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## Impact of Formative Childhood and Adolescent Experiences in Latinx Children of Immigrants Adulthood: Analysis of Educational, Health, and Social Implications

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Impact of Formative Childhood and Adolescent Experiences in Latinx Children of Immigrants  
Adulthood: Analysis of Educational, Health, and Social Implications

By

Alma P. Lopez

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

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In

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Impact of Formative Childhood and Adolescent Experiences in Latinx Children of Immigrants  
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This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the student's  
committee.

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	3
ABSTRACT.....	6
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	7
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	11
Life Course Perspective.....	11
School-Based Impacts on Children of Immigrants .....	14
Health Impactions on Children of Immigrants .....	19
Social Life of Children of Immigrants .....	24
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS AND DATA.....	30
Research Strategy.....	30
Recruitment and Data Collection.....	32
Interview Sample Demographics.....	33
Data Analysis.....	36
Limitations and Implications.....	37
Ethical Considerations.....	37
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS.....	38
Education.....	38
Health.....	47
Social Life.....	58

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS.....	63
REFERENCES .....	69
APPENDICES.....	77
Appendix A.....	77
Appendix B.....	79
Appendix C.....	81
Appendix D.....	82
Appendix E.....	83
Appendix F.....	84
Appendix G.....	85
Appendix H.....	86
Appendix I.....	87

## ABSTRACT

As the rates of immigration rise within the United States, it is essential to discuss and bring awareness to the neglect and discrimination that immigrants and subsequently the children of immigrant's face within the nation. We know about the journey of immigrants and the effects of such but what about their children? Those who did not specifically make the travel to a foreign country but had the "privilege" to be born there? The aim of this study is to investigate the impacts of children of immigrant's experience in their childhood with this identity and their potential effects into their adulthood by looking into their education, health, and social life. Through a series of online interviews (n=13) with Latinx children of immigrants around the age of 18-30, this thesis found effects in all three areas. For education, participants in their childhood had less school activity participation, language barriers, and differing peer engagement which later affected their perspective and view on education creating pressure to succeed. In regard to health, in their childhood there was a buildup of stress and responsibilities that created elevated anxieties and learned feelings of privilege that as adults they continue to feel yet are working to unlearn. Lastly, in their social life participants explained that in their childhood they missed out on varying social events and yearned to conform to American standards and as adults now they are working up to catch up to peers while simultaneously embracing their immigrant and Latinx identity.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

As an upcoming psychology graduate back in 2020, I sat in the office of professor, Dr. Kristi Rendahl, who I had never met before. I set up a meeting to discuss the nonprofit leadership program - the program Kristi coordinates and the sector in which I envisioned I would work after graduation. Sitting there, the question of graduate school arose, and I immediately became tense at the idea. How could I continue my education when the responsibilities of my whole family rested on my shoulders? How could I continue my education when I should be working and making money to help my family reach the dream of buying a house? How could I continue my education when I would be turning twenty-one soon and be able to petition for my parents to officially be members of the country in which have resided for the past twenty-five years?

I wanted to continue. Academia is where I find comfort. However, I felt obligated to my immigrant parents' sacrifice to work and make money to help shift the weight of their labor-intensive jobs off their shoulders and maybe give their bodies some rest from all the hard work they do daily. I have partaken in plenty of privileged experiences being a student while my father works over 70-hour work weeks. His body vastly deteriorating throughout the years with constant muscle pain, yet he never complains. Having work is a *privilege* to him, so I felt strongly urged to take this on for myself.

I then became a ball of emotion and tears came rushing to my eyes as I sat in Kristi's office, a woman I had previously never met but I felt as if she cared. Someone finally actually *cared*, and I felt safe to let go of everything deep inside. It was at that moment that I realized how much guilt, fear, responsibility, and resentment I held in my twenty-year-old body for being



a child of immigrants. She told me to be proud of all I have accomplished while going through numerous challenges that many do not have.

I had never taken a step back to realize the weight I carried on my shoulders because I felt guilty having these emotions. I distinctly recall the Post-It notes I would tape with messages to my walls when I wanted to quit my homework or felt like taking a break. They went along the lines of: “They went through so much for you.” “They work so hard for you.” “They have not been back to their home country for over 25 years for you.” “They were not able to attend their families’ funerals in Mexico for you.” “They suffered and suffer for you.” These quotes did their job and I would continue my work, but they also made me resentful and drained. I love parents deeply and they have never told me to not pursue my dreams. On the contrary, they would give the food off their plate and their last dollar so that I can continue doing what I dream of. That is the reason they came to this country.

I then had an epiphany, a realization that I wish I would have undergone sooner. My perception shifted from this guilt-ridden, resentful, and unhappy person to the idea that my feelings are valid and that I no longer have to hide. My experiences shaped who I am today and will continue to for the rest of my life. Although she may not know it, Kristi changed my life that day. I started living when I stopped the mindset of “my parents didn’t migrate to this country for me to not...” Rather, I realize my parents migrated to this country to live. To have opportunities and survive. The healing process had started and only began by shifting my thoughts and critically analyzing how my experiences growing up as a Latinx child of immigrants shaped me. The good, the tough, and everything in-between. The identity of being a child of immigrants encapsulated and held me captive in the expectations and responsibilities that my parents gave me, but also importantly, that I gave to myself. I know they would not want me to feel the way I

was - overwhelmed and filled with the feeling of “why me?” Why did I have to be their voice? Why did I have to be the translator at a young age? Why did I have to have the constant fear of them one day being gone? Why me?

That meeting with Kristi, paired with my ongoing sociology degree and social media, opened the doors for curiosity. With the current climate of being able to express oneself with increasing freedom, I saw that many young adults began to talk about their experiences being a child of immigrants. I became involved and followed social media creators that shared their feelings about this identity. Podcasts have started to arise with children of immigrants being sincere and open about their feelings. Young adults sitting in rooms being vulnerable with the world, despite the often-negative feelings on immigrants, began standing up for themselves. The more involvement I saw, the more I realized I relate to many of their experiences.

I remember having the task of being the official interpreter of my entire family which is a common experience that I noticed in other children of immigrant’s lives. My time and activities I could partake in would revolve around whether or not I had family obligations. These obligations were mainly going with my family to a store, medical appointments, and making phone calls. Even as a very young child, probably around first grade, this was my task. Throughout the time I was in elementary school, I did not mind having this responsibility. Once I was in middle school and high school the perception changed. I felt as if I missed on opportunities to socialize with friends and peers would stop inviting me to events because I often had to decline. My familial responsibilities came first because if I didn’t do them, who would? Hearing others talk about this I realized I wasn’t alone, and it was incredibly validating. I now am grateful I had this opportunity to help my family and it helped me develop both my Spanish and English in ways that would not have been possible if this did not happen.

Due to my own experiences and general interest to further the knowledge of research, in this study I aim to investigate how the experiences of children of immigrants within their childhood and adolescence may impact them later in their adulthood. How are their educational, health, and social interactions impacted by these experiences? My experiences greatly impacted me in ways I still am figuring out, but what about others?

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

Being a member of a minority group within the United States entails the potential for discrimination, prejudice, and racism. That is not to say that discrimination occurs to every individual, but rather that it is proven consistent enough to become a pattern among minorities. With intersecting identities, the risk increases. Whether that is being a woman, a person of color, immigrant, disabled, etc., the implications it can have in your life has been researched. However, what is lacking in the literature is research on children of immigrants and their unique experiences. Children of immigrants have the luxury of citizenship that their parents lack yet are impacted by a generational effect.

The following literature will highlight the importance of formative childhood experiences and their potential implications. As I plan to investigate children of immigrant's adult hood based on their childhood experiences, I will look at literature which explains the importance of formative childhood experiences through a life course perspective that will be overviewed below. Additionally, I will discuss literature that reviews the impacts that children of immigrants have in regard to their education, health, and social life.

### **Life Course Perspective**

Life course theory or life course perspective is a viewpoint that epidemiologists, psychologists, sociologists, as well as other disciplines use to guide their research. This approach takes into account timing, historical events, relationships, and our personal agency to see the changes and ins and outs of an individual's life. Sociologist, Glen Elder Jr., is one of earliest known developers of this perspective who realized in the 1960s the effects of the great depression upon children throughout the succeeding decades taking into regard the impacts of education, family, upon other social institutions on the children. Life course perspective not only

looks into the history, events, but also cultural effects and varying transitions that one makes upon their life. For instance, an individual in their lifetime often follows a common pattern within society such as getting an education, leaving a parent's home, finding a job, marriage, retirement and so on. Throughout each one of these events we are transitioning to another and this pathway is not always a linear smooth trajectory, there can be major events, effects whether positive or negative, and major turning points that impact one's life course.

As we enter adulthood, at times we work hard to remember our childhood experiences, but others follow us and impact us directly for years. These experiences can affect individuals both through physical and mental health problems. Whether that be having positive childhood experiences (PCEs) or adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), family dynamics and individual dynamics can be changed long-term. Using a life course perspective, takes these events into consideration when observing how our life is shaped.

Childhood for every individual is different taking several factors into consideration such as race, culture, location, income, and more. Yet there are some experiences found to often impact children similarly regardless of these varying factors. Poverty for instance, adversely impacts children making them at increased risk for having mental, behavioral, and developmental disorders (MBDDs) (Bitsko et al. 2016). Poverty can create lack of resources or environment (whether that be at the community level or family level) where children lack a stimulating adequate place to play. Toys such as blocks and sensory play or educational material such as flashcards, books, etc., can be a cost last in families budget. As a result, due to the substandard stimulation, children can have stunted development where their gross motor development is impacted subsequently having the potential of long-term issues or delays (Bitsko et al. 2016). Poverty impacts children in distinct ways however, by using a life course

perspective within children of immigrants, we can see how history, family, roles, and our social institutions may affect them differently.

