medical settings. The deportation pyramid is not a typology into which each family fits neatly; indeed, children who have experienced a deportation directly are likely to also suffer from fears of separation. Instead, the deportation pyramid is a conceptual model that depicts the rippling effects deportation policies have had on all children in Mexican families regardless of their citizenship status and actual involvement with the Department of Homeland Security. A small number of instances at the top of the pyramid are those in which children's daily lives are permanently altered because of an act of deportation. A much greater number occur at the bottom of the pyramid, in instances when children are indirectly affected by the policies that criminalize their parents, relatives, and neighbors.

At the pinnacle of the deportation pyramid are instances in which a child's family structure is disrupted after a deportation act, like Perla and Gladys, whose marriages ended with the deportation of their children's fathers. Because these men could not provide for their U.S.-born children from employment in Mexico, they could not use financial provision for their children from a distance as a way to remain in their children's lives, as do fathers and mothers in intentional transnational families (see Dreby, 2010; Parreñas, 2005). Deportation permanently ruptures deportees' relationships with their children remaining in the United States. Although I did not interview any families in which a child was sent to foster care and parental rights were terminated after a parent was deported (see Wessler, 2011), such incidents would also fall at the pinnacle of the deportation pyramid.

Just below the top of the pyramid are instances in which U.S.-born children must return to Mexico after a deportation. Sofia and her children exemplify such a case. A few months after I interviewed her, Sofia returned with her four children to her parents' home in rural Chiapas, Mexico. The three younger children did not speak Spanish well, having been educated in U.S. schools for all of their lives. The transition to schooling in Mexico can be very difficult for children who have previously attended school in the United States (Zuñiga & Hamann, 2006). Deportations permanently affect these children even if they continue to live with both parents.

Next on the deportation pyramid are instances in which families experience long-term financial and emotional consequences after an enforcement act, even when the family is reunited in the United States. In many cases, like that of Vanessa and her husband, who were apart for just 5 months, the actual period of separation was relatively short, but the emotional and economic fallout were long reaching. This was also true for Clara, whose husband was detained for just 9 days but who still talked about the costs 2 years later when she struggled to feed her children as they dealt with the many debts they had accrued since. Below this on the pyramid are instances in which families experience short-term changes in daily routines, economic stability, and emotional distress after an arrest, detention, or deportation.

In all families directly affected by acts of enforcement, women take on the short- and long-term financial burdens of the forced separations. Because they are typically left without their partners, who are detained and deported either first or in lieu of women, women must figure out how best to financially provide for their children. Moreover, men are demoralized by deportation. Unlike other fathers separated from children during migration, deportees are unable to provide for them. Narratives of sacrifice cannot be used to maintain family unity despite the distance. Women thus must not only provide financially for their children, but also must find a way to rally the men in their lives. In this sense, like those in transnational families, single mothers bear the greatest burdens of forced separations (Dreby, 2010). Forced separations are inevitably tied to gender politics in families.

Children, too, face hardship from an act of enforcement. Higher up on the deportation pyramid, children experience permanent changes in

family structure and especially in their relationships with their fathers. Lower down on the pyramid, children are affected indirectly by the economic hardship of living in a single-parent household, albeit temporarily. Emotionally, their relationships with their fathers suffer. The timing of the deportation in a child's life clearly matters. Younger children are less aware of and affected by a parental detention. Older children, like Gladys's daughter, who became her brother's primary babysitter, take on new roles in their families. More binational research is needed to look at the consequences of deportation for children over time. As is true for transnational families, separations seem to have reverberating consequences even after reunification (see Artico, 2003; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002).

The bottom half of the deportation pyramid represents the more numerous instances in which the threat of deportability has an impact on children's lives. Children, regardless of whether they have had a direct experience with an act of enforcement, harbor many fears about their family stability. Undocumented children, like Anita's daughter, who withdrew into herself in school settings, worry about their own precarious legal status. U.S.-citizen children are fearful that their family will be separated if their parents are detained or deported. This is perhaps exacerbated by the fact that parents, believing that their children do not understand legality, rarely talk directly about issues of immigration with their children.

Children are, however, aware of social status differences due to immigration. Even the youngest children, who did not fully understand immigration, hid the fact that they or their parents are immigrants. This shows they were aware of the stigma associated with illegality (see also Abrego, 2011). This brings us to the bottom of the deportation pyramid. Children in the Mexican families I interviewed have begun to associate immigration with illegality regardless of their family's legal status. With news programs highlighting the worst case scenarios of families caught up in enforcement politics, children in Mexican immigrant families believe that all immigrant families are at risk. Misunderstandings about immigration and their immigrant heritage are perhaps the most devastating effect of the threat of deportability on children and children's identity.

In two very different local contexts, I found that contemporary enforcement policies have

had a profound impact on children in Mexican families regardless of the parents' or children's legal status or the family's actual involvement with the Department of Homeland Security. U.S. policymakers would be wise to consider the burden of enforcement policies on children the same way as public health practitioners use the injury pyramid. A deportation pyramid illustrates the ways current policies affect many more children than just the 100,000 reported by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Office of the Inspector General (2009) as having had their parents or parents deported and the 5,100 left in foster care when a parent is detained or deported (Wessler, 2011). These cases are just the tip of the iceberg. The effects of detentions and deportations are long reaching—with long- and short-term consequences for children—affecting both the gender politics of families and especially children's relationships with their fathers, yet enforcement policies have a lasting impression on the greatest number of children at the bottom of the deportation pyramid. Children suffer deeply when they constantly worry about the stability of their families; research has shown that family instability has severe negative consequences for child well-being (Brown, 2010). Moreover, many are confused about immigration, something that is evident in the way 10-year-old Andrea referred to the "police-ICE" when telling me she was afraid of being separated from her parents. Also, children have begun to associate stigma with immigration, conflating it with illegality and hiding their immigrant heritage. This is a truly sad direction for a country that prides itself as being a nation of immigrants.

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