It is important to note and take into consideration the unequal distribution of poverty in regard to ethnicity and race. Throughout one's life course, our social institution will not treat one individual alike then the other. Especially in locations with high residential racial segregation, it is plausible to infer poverty and therefore adverse experiences, are unequally targeting minority groups. Minority groups, such as immigrants, frequently reside in areas with lack of community support and resources which can create chronic stress (Bitsko et al. 2016). This chronic stress can create disturbance into adulthood with effects into individual's sympathetic nervous system, brain, metabolism, risk of inflammatory diseases, high blood pressure, and mental or behavioral health disorders (Bitsko et al. 2016).

Having childhood MBDDs are affiliated with deficient insurance, poor parental mental health, substandard neighborhood support and more (Bitsko et al. 2016). If these childhood experiences are not addressed and treated early on, these translate to continued risks such as inferior schooling, less employment opportunities, and premature mortality onto adulthood (Bitsko et al. 2016). Treating MBDDs however, may cost financial and emotional stress due to the required additional services to undergo treatment compared to those without MBDDs (Bitsko et al. 2016). Regardless of the cost and potential emotional stress, leaving these untreated can then generate long-term health effects for children creating rise of costs for the community and society. Preventative treatment and early intervention are crucial.

Childhood experiences whether positive or negative, can impact long-term in one's adulthood. This brings importance toward addressing these experiences and working to prevent or adding resources to help lessen such. Immigrant communities are often stuck with poverty and

stressors attached to this identity which will be further addressed ahead. Furthermore, it is reasonable to suggest that these unique experiences children of immigrants undergo throughout their childhood can impact them during their adulthood bringing importance into analyzing their trajectories.

### **School-Based Impacts on Children of Immigrants**

Existing literature surrounding children of immigrants' education primarily explores the influences on Head Start, primary, and secondary education (Brabeck et al. 2016; Brown and Chu 2012; Crosnoe 2005; Crosnoe 2007; Gilbert, Brown, Mistry 2017; Paat 2015; Santiago et al 2014; Smith 2019; Smith 2020; ). Researchers often find that children of immigrants get an unfair and uneven start to their early education compared to their White counterparts (Crosnoe 2005; 2007). For instance, early childcare for children in Mexican immigrant families is often done by the families themselves or friends, which is described as informal care, compared to other race/ethnic groups which received formal care due to socioeconomic statuses (Crosnoe 2007). Within formal care, children receive a structured additional educational setting which will set them up for their official start to elementary school. Being enrolled in a preschool, known as a formal setting, will increase a child's educational scores such as in math, which again, a large amount of immigrant families do not have the ability to enroll their children in (Brabeck et al. 2015). More often than not, if children of immigrants are enrolled in some formal settings of education, these programs are migrant-worker-specialized which help give children that boost that their counterparts have.

Early education often dictates the structure of your schooling, indicating the importance of unraveling and addressing this uneven start that children of immigrants have. Overall, children that have an undocumented parent were found to partake in less schooling than their peers (1.5

years), score lower in reading, sentence comprehension, reading composite, math, and spelling tests in comparison to children with an authorized immigrant parent (Bean et al 2011; Brabeck 2015; DeCarlo Santiago et al. 2014). Although children are resilient and do succeed even through these formal and informal education settings, the potential and impact for children to have less opportunities to succeed and undergo extra barriers is still occurring.

Patt (2015) addressed children of immigrants in adulthood and analyzed cultural and structural (socioeconomic status and assimilation) effects on their educational attainment and found that an overwhelming majority of participants had attended substandard schooling which had an effect on their educational attainment in the long run. Additional research supports that specifically, Mexican American Latinx children have low educational attainment compared to their counterparts and have the lowest out of all Latinx groups (Roosa et al. 2011). In fact, only fifteen percent of second-generation Mexican Americans are said to obtain a bachelor's degree (Patt 2015). Those who have attended college find that they receive stares from white individuals on campus making them extra conscious of their racial identity (Rendón 2015). With some even feeling the urge to drop out as "white people were always staring at me" and "Why do they have to see me as a Mexican? Why can't they see me just as a person?" (Rendón 2015:177). From experiencing this discrimination, the worry of potential positions in the workforce began to worry children of immigrants (Rendón 2015). The question of what if these stereotypes and discrimination affected their opportunity to obtain a job? A worry that white Americans do not have.

Segregation in schooling has been frowned upon for decades, yet plenty instances of segregation still continues. For instance, the location of a school system and lack of funding often correlate with racial status. School with low funded, less experienced faculty have been



historically attended by minority individuals in the United States (Crosnoe 2005). For Latinx immigrants, more often than not, parents have low socioeconomic statuses which is an additional factor that predicated the education system one will attend. The impacts of these experiences have been found yet have not fully been addressed or dissected in a widespread manner. Crosnoe (2005) sought to further the research by investigating children of immigrants and their schooling attendance which further verified that the socioeconomic status in immigrant households was below the federal poverty lines. This was shown to impact their school attendance and they were likely to be in “worse” schools than other racial/ethnic groups (Crosnoe 2005).

Schools are a setting in which children often assimilate and participate in a commonly expressed “double life.” They attend schools where English is the primary language which is often not reciprocated at home. These children must then switch between their identities and speak in a language that is appropriate at the time, depending on the situation. Not only is this applicable with their language use at school, but even with their food (Dondero et al. 2018). Meals in schools have been found to be mainly American foods with little variation and occasional “ethnic” meals. If children, for example, bring Mexican food to their school they experience the pressure to conform to the school’s options and hide their Mexican food from their peers (Dondero et al. 2018). Peers influence children of immigrants to acculture and face a battle between their culture at home and the culture at their school, often leading to stress and discomfort.

Aside from peers, teachers, another important agent of socialization, have been shown to be impactful in young children of immigrants’ perceptions of discrimination as well as positively associated with their ethnic diversity (Brown and Chu 2012). Educators who foster and celebrate differing cultures, as a result, have children that celebrate their identity (Brown and Chu 2012).

Those who have positive perceptions and associate with their ethnic identity in turn have positive academic attitudes (Brown and Chu 2012). Additionally, teachers have noted that communication with parents is crucial, especially when working with immigrant parents (Smith 2020). The often-occurring language barriers make communication hard, creating difficulties in effectively engaging with parents and establishing a connection with families (Smith 2020). Having such connection with parents often dictates children success. With children of immigrants' background affecting them differently than their non-immigrant-background peers, it is crucial to expand the body of research on this growing population which I intend to contribute to with the current research. Furthermore, taking these experiences with teachers, it is reasonable to believe that the relationship of children of immigrants with educators can have a long-lasting impact.

Whether immigrant or not, parents are also impactful in students' academia. Migrant farm worker parents emphasized the importance of education for their children for the opportunity to achieve less laborious jobs such as the fieldwork they do on a daily basis (Crosnoe 2005; Smith 2019). The work done in the fields is impactful on one's body; it is draining work that many migrants do out of necessity. Parents often express taking their children to experience the fieldwork to demonstrate just how hard this work can be, subsequently prioritizing education in hopes of better opportunities for their children (Smith 2019). Children are then shown and told about their experiences by their parents as a motivator for them to get ahead and do "better" than them. As recalled by a child of immigrants "Whenever I saw that, it was like, more responsibility. I have to behave good, focus on school. It's like, everything was on me" (Zayas and Gulbas 2017:2470). Hence, these experiences can follow and shape how children view their education in the long run.

While there is no official language in the United States, English fluency is crucial for success. Immigrant individuals who are not fluent in English and do not reside in areas where their native language is used, undergo several barriers. Lack of accommodations or translation services can impede parents or even the children of immigrants themselves to appropriately navigate the education system. Even if there are accommodations, immigrant parents may feel as outsiders with anti-immigrant sentiments rampant across the country limiting their engagement within their community. Parents with limited English fluency have been found to have decreased confidence and diminished ability to participate in their children's academic activities and meetings (Gilbert, Brown, and Mistry 2017). Latinx children of immigrants have also been found to have less involvement in extracurricular activities and partake in lower level academic coursework (Humphries, Muller, and Schiller 2013). Additionally, due to language barriers immigrant parents can have greater difficulties assisting their children with homework assignments.

Compared to other immigrant ethnic groups, after immigration to the United States, Mexican parents tend to not further their schooling, choosing to enter labor intensive jobs instead (Bean et al. 2011). Actually, Latinx immigrant parents are found to have lower education levels than white parents (Humphries, Muller, and Schiller 2013). Parent's immigrant status also comes into play. Mexican parents in comparison to Asian parents are over three times more likely to be undocumented when they arrive to the United States which impacts second generation children's educational attainment as this adds an additional stress into their lives (Bean et al. 2011). It is important to note that this does not mean that immigrant parents blatantly neglect their children's education, rather that they have to support their children through other avenues. This reiterates the education gap that children of immigrant's face in comparison to their counterparts since they

do not have that added at home help. As we see, largely missing in the literature are the experiences of immigrant children in higher education. I plan to fill this gap by further exploring how children of immigrants are impacted while in college or their lack of.

### **Health Implications of Children of Immigrants**

Regardless of immigration status, health and access to such resources impacts everyone differently. One's socioeconomic status and location can give individuals easier access to resources often making it a luxury to be able to obtain mental health resources, medical consultations, etc. Those with limited funds forgo yearly checkups or procedures that they may deem unnecessary because they do not have the resources to do so. If they do have access to yearly checkups, the quality of care is low making possible to miss common childhood diagnoses (Gelatt 2016). For immigrants, especially those who are undocumented, they live in the shadows in fear of detainment with limited resources, the stress of adjustment to a new community, mistreatment by employers, racism, and overall fear to reach out due to the potential threat of deportation. The fear and limitations that immigrants experience often extends to their children even if their children are United States citizens. In turn, children of immigrants can experience greater mental health and physical implications compared to their nonimmigrant counterparts (Landale et al. 2015; Perriera and Ornelas 2011). If immigrant parents experience discrimination, which we know occurs, children show an increase in behaviors with less positive behaviors even though they were not directly the target of the discrimination (Gassman-Pines 2015).

In the United States, around twenty-five percent of all children are Latinx and half of U.S. born Latinx children are raised by at least one immigrant parent (Caballero et al. 2017). These children experience stress from having to accommodate to U.S. customs, going through discrimination, family separation or the potential of family separation, violence, and more. While

it is recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) for all children to undergo some type of psychological screening during their routine well-child checks, pediatric primary care providers (PCPs) may not always follow these recommendations (Caballero et al. 2017). If they do, some PCPs do not use the recommended screenings of the AAP.

In comparison to White children, Latinx children face lower percentage of screening for mental health issues which can cause them to miss potential diagnoses (Caballero et al. 2017). When reviewing screening methods, multiple inconsistencies in proficiency toward helping children of immigrants were uncovered. Whether it be language barriers or not having a wide age adaption, the existing screenings are inconsistent, but it is demonstrated that they do help to some degree. Therefore, it is still recommended for PCPs to utilize the tools to help children build trust within them and support immigrant families. PCPs do not always follow recommendations that can benefit children's health, and Latinx children of immigrants show greater struggles in achieving health equity (Caballero et al. 2017).

Children in immigrant families have been shown to have higher rates of stress, suicidal ideation, post-traumatic stress disorder, nightmares, and many other mental health diagnoses (Perreira and Ornelas 2011; Rosenberg et al. 2020). Shockingly, suicide attempts among Latinx adolescents' doubles within U.S. born children of immigrants compared to their foreign-born counterparts (Perreira and Ornelas 2011). Around thirty to seventy percent of children with a mental or behavioral health diagnoses do not receive appropriate treatment and these rates increase for children in an immigrant household (Rosenberg et al. 2020). Additionally, children around the ages of two to seventeen in immigrant households were also found to be less likely to receive counseling services and accessibility to treatment medication (Rosenberg et al. 2020).

Even when likely suffering from depression, children of immigrants are less likely to receive antidepressant treatment than their white counterparts with equal levels of depression (Chen, Hussey, and Monbureau 2018). Whether that is due to lack of health insurance, language barriers, discrimination, or lack of knowledge of services, overall children of immigrants have a lack of availability for these services (Chen, Hussey and Monbureau 2018; Huang, Yu, Ledsky 2006; Kim et al. 2010; Kirkpatrick et al 2020; Rosenberg et al. 2020). Although children of immigrants may be citizens, compared to nonimmigrant counterparts, children of immigrants were found to have no consistent source of care, encountered delays within their ability to access care, and have higher rates of poor health (Javier et al. 2010).

Unauthorized immigrants are ineligible for most federally funded health services (such as Medicaid) and institutions while additionally having low percentage of private health insurance (Gelatt 2016; Graefe et al. 2019; Hamilton et al 2006). While their children may be eligible for these services (as citizens of the United States), parent fear of repercussion can lower their trust in reaching out for health services (Brabeck et al 2016; Graefe et al. 2019; Perreira and Ornelas 2011). Compared to any other racial or ethnic groups, Mexican children of immigrants are less likely to be uninsured (Hamilton et al 2006). Undocumented parents fear deportation and forgo services for their children as a preventative measure to avoid potential separation as they may see the healthcare system as an institution of mistrust. If and when they do access services, this is only done after conditions have developed and they are in need of emergency services (Hamilton et al 2006; Perreira and Ornelas 2011; Salas, Ayón, and Gurrola 2013). Because of the fear of parental separation, one child of immigrants recalls undergoing extreme physical manifestations of stress such as intense daily headaches and vomiting (Zayas and Gulbas 2016).

The location immigrant families reside paired with the community's sentiments toward immigrants can also bring reluctance and hesitancy in use of health services (Graefe et al. 2019). In fact, among children in immigrant families who live in areas with negative sentiments toward immigrants, their annual meetings with physicians are cut by half (Graefe et al. 2019). Living in areas where there are particularly large anti-immigrant sentiments, undocumented parents realize that their children are affected and traumatized. Some parents state that they receive constant phone calls from their children when they are not together due to the fear of them suddenly being gone. Parents see the relief their children go through when they get home and see their parents are safe which brings them sadness. "They live with the fear of coming home and not having a father or a mother there," (Salas, Ayón, and Gurrola 2013:1013) as stated by an undocumented father.

For children, the continuous lingering stress and fear of potential family separation shapes their mental health by having the constant awareness of their parents' status even if their parents have not been deported (Gulbas et al. 2015). In the case of actual deportation of their parents, U.S. citizen children are said to have increased anxiety, depression, social withdrawal, fear, and partaking in rule breaking behaviors as observed by their family and friends (Gulbas et al 2015; Perreira and Ornelas 2011). In a study conducted on U.S. citizen children of immigrants, the researchers selected children whose parents were either experiencing detainment or deportation or not and found five consistent themes (Gulbas et al. 2015). The children had frequent inability to communicate with friends, negative perceptions of Mexico, financial struggles, loss of supportive school networks, and violence (Gulbas et al. 2015). In some cases, children accompanied their parents back to Mexico which caused them great disruption, ending the connections with friends and peers in the United States integral to their life. Fifty percent of

the participants also reported high degree of probable depression regardless of whether their parents were undergoing detainment (Gulbas et al 2015). A participant with undocumented parents and sister, Cecilia, stated:

I try not to make it come out of my mouth. I try to keep it shut in there. I try my best not to think about that, or go near jails because there is this jail close to my school, and I try not to look at it. Because I think that there might be deported people there, and I'm like, "I hope that's not where my parents go." I'm like, "oh no, don't think about that" Because then that would really affect me. And make me more sad and depressed.

Although Cecilia is a U.S. citizen, her family's undocumented status brought her sadness and fear to think about the possibility of potential separation. Cecilia was one of the participants who scored probable depression; although, her support from family and friends is constant, the undocumented status of those near her is enough to create a huge stressor.

Within Hispanic communities, familism or the priority of family is a strong factor within their culture. Research on the effects of familism on mental health is contradicting. Some research (Keeler, Siegel, Alvaro 2013; Marsiglia, Parsai, and Kulis 2008; Santiago and Wadsworth 2011) states familism is positively correlated with improvement in mental health symptoms and decrease of aggressive behavior, while others (Diaz and Niño 2019; Santiago et al. 2019; Toro et al. 2019) contradict this by finding negative effects.

Additionally, it was found that high levels of familism and family reframing were associated with less psychological symptoms overall, rather than just decrease in depression symptoms (Santiago and Wadsworth 2011). Here, Latinx children with mainly immigrant parents all belonged to low income households. Through demographic, poverty-related stress, family



coping, culture, and mental health questionnaires, higher levels of familism were said to decrease psychological symptoms due to the parental involvement with children which subsequently inspires family reframing (Santiago and Wadsworth 2011).

Contrastingly to the research above, an analysis of depression symptoms and familism in Latinx college students with immigrant parents suggest that the view of lack of fairness within filial responsibilities in young adults (rather than solely participating in filiality), can increase depression symptoms. Those who supported familism at great levels, especially in the need to help family members with psychological needs, depressive symptoms were found to increase (Toro et al. 2019). Overall, even with some conflicting research (Santiago and Wadsworth 2011), children in immigrants households have alarming health effects correlated with their parent's status. In fact, parents stress and exhibition of mental health symptoms directly correlated with children of immigrant's expression of health symptoms (Santiago et al. 2018). This brings importance to investigating and bringing awareness to the topic.

### **Social Life of Children of Immigrants**

Parents' legal status can affect their citizen children through many factors other than education and health. Managing the identity of being a U.S. citizen can come with feelings of guilt and pressure, all while feeling happiness and privilege. These children have the opportunity to engage in activities and access resources their undocumented parents and family may want, creating a sense of duty attached to their identity. Often resources, as we know, do not come easily as there are barriers attached even with citizenship status.

It is not uncommon for citizen children of immigrants to "grow up" quickly and have responsibilities that many White American youth do not have. In fact, Black, Latinx, and Asian American's most commonly have increased family obligations in comparison to White young

adults (Arnett 2003). Even when the relationship with their parents is not cohesive and has conflict, Latinx youth will continue with their family obligations (Tsai 2015). This is not only a cultural factor but can be attributed to a parent's legal status. Their parents do not have the ability to be a safety net and, conversely, children serve as that safety net. Parents who have citizen children tend to support them increasingly in their activities and education in comparison to their undocumented children causing citizen children in return feel an obligation and need to help their parents by making their sacrifices "worth it" (Rodriguez 2019). They feel a duty to succeed in their career and life in general as they are "blessed" with being citizens.

Multigenerational punishment, coined by Laura Enriquez (2015:941), is a "distinct form of legal violence wherein the sanctions intended for a specific population spill over to negatively affect individuals who are not targeted by laws." In this case, the laws and limitations directed toward undocumented immigrants penetrate the lives of U.S. citizens. Citizen children have been found to develop coping strategies and consequences of their parent's documentation, such as fear of police officers (Enriquez 2015). Undocumented immigrants cannot obtain drivers licenses resulting in them avoiding driving as much as possible or driving without a license with the constant fear of repercussions. Children of immigrants then increasingly monitor their surroundings and serve as an extra set of eyes to help their parents avoid detection by letting them know common police checkpoints or just staying vigilante as to spot police cars (Enriquez 2015). The multigeneration punishment becomes clear when children begin driving themselves, as they report driving with increased hypervigilance and are scared of police (Enriquez 2015).

Children are dependent on their parents, meaning they in turn experience what their parents allow or are able to provide. Due to parents' inability to travel because of the risks, this then limits children's opportunities to gain social and cultural capital (Enriquez 2015). Children

observe the opportunities their peers have such as vacations and lament their inability to partake. To provide relief, parents encourage their children to become friends with peers similar to them (children of immigrants or immigrants), but they recognize that this is not the majority and it can potentially limit the social ties their children have. Additionally, the low economic capital undocumented families have can limit the opportunities of extracurricular activities children have when compared to their nonimmigrant peers. Once children become older, they may have easier access to these opportunities, yet they will still be at a disadvantage and will have to work to catch up to their peers (Enriquez 2015).

Cassandra Rodriguez (2019) interviewed thirty-four citizen adults ranging from eighteen to twenty-nine years of age. Majority of these were Mexican Americans who currently were in college or had some college education. Participants expressed concerns that their parents and families would see them as ungrateful for sharing their experiences yet continued the study. For many, the study was one of the first times they were asked about their citizen status in comparison to their parent's undocumented status. Rodriguez (2019) sought to know more about how these citizens' adult status impacted them in their relationships and interactions and found four major themes: parental deportability, financial aid, sponsorship, and breadwinning.

Young citizen adults displayed less fear of parental deportability as they interacted less with their parents in comparison to their childhood (Rodriguez 2019). Parental deportability is still a terrifying thought, yet these young adults managed through it knowing they will take responsibility and "step up" if this were to happen (Rodriguez 2019). With attending college, the young adults emphasized having increased fear and difficulties especially with filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Due to their parents' lack of a social security number, the form is delayed as they have to mail the paperwork instead of relying on online

verification (Rodriguez 2019). This creates a delayed access to funding and also increased fear and stress. Many recalled having to meet with numerous high school counselors, friends, financial aid advisors and often were met with uncertainty as they were not familiar with the process (Rodriguez 2019). One participant explains: “That is where it starts to divide and become a problem where it’s just more like: are we being treated equal or are you putting barriers to discourage people from doing something? Because that is discouraging.” (Rodriguez 2019:720). These extra barriers create stress and lessen their hopes toward achieving a college degree. There are many barriers and factors a citizen must take into consideration as an extension of their parents’ legality that it creates frustration.

A citizen does have the opportunity to sponsor relatives, but this process is difficult, lengthy, and expensive. At the age of twenty-one, a U.S. citizen can officially petition for their undocumented parents but must be 125% above the poverty line. The age of twenty-one where many young adults in the United States await with eagerness to legally drink alcohol, is the age where these citizen children await with the potential of sponsoring their parents. Although many of Rodriguez’s (2019) participants had reached the age of twenty-one and can start the process of sponsorship, most chose not to noting several barriers.

For one, the process requires a three to ten-year bar from the United States meaning while paperwork is being filed, the individual would be sent to their home country and may not enter the United States. If they do enter, they can face a permanent ban and criminal charges. Those who came here undocumented and were in the United States for less than 180 days, receive a three-year bar and those who have been in the country for over a year receive a ten-year bar. Not only would families be forced to separate, but to complete this process it requires a large amount of monetary resources. This dream that many citizen children grew up with - that magical age of

twenty-one – is often shattered at the choice of either going through the process of sponsorship and not seeing your parents for over a decade or continuing to live with their parents' undocumented status.

Additionally, children were found to be the breadwinners for their families (Rodriguez 2019). Undocumented immigrants cannot legally join the workforce which results in them working in underpaying jobs, enduring mistreatment, and overall being taken advantage of. As a result, citizen young adults join the workforce to help their family. In Rodriguez's study (2019:723) one participant recalls "That kind of sucks if you are a teen and you are the one that can actually have a better job than your parents just because you have documentation." There is a sense of pride that the participants felt with being able to help their family, yet they also felt pressure and potential unfairness at this responsibility. Twenty-six out of the thirty-six participants of the study noted that they help with their families bills such as groceries, rent, clothes for younger siblings, etc., even once they moved out of the family home (Rodriguez 2019). This responsibility and duty often motivate citizen young adults as they saw it as part of being an extension of immigrants. Through all these conflicting feelings, the young adults ultimately still help their parents but does not negate the fact that this ambivalence is present and is affecting them.

Latinx individuals are commonly questioned about their legality solely on the way they look. People assume the color of one's skin correlates to their documentation which creates a pattern of discrimination for Latinx people even when they are U.S. citizens (Getrich 2013; Tovar and Feliciano 2009). For instance, children of immigrants experience extra hardships when attempting to travel through the border directly related to their looks (Getrich 2013). Border patrol agents at the Mexico and United States border question them increasingly in their

attempt to visit family in Mexico (Getrich 2013). Although citizens, because of the color of their skin, their legality comes into question. As some state “I don’t know... it’s too bad I’m not an obvious citizen... I think maybe if I was white and blond haired they’d let me go faster (Getrich 2013:473)” and “You can classify me easily. I think that’s what they do”(Getrich 2013:473). For these children, they noticed a pattern where their legality was questioned which created fear, nervousness, and embarrassment. They knew if they were to be lighter skinned, this would not happen to them.

Even when these children of immigrants were not trying to visit Mexico, their social life was impacted because of previous experiences with border patrol or knowing of other people’s experiences. Children of immigrants often act “American” or become “obvious citizens” to protect themselves from discrimination (Tovar and Feliciano 2009). They do so by speaking more English or changing the way they look (Tovar and Feliciano 2009). However, this can come with additional implications. Some have recalled getting the statement claiming they aren’t “Mexican” enough (Tovar and Feliciano 2009).

Increased stigma amongst immigrants also impacts children of immigrants during high sociopolitical tensions. With the 2016 presidential election which resulted in Donald Trump appointment of 45<sup>th</sup> president of the United States, immigration was a topic of high debate. His claims and numerous targets against immigrants brought a rise of anti-immigrant sentiments and fear amongst undocumented individuals and hence, their children or family members. Many explained being traumatized, scared, and horrified thinking about the election prior to Trump’s win (Valdez, Wagner, and Minero 2021). Families set forth plans in the case of Trumps election to prepare for potential family separation and rise in white supremacy. Parents feared for their children’s citizenship after there was talk of invalidating their status if they are children of

undocumented individuals. Youth had similar fears although they were citizens. Lives were derailed as families started shifting their daily routines such as avoiding driving on main roads and changing the time of day they left the house (Valdez, Wagner, and Minero 2021). As older as one gets, the more aware the youth become of the political climate and their implications. With that being said, young children were also observed to worry about the election from hearing about it at school and peers, still leaving them in a state of anxiousness (Valdez, Wagner, and Minero 2021).

As we have observed, children of immigrant's social life are impacted in a multifaceted manner. For children of immigrants, their experiences are unique and differ from those outside this identity creating importance and need for further research.

### **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS AND DATA**

The current chapter will review the methods of the research as well as any potential limitations and considerations. I will initiate by overviewing the research strategy employed of qualitative interviews. This approach was used due to knowing the importance of gaining fruitful data therefore, in-dept, semi structured interviews were conducted. I then will explain recruitment and data collection which mainly consisted of snowball sampling from acquaintances and social media exposure. The data was analyzed using a grounded theory approach as well as different stages of line by line coding. Lastly, I will discuss any potential limitations the study has as well as ethical considerations.

#### **Research Strategy**

Participants for this study will be required to adhere to a few factors such as being over the age of 18 and identifying as Latinx. Additionally, participants must be second generation

immigrants/first generation Americans. Subsequently, participants parents are immigrants whether that is documented or undocumented.

This study will follow a grounded theory approach to uncover patterns that may or may not emerge from the resulting data. Mirroring several Latinx immigrant focused research, a qualitative grounded theory approach utilizing semi-structured interviews, has the ability to garner insightful results (Getrich 2013; Goldsmith and Kurpius 2018; Salas, Ayón, and Gurrola 2013; Smith 2020; Rodriguez 2019; Tovar and Feliciano 2009; Zayas and Gulbas 2017). Once recruited, participants will schedule a time to Zoom the interview or set a location for an in-person interview. Prior to initiating the interview, participants will be given a consent form (see Appendix A) that will thoroughly explain in detail the study process as well as my contact information if they have any additional concerns.

The interviews will again follow a semi-structured approach. I will start off with consent of audio and visual recording as well as overviewing the safe keeping strategies employed to protect the participant that are previously explained in the consent form. Participants will be reminded that participation is completely voluntary, and they can end the interview at any time as well as omitting to respond to any questions. Once participants sign the consent form (see Appendix A and B), the interview will begin

Demographical questions (see Appendix E) will be the first set of questions. I then will turn to structured broad questions with the ability to probe for additional information (see Appendix F and G). If the conversation does not naturally lead to experiences within education, health, and social life, the format and structure of additional questions will follow such themes. When general themes are covered, the interview will end, and participants will be thanked for their time.



Once the interview has finalized, the recording will automatically upload to Zoom cloud. This file will then be uploaded to media space where a transcript will be requested. When the transcription is complete, I will listen to the recording alongside the transcript to ensure accuracy. Throughout this process, to protect participants, anonymity will be given to them with the use of pseudonyms. From that point forward, correlations made will only use their designated pseudonyms. Once the transcription process has finalized, the recordings will be deleted on both Zoom and media space. The transcription files will be kept on a password encrypted computer only the research has access to.

### **Recruitment and Data Collection**

Through known acquaintances, participants will be recruited from my direct social network. The study will be brought up to these individuals to spread to their inner circle or anyone they believe would fit the requirements and have them reach out to me if interested. With permission of the Latinx Affairs center at my institution of Minnesota State University, Mankato, flyers (see Appendix H and I) with the study description and contact information will be posted. I will also explain the study in detail to the director of the center to let members personally know as well. Social media will be an additional tool to recruit participants such as TikTok and Instagram. Particularly within TikTok, there is a rise of individuals sharing their stories and using this platform as a method to create awareness. With the aid of hashtag usage such as #secondgeneration, #firstgen, #firstgenamerican, as well as variations of these, I will reach out to users (see Appendix C and D) and describe the study with the goal of them distributing it to their followers through their platform.

A last tool of recruitment will include connections my thesis advisor, Dr. Rendahl, was able to arrange for me. From such, I connected with the board chair of the nonprofit organization

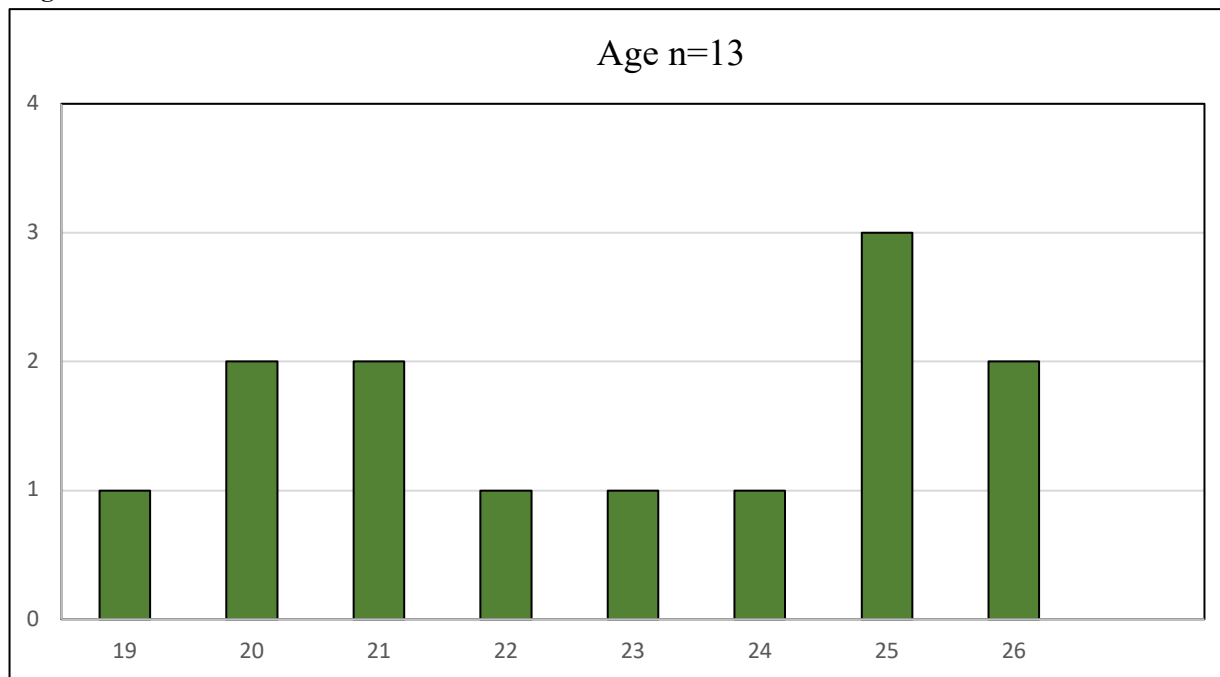
Hispanic Advocacy and Community Empowerment through Research (HACER), Mario Hernandez. HACER lifts Latinx voices through ethical and targeted research to help lessen the gap of Latinx literature and inform policies and change. With communication with Mario, additional participants through his network will be recruited.

Through all these recruitment strategies, I will provide the option of conducting the interview in either English or Spanish. Having the ability to fluently speak both languages, gives me the ability to reach a wider array of participants and create comfort by using their preferred language. Additionally, I will briefly explain my personal tie of being a child of immigrants myself. I will not go into extensive detail as to influence participants but will explain my identity to create rapport as a researcher. Comfort for participants is important not only as researcher but again a child of immigrants myself, therefore establishing this connection will allow participants to trust me in such a personal topic. The interviews will be conducted primarily through zoom as I anticipate most of my participants to not be in my immediate area of Minnesota. However, if participants would rather in person interviews and there is close proximity, these will be conducted in participants preferred location. The audio recordings will be saved in a locked safe location only I will have access to. Once I finish transcribing the interviews, these will be deleted.

### **Interview Sample Demographics**

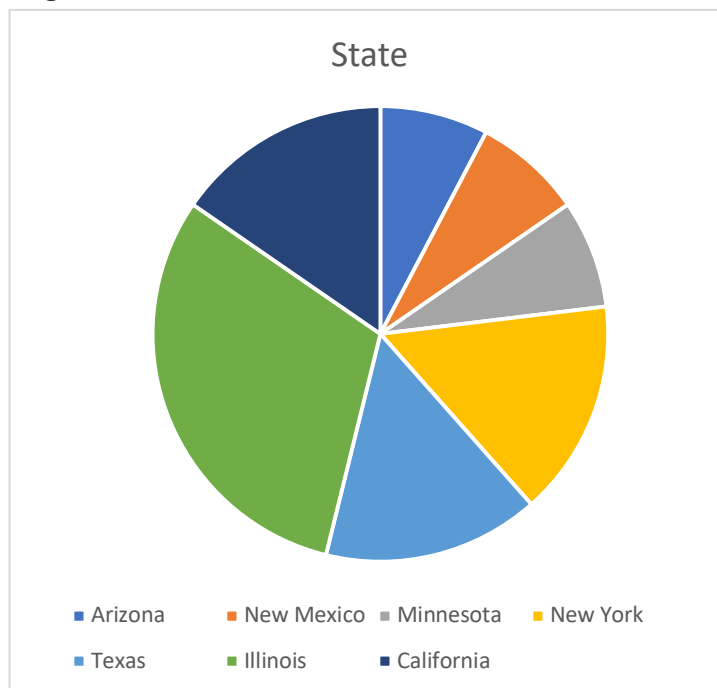
Although I used several methods for recruitment as described above, all participants who reached out resulted from the social media outreach. I had several individuals reach out to discuss participating however how oftentimes with interviews, they fell through. I had a total of 13 participants with interviews ranging from 30 up to 60 minutes long. The mean age of the sample is 23. See figure 1 for the age ranges.

Figure 1



Participants also were located in a total of seven different states which are outlined below in Figure 2. Some of participant experiences varied depending if they came from border states or not which will be further discussed in the findings.

Figure 2



For education, five of the six participants who stated their highest education was high school were currently in college finishing their bachelor's degree. The other participant who stated their highest education was high school had attended college at some point meaning every single participant had received college education. Additionally, on Figure 3, employment status is displayed.

**Figure 3**

<b>Education</b>		<b>Employment</b>	
Highschool	6	Unemployed	1
Degree in Nursing	1	Part time	2
Associates	2	Fulltime	10
Degree in Nursing	4		

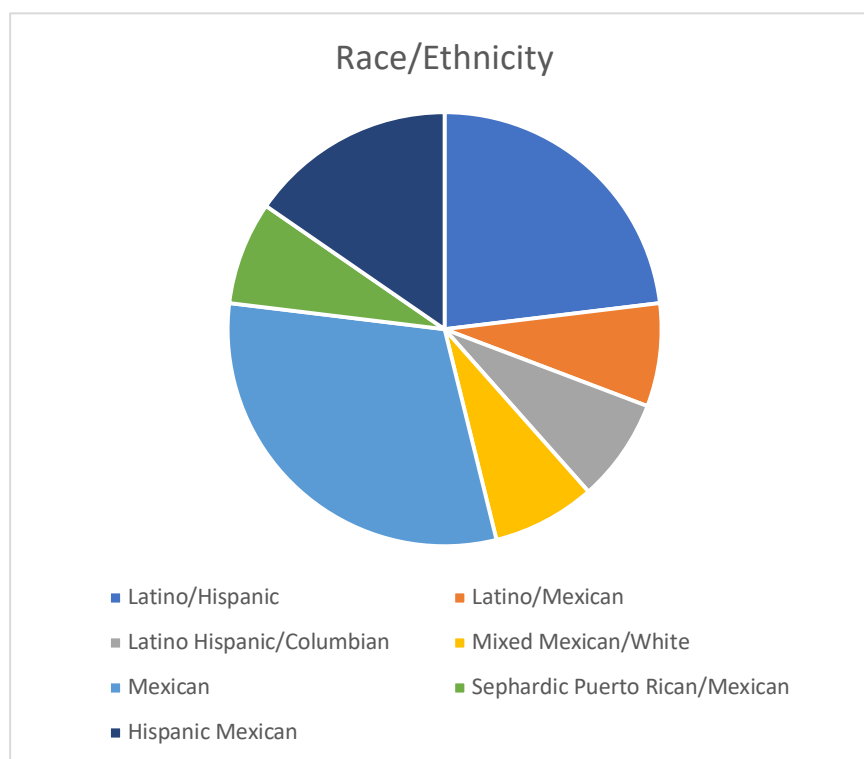
Figure 4 below shows gender identity and overall status identity of participants. It is important to note that participants were hesitant on how to describe and label themselves. Some mentioned they were second generation yet later retracted and said first generation. Regardless, those who labeled themselves second generation explained they have immigrant parents yet consider their parents as first generation Americans therefore making them second. Again, even those who ultimately decided on the label first generation took some time to think about it and even asked me what the technicalities of the label are. I asked to choose whatever they use to describe themselves regardless of rules or conditions.

**Figure 4**

<b>Gender</b>		<b>Identity</b>	
Male	4	First Generation American	11
Female	8	Second Generation American	2
Nonbinary	1		

Lastly, I asked participants to self-identify their race/ethnicity. I again left this decision on how to categorize to them. Often, this question is difficult and there is much ambiguity what to identify as for race. I was also questioned by some participants if they technically should consider themselves “white”. I asked for them to identify with whatever they commonly use. I decided to do so because identifying as white due to technicalities and having to as there is often no other option can create uncomfortable feelings. Many use a combination of labels which are demonstrated in figure 5 below.

**Figure 5**



### **Data Analysis**

With authorization from participants, interviews will be audio and visually recorded, which will allow the most accurate results. The interviews will then be directly transcribed, if Spanish is used, this will be translated to English to create consistency.

To initiate uncovering patterns and interpretations, initial line-by-line coding will be employed (Charmaz 2006). This style of coding will allow me to process the data without deviating from its meaning, all while discovering any potential gaps (Charmaz 2006). Throughout this process I will use memo writing to help me keep record of my thoughts and ideas. I then will engage in a second round of coding, focused coding. Focused coding will allow me to narrow down specific codes and patterns (Charmaz 2006). This process will not be a straightforward process as the more I code interviews; the possibility of uncovering previous patterns I may have missed will arise.

### **Limitations and Implications**

Within the study, there are several limitations to consider. It must be acknowledged that the findings may not be generalizable. Stemming from the participant background and ethnicity, culture has an impact on patterns. Being Latinx and immigrants is a wide sample that impacts everyone differently and therefore experiences and findings vary. A small sample size is another consideration to keep in mind.

Despite such limitations, the contributions this study can add to literature is important to note. With the growing size of second-generation immigrants within the United States, it is vital to understand their unique experiences to be able to provide potential tools for them to succeed. This study can be furthered by obtaining a larger sample size as well as concentrating on single countries of origin or parent origin to uncover specific and distinct patterns. By doing so, correlation and distinctions between countries can be made.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Taking into consideration the nature and potential hesitancy of the topic, anonymity of participants will be crucial. Additionally, participants must acknowledge they are over the age of

18 to be considered for the interview. Participants will be informed of all the safekeeping measures set in place to protect their privacy. Through the informed consent form (see Appendix A and B), details will be provided. Without receiving the consent form, the interview will be kept on hold; however, once signed consent is received the interview will go forward.

Participants will receive a copy of the consent form to keep for their personal record and to refer to for any questions as my contact information as well as other contacts such for security concerns will be listed. Throughout the interview participants will be reminded that they may choose to stop the study at any time and or to skip any questions if they feel uncomfortable.

When working with online platforms such as Zoom and Media space, although varying safekeeping's are in place to protect participants, there is always a potential of anonymity being uncovered.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

In the following, I will recount the common themes found within the three subgroups: Education, Health, and Social Life. Following a life course perspective, each subsection will follow a structure in a chronological order of events to most efficiently uncover resulting effects of certain circumstances. For instance, in the education section, it will cover findings starting from earliest being elementary school up until college. The end of each section will recount the seemingly effects of formative events mentioned in childhood during their adulthood. The same will be for the health and social life sections.

### **Education**

#### *Feeling Different/Language*

For most, the education system and interaction with their peers was the first indicator that they were not like their white non-immigrant counterparts. When trying to pinpoint when they first realized they were children of immigrants, they recalled an awareness of being “different”

from their peers. Participants explained that they “just knew” yet did not immediately give themselves the specific title of immigrant or child of immigrants. Their experiences and their environment consistently reminded them of how unlike their peers they were. Not only because for some, they grew up in predominately white dominated environments and were distinctly aware of difference in their skin colors, but also because of the acute awareness that they are bilingual while their peers are not.

For one female Colombian participant, Julia, she states “I do remember feeling very, very aware of the fact that I spoke Spanish and that kids thought that was different”. Julia soon started to feel singled out and clearly remembers an instance where she repeated a swear word in English a classmate told her to repeat. At the time, Julia did not know the meaning of the word causing her to receive disciplinary action. Her mom had to explain to the school that Julia is only allowed to speak Spanish at home and there was no way she could have learned a swear word there. Julia immediately felt the discomfort and embarrassment as she felt targeted that she was receiving disciplinary action compared to her white peer. Mateo, a 20-year-old male from New Mexico, looks back into being tested for a gifted education program and questions arose surrounding his native language and family members. That’s when “it really stood out” that he was not like his peers. This language difference was one of the first experiences of being different that majority of participants described vividly.

Furthermore, all participants identified as bilingual and often would recall learning English years after their peers; however, this was not a barrier in itself rather again a difference. Those who lived in areas with little diversity, would similarly state being embarrassed or not using their Spanish as often due to feeling tokenized by others. Language did come into play in their education when it came to parent involvement. Similarly found in a previous study (Gilbert,



Brown, and Mistry 2017), when tasked with homework assignments they may need assistance with, they could not simply ask their parents for help as most did not speak English and therefore could not understand the content. In other cases, the education received by their parents was minimal which was consistent with Bean et al's (2011) findings of Latinx parents entering workforces and having lower education levels. Some of participants parents completed up until elementary school in their native country so the material their children were learning was often out of their scope. Participants education did not suffer necessarily as they made sure to emphasize, yet it was just a difference when compared to their white peers. They recollect having to work harder within their assignments and figure out things on their own.

Additionally, participants would recall sometimes having translators present in educational meetings or conferences. "There was always another person in the room just as a translator". In the case of translators being busy with other families as in most education systems there is only one translator available, participants would serve as the translator. They noted this was a normal occurrence; however, it did make them feeling singled out and distinct from their peers. Once again, that reoccurring feeling of othering. Often times as well, meetings would have to be rescheduled or teachers would communicate in notes and write down their message which they then could communicate to their parents later on and translate the note.

Even outside of parent teacher conferences, whatever document was in English, the children served as the translator. This experience was mentioned by every single participant often in a jokingly manner as they recalled being very small children having such a responsibility. "I was like seven or eight and there would instances when I would have to do that [translate]. And you're like a baby pretty much. I didn't know what to tell them". Some even recall translating a document for their family just days before the interview over the phone. "I

think white kids or kids who aren't immigrants have to deal with that kind of stuff. Their parent just kind of handle it and it's not so much their responsibility." This experience created a big sense of responsibility, that at times they had to schedule their life around events or appointments their families had causing some missed school days. Participants describe that this made them feel as if they had to mature quicker compared to peers. Pressure and stress increased when these documents were legal paperwork or other government documentation.

### *School Events*

In the case of school sponsored events, it was difficult for participants parents to attend. They would not be able to understand what was being said and therefore not be able to interact with others without the help of their children. For participants, they would notice this and compare themselves to their peers whose parents would constantly attend and interact with one another. "And so, seeing like all my friends' parents interacting with each other and my parents alone just off to the side. Like you could see that there was a difference". Participants recall feeling affected when they were young, but understand their parents do everything they can. They know if their parents would try to attend, they would not enjoy their time. "Some dad daughter events that I was just like, my dad will not be able to talk during this, which is fine. He is not going to enjoy himself". It is important to note, that throughout the interviews while participants described these circumstances of parents not being able to attend events, they mentioned their sadness, but it was immediately followed by understanding.

Field trips were another common event most recall their parents being unable to participate in. Their parents would be busy working and not able to take a day off as that would be detrimental to their finances. Language barriers once again came into play as parents would not be able to communicate in such events. Nonimmigrant peers would consistently have their

parents be involved in school activities that participants felt they knew peers' parents even more than their peers. This lack of parent involvement in field trips or events again made them sad when they were young, but they do understand they did not attend because they simply did not want to rather, they did not have the ability to. Sports was an additional often mentioned school event participants missed out on. Money came into account frequently and in general time. They had additional responsibilities that nonimmigrant peers did not have, and these events were seen as a luxury within their parents. This lessening of participation in school events was consistent in a previous study which discovered that Latinx children had less involvement in extracurricular activities (Humphries, Muller, and Schiller 2013). In general, participants state feeling overall frustrated seeing all the hurdles they had to undergo compared to others to attend what others seemingly see as a normal education experience.

### *Sticking Together*

In education systems where participants knew of other children of immigrants, they would stick together. "I think that being a child of immigrants, it kind of has that attraction to other people" Mateo states. Participants valued these relationships with peers who had similar experiences because it created a sense of feeling validated and heard. They could share their commonalities, embrace, and laugh at their stories. Participants would also jokingly describe how they would "trauma bond" with other children of immigrants and it was something that their white peers would never understand. Although everyone's experience is different, as Natalia based in Los Angeles states, "we know the pains, so we all know that flavor of pain". It was a natural gravitation toward these peers with similar experiences that those participants who lived in diverse areas were incredibly grateful for. They mentioned how fortunate and lucky they were to have peers with similar backgrounds, and they were sure their experience would be not as

great without these peers. Having the diversity made them be able to explore their immigrant identity as well as being Latinx. It created a safe space to others who were not fortunate to have.

Those who lived in areas with minimal diversity would mention they would automatically connect with peers with similar experiences which were not many. Those connections that they could form were valuable to them but would mention how it would affect their relationships with their white peers because they feel unheard with them. They did not have the same connection with their white peers however they still would have a relationship. This, however, would never compare to their child of immigrant friends. On top of that, in areas with minimal diversity, participants would commonly experience discrimination from peers. Although this would happen within those who lived in diverse environments as well, it was commonly heard from participants living in white dominated areas. They mention their peers calling them names or even their peers' parents. This caused them to often have lower self-esteem or to at times go along with the name calling to fit in. In their adulthood they realize how negatively this impacted them even though they were saving face when they were younger, it did lessen their view of themselves and created distance from their culture.

### *Perspective on Education and College*

Aside from their connection with peers, since a young age, their view of education varied from others. Education for most participants was seen as an opportunity you must be grateful for and you have to prioritize. Mateo mentions:

Having immigrant parents, you have that pressure to succeed. And so, while a lot of people were able to enjoy high school and enjoy having a social life and everything, for me, education was like really pushed onto me. And so, my mom always said, primero la

escuela [first school] and then everything else. I think it was a pressure that a lot of other people don't really get.

Education had an incredible value that had added rigor. There was no time for hanging out with friends or watching television as that time must be spent on their education and studying. Parents were strict and held high standards toward their children with some participants stating that the pressure to do great often took a toll on them throughout their high school years as they prepared for college. Found in Zayas and Gulbas (2017), Crosnoe (2005), and Smith (2019), they also found the increase of responsibility and importance given to education by parents. Sophia, a 20-year-old nonbinary participant who grew up in Miami explains:

There was so much extra rigor...There was sometimes like oh, this what you just have to do because you have to go to a good college. For the most part, it was just like an unspoken rule that I think was indoctrinated when I was younger and then just perpetuated. And there was also this like big expectation.

As adults, participants pursued college because they wanted to themselves and as we can suspect accompanied with following what society deems as the order in one's life course, but also due to the value of education from their parents. This value on education emphasized by their parents urged them to pursue higher education because it is seen as the ticket and pathway to obtain opportunities their parents never had.

I chose to go to college because I know that my family sacrificed a lot to come to the United States for me to just stop after high school. I knew that wasn't an option for me. So that's why I ended up going to college.

With the pressure that they ascribe themselves and their parents inadvertently give them, they now feel that they must go to college or must have stellar grades. Others, state college is a pathway to elevate the generational wealth, a responsibility that lays within them as citizens.

College was tough again not only due to the rigor of classes but meeting parents' expectations. These expectations were told to them by their parents, but many ascribed this feeling themselves as they often described themselves as the "investment" for their parents. In the cases where parents verbally expressed their expectations, they would mention they need to do better and bring up how "easy" their life is compared to what they went through; however, much of this pressure to succeed was a lingering thought that went through participants heads. It was a pressure that even though it was not directly stated, it was consistent within them and their minds.

The process of applying for college was another obstacle participants underwent due to being a child of immigrants. Most had parents who have never attended college, so the application process was something they completed and had to figure out on their own. "I was on my own for some things that other people had their families for". Participants felt underprepared and not sure who to ask for help. They had multiple worries in their mind such as the pressure to maintain stellar grades while finishing high school, applying to college, working, helping their families with tasks, and much more. In the cases where parents did have some college education, which was only two participants out of 13, it often was done in their native country which again they could not rely on them for help as the education systems are vastly different. Some state if they would have had help figuring out the processes or if they had previous knowledge on how college and applying consisted of, they would have had greater opportunities to apply to better fitting programs. They recall not knowing about letters of recommendation, how to apply to

scholarships, or truly comprehend how expensive college is causing them to be massively underprepared.

In regard to FAFSA, again participants could not rely on their parents for help and were left to go through the process alone. At times, high school counselors would come into play and help, yet participants state feeling guilty asking for further help even when they needed it. For some, FAFSA was also a state of worry as parents fear anything connected to the government often due to their immigration status. “the lack of trust or lack of confidence in the system definitely played a role” Mateo states. Similarly, for Cynthia, a 19-year-old female from Illinois states:

I first had to do my research because I’m like, I don’t want my parents to get in trouble or I don’t want people to find out about them... I was like, I don’t know what the outcomes are going to be of this.

In some cases, as we see, parent’s status is a state of worry for filing for FAFSA. This was a commonality found in Rodriguez’s (2019) interviews as well. In her study, participants stated feeling anxious or stressed about this process and often experiencing delays. Cynthia, alongside additional participants, expressed the same sentiment.

All participants were in college at some point of their lives or recently graduated. They state having to work while simultaneously attending college resulting often times to having to attend college part time to be able to afford attending in the first place. Comparison to peers was common due to seeing how “people study and how much time they have and how less time I have because I’m working you know”. A lot of the financial responsibility of attending college solely lies upon their shoulders as their parents are low income and cannot simply rely on their help as other peers can. One participant, Gabriel, stated he had to drop out of college as he could

not afford to attend and was “completely blindsided” when he started. Neither him or his parents had previous insight on the realities of college expenses and process. He is currently working full time and pursuing a fitness career. Participants find that their experiences are not linear, and they know if they had the preparation throughout high school on what to expect when attending college and how costly it will be, they would not be as overwhelmed.

Overall, since a young age, participants have had an immense pressure to succeed due to their parents being immigrants. Throughout elementary school and middle school, they felt different from their peers as their parents could not attend many school sponsored events due to language barriers and work conflict times. A common feeling of otherness in multiple circumstances. The pressure of their grades and responsibilities, did take a toll on them especially once they initiated high school as college started to be discussed. Relating to these learned responsibilities, as they became adults, every participant at some point attended college, is in college, or graduated. Additionally, their parents overall lack of knowledge of college and the lack of support within their school systems, make the college process incredibly stressful and overwhelming especially when it comes to finances. Participants feel a lot of responsibility to be great and do great to be able to help their parents in the long run. Their childhood education was often frustrating when they were young, but ultimately, although still stressful, they state they understand the why they went through those experiences now that they are older.

## **Health**

### *Guilt and Pressure*

Many participants recall how their mental health specifically has been specifically affected. Since a young age, the identity of being a child of immigrants was present. Julia states, “A lot of my identity was kind of shaped by dealing with the realities of immigration and the



realities of being Hispanic and a child of immigrants’’. As a child, much of their stress arose from the othering they felt of being different and missing out on many gatherings with their friends.

The pressure and guilt felt also arose from the stories their families have told them since they were young. For Mateo, around third grade was when he remembered the first time his parents told him about their journey to the United States. Sophia remembers how their dad would always talk about Mexico and how he arrived in the United States by cracking jokes. Camila, a 26-year-old female from California, recalls how her dad told her about the journey of crossing Rio Grande and being deported over 10 times attempting to make it to the United States to have a better life. Hearing these stories for many was a creator of a feeling of guilt. The feeling of being “spoiled in comparison” to their parents. Sophia finds that these stories caused them to feel the guilt as early as fourth or fifth grade stating they have more opportunities than their parents.

These stories were often used by their parents to pressure them to do better and succeed so they do not have to live a life and experience all the hardships they do. Aside from the stories of their journey to the United States, participants would hear about the conditions their parents lived in back in their home country as well as the hard and laborious jobs they do in the United States. As Julia recalls, her parents would tell her, “We grew up in horrible conditions compared to yours, which I never wanted to speak out against them because I didn’t want to invalidate their experiences because it was true”. The stories of how her mom grew up in extreme poverty living in homes with virtually no floors and created by carps in Columbia, created a feeling of being spoiled and not wanting to speak up about her experiences. Participants stated multiple similar experiences.

Many participants describe, how they lived-in low-income situations often recalling not being able to keep up with their peers with all the trends or even being able to go to the movie theatre with friends at times. One participant recalls living in a small apartment with multiple family members sleeping in the same bed. Others mention hearing the stories of their parents working long hours in fields seeing their bodies deteriorate from their laborious jobs. Even though participants underwent experiences of being low income and undergo their own struggles, in their eyes, their parents have undergone so much and struggled immensely that their own struggles cannot compare to their parents “I couldn’t have issues because their issues were better and greater”. It is important to note, that all the experiences and stories happened in their early childhood which then caused the guilt to develop still before they became adults.

They quietly recall a pressure which makes them believe they can make no mistakes and must succeed. All expressed at minimum increased anxiety or depression throughout their life course. “I have no choice but to succeed. I have no choice but to do this because my mom has given up everything and has gotten nothing back for it” on participant Julia states. Sophia was diagnosed with PTSD and borderline personality disorder due to all of the traumas they underwent as a child. Cynthia had a moment in high school where she was “fed up and tired of all the responsibilities that I had, and I felt like the world was just like ending; this is too much pressure” which ultimately ended in her school counselor intervening due to the severity of the situation.

### *Discussing Mental Health with Others*

Even though all participants recalled having mental health struggles directly linked toward the identity of being a child of immigrants since a young age, most have never spoken to

their parents about these struggles. Participants mentioned not wanting to make their parents feel bad as their mental health struggles are in part due to them

I didn't want them to know that at times, they are a burden to me because of them coming here, it's kind of a burden to me. I just don't want them to know or feel bad about it or anything because I know they came so that I can have a better chance at living and having a better life. But to this day, they don't actually know what is burdening me is them. You don't want to make your parent feel bad, especially because you know they have been through a harsher time than you are currently going through. It's like I don't want them... I don't want to make them feel bad or anything.

This quote by Cynthia encompasses very well the sentiments often expressed by participants.

The guilt once more is overwhelming where they do not want to speak up about their feelings to their parents. They do not want to seem ungrateful toward their parents or make them feel bad about some of the experiences they went through as a result from their immigrant identity. This feeling of hesitation to speak to parents about this for fear of sounding ungrateful, was also expressed in previous literature. In Rodriguez's (2019) study, she found that participants feared their parents finding out about their participation in her study and see them as ungrateful.

Most mention feeling safe and validated to talk about their struggles only if it was with other children of immigrants. Having a community with people similar to them, was crucial and important for them to have some avenue of relief. Additionally, with participants who lived in border towns or areas with diversity, they mentioned talking to friends. Those who lived in areas with little to no diversity, they felt secluded and alone. They expressed that no one would understand what they were going through and it was also a vulnerable topic to talk about. In cases in which participants considered talking about their own struggles to their parents, they

were deterred from doing so as their parents do not believe in the existence of mental health struggles.

Mental health in Hispanic culture is not a necessarily accepted issue or in general discussed much as it is seen as a weakness. Additionally, in their parents' eyes, aside from not believing in mental health, they also are engrained in a hustle culture. They must be working at all times possible and taking advantage of any free time to continue working and receiving income. There is no time to feel "sad" because one must be hustling as much as they can. In general, due to this, emotions are not commonly shown within their families. Participants state often not getting much emotion from their parents due to it being seen as a weakness and again, there was no time to spare. With all of these pressures, guilt, experiences, and not having individuals with similar identities, most kept their struggles to themselves throughout their childhood. They learned to persevere and hold emotions inside while slowly their mental health seemed to deteriorate.

### *Unlearning*

As adults now, they are trying to work through their feelings and experiences. Yes, they still have the lingering feeling of pressures and anxiety which for Julia she states, "It's something I think about everyday"; however, simultaneously finds that "this is my time to reverse a lot of that trauma". Many are growing up to realize that they can be thankful for what their parents gave them while also acknowledging that they went through hardships as well. As a child, the experiences they had to go through and the feelings that resulted, they did not allow themselves to feel them and internalized, yet now as adults, they are starting to work through them.

Tying to unlearn that and unlearn the protectiveness. And realized that my life is my own and my experiences are my own. And while I can be super grateful for the lives, they

[parents] let me have. I can completely attest that to like the way that they raised me and also just like them sacrificing to even come to the mainland and come to the country. It's my life and I need to live it for myself and not for them. Which I have always done until just this year. But that's been like a huge process of learning and its been really, really, hard.

As we see, for this participant, Sophia, they are learning that they can make their own decisions and try to let go of the guilt they feel. It is a learning curve and a journey that is not easy but is finally being done for many.

Some state they feel increasing understanding of everything they went through and in general are grateful. Commonly, participants found they had to grow up quicker than nonimmigrants and mature at a young age but find that "these are the cards" they have been dealt. They decided to choose to instead of feeling resentful about some experiences, to now not focusing on their differences and taking their life for what it is. Many mentioned having attended therapy as an adult or are in therapy currently to talk about how their childhood affected them.

Camila finds that:

When our parents came to this country and then they gave birth to us, they themselves to a certain degree, were still children when they were raising you and they were raising you with the trauma that they experience coming into this country. So, to a certain degree, I was raised with the trauma that my dad had of the times he was deported, the experiences that he had with his family, and these different things. And so, there's been so much that I even had to unlearn myself of the things that or the times when I am like, I don't know why my parents did this or why they didn't allow me to have xy&z opportunity. And now, as an adult, I realize why things happened the way that they did.

Regardless of them acknowledging that they went through their own struggles because of this immigrant identity, participants were sure to state numerous times that they were thankful for their parents and that they did the best they could which is well encompassed by Sophia, “Part of the trauma was my parents. I love them. They’re amazing parents. By a lot of my trauma is because of my parents and a lot of my trauma still is because of my parents”. Participants recognize that the task and journey of navigating a country in which often times you are not welcomed, is a difficult experience. Their parents hold a significant amount of trauma stemming from the journey of immigrating and have not worked on alleviating that trauma. The pains and trauma that participants now hold, they know it stems in part due to their parents but again realize their parents often to not have the tools to work through these.

#### *Authority*

Moreover, police are a figure that most recall having some anxiety, fear, or worry about found similarly in a previous study (Enriquez 2015) . Participants recall just being hyper aware throughout their childhood of not getting into trouble or situations in which law enforcement could potentially be involved. Julia recalls her mom telling her to not put her down as an emergency contact or to not mention her name to avoid law enforcement, “If I could avoid it to avoid bigger issues or maybe the police digging deeper or maybe someone reporting us things like that”. Some have had encounters with law enforcement, specifically with parent deportation. The feeling of sadness and anger due to parent deportation at a young age, caused a fear and resentment toward law enforcement in adulthood. For others, they have been stopped by law enforcement with their parents in which it causes anxiety due to fear of retaliation from cops based on their skin tone or status. Cynthia, recalls being pulled over by police with her father and having to act as a translator mediating the interaction as a young child. She recalls how scared

her father was from what others may see as a simple stop, this could be a critical life changing event for her family. Cynthia distinctly recalls how her father questioned whether or not he would be deported and separated from his family, and although she was scared herself, she needed to mediate the conversation and maintain herself calm.

To this day, there is still a fear of law enforcement engrained into their minds and has only lessened slightly with the loss of the 45<sup>th</sup> president of the United States, Donald Trump. A significant number of participants recall their fear increasing of authority figures, specifically law enforcement, when Donald trump became president. Some avoided gatherings due to the fear of being discriminated against by bystanders and law enforcement. Participants commonly used the phrase “being a good citizen” or having to “stay in their lane” to describe how they should strive to act. As Valentina at 21-year-old female from Illinois states “if we screw up in any way, then our whole life gets ruined”. With growing up and understanding the system a bit better, those who according to society are supposed to protect and serve, are a terrifying thought and presence for participants and in general people of color.

Aside from law enforcement, authority figures for many are seen as people who you must respect no matter who they are. In Hispanic culture, elders and authority figures must be respected which was taught to them in their childhood and they still practice this as adults. Additionally, it is tied with being immigrants and their parents having to be submissive toward others because of their immigrant identity. Participants are now sticklers for following rules whether they may agree with them or not, it is something that they will try to their best to follow. That is a big difference some recall with peers or coworkers currently. They see how casual others are with authority figures. As some explain, they will always call their professors by their titles and take responsibility to do “what is right”. Whoever is in charge or has a position of

power, they must follow and listen to. This view is something they are working through and they consistently encounter which Sophia states they are “100% sure that that is connected to just being an immigrant and Latine”. Although they of course state they will continue to be respectful of others, they are trying to unlearn this to an extent. This taught submission has affected them as adults because often they find themselves having less of a voice in spaces such as the workplace and education systems. Avoiding confrontation is common to subsequently avoid any trouble with others.

### *Physical Health*

In regard to physical health, interestingly a common theme I did not account for surrounds body image or dieting. Since a young age, most grew up with diets or parents making comments surrounding their body image. Their parents were not hesitant to mention that they were gaining weight or comment on their eating habits. Mateo found that, “it got engrained that you have to lose weight”. Participants directly link this toward a cultural view however it came with repercussions later on in their life. “I became very hyper aware of my appearance I struggled for a really, really, really, long time with multiple eating disorders and with body dysmorphia” said Julia. I had not realized how preeminent this would be, but it was mentioned by 12 out of 13 participants. For a second participant, Sophia, they struggled with eating disorders similarly to Julia. They recall being constantly given comments by their mother about what they were eating, wearing and how their body looked. It got to the point of developing bulimia which now comes with health repercussions.

In areas with diversity, experiences with doctors and checkup were not an issue as often doctors spoke Spanish and parents were able to easily interact. Participants would mention how lucky they were to have bilingual doctors because when these doctors were absent many were



forced to translate at their own appointments or their family members appointments. These appointments were often a sense of anxiety as medical terminology as a young age is something they did not necessarily know. “You’re like a baby pretty much. I didn’t know what to tell them” said Julia. Every single participant mentioned this experience again often in a jokingly manner. It was anxiety inducing but still downplayed as an occurrence that is normal and necessary.

### *Gratefulness*

Furthermore, the manner in which participants talk was another commonality found. All participants would use words such as them being “lucky” “opportunities” “grateful” “blessed” “privileged” “fortunate” and more. Although yes there were common missed opportunities and so many barriers, they still all commonly had a sense of thankfulness. Sophia states:

“I definitely, I don’t take my opportunities for granted and I literally see every single thing as an opportunity because it is and it’s something that they [parents] didn’t get to do. Therefore, I have to do which is a lot”

Similarly, Mateo mentions, “I think the main way that it still continues to affect me is just how we see the world compared to other people”. These children of immigrants feel blessed for what they have and would comment often on how lucky they were to experience certain situations because they know other children of immigrants didn’t get that opportunity. For instance, Mateo mentioned he was lucky to be able to go to doctor appointments because he knew for other children of immigrants, they underwent multiple barriers. Or for Sophia whose parents were able to help them with their FAFSA and they stated “ I know that’s a really big thing for a lot of people. I’m blessed that it wasn’t for me”. Having an education was seen as an opportunity, having a job was seen as an opportunity, participating in gatherings was an opportunity, so many

things that others would see no importance, for participates it was a door for many possibilities and chances.

Additionally, almost all participants mentioned how incredibly grateful they were for being able to participate in this interview. At the end of the interview, they spoke to me for minutes after to thank me for conducting this research. I believe my status of being a latinx child of immigrants myself, made this experience for them in some part more comfortable. They felt represented and to have a researcher who looks like them, was something they previously did not have many opportunities to experience. Participants knew this research was being conducted as part of my thesis so most wished me luck and even would mention how proud they were of my achievements. All participants were not known acquaintances to me, yet again would mention how proud they were of me for being in college and being in a master's degree program. This relates back to my previous finding of the natural gravitation toward other children of immigrants.

Also, they were happy as this was one of the first opportunities they have had to speak about their experiences and their feelings recently. They found that speaking out and knowing that someone is researching their experiences makes them feel less alone. Having researchers look into what they are going through as children of immigrants, is exciting. I find important to recite instead of summarizing some of the mentioned feelings of gratitude which unfortunately show the undervalue expressed toward immigrants but also demonstrates how valuable it is to have representation and continue to investigate this population.

-This is the first time I've actually had the chance to say it out loud too. Not many of us get that chance, so, thank you. This is great. It is really important. You are getting voices heard.

-Just knowing that there's people out there who really do care about what we are going through. Thank you so much. I appreciate it. I know many other people feel the same.

-Thank you for making our voices heard.

-It always helps me with just learning myself. So, thank you for doing this. This is really important work. It's important to know that we're not alone in these experiences just because it's a very isolating thing.

-I'm thrilled to help because this is hard work that needs to be done.

Overall, mental health struggles were obviously prominent in children of immigrants.

Participants due to their responsibilities quickly learned stress at a young age. Whether it was due to translating, authority figures, body image or more, their feelings kept accumulating. Due to a feeling of privilege, they would keep their stress and anxieties under wraps as to not undermine what their parents had to go through. As adults, they are starting to acknowledge what they personally went through as a direct result of this child of immigrant identity in their childhood. They still have repercussions from some experiences, yet they are in a journey of unlearning and healing.

## **Social Life**

### *Internal Conflict*

As often expressed by participants, their social life was correlated with their cultural and immigrant identity. As children, they saw how different their life at home was compared to their peers. This was an instance of insecurity and shame where they tried to assimilate to American culture to fit in and conform. However, finding a balance between their cultures was difficult. Many state feeling "really deeply insecure about my cultural identity" in which they commonly started to push back against their immigrant and cultural identity. Frequently participants would

recall instances in which they attempted to switch their identity to fit with their friends.

Giovanny calls this switch his “American mode... a psychological switch that I had to do. I had to copy the accent of people around me.” He further states that he suppressed his identity so others would not bully or bother him but also to as to not cause a scene and blend in. There was an internal conflict in which they often felt that did not fit into their home life or their social life stating, “I’m too or not Mexican enough or not American enough”.

For Julia, she wanted to dye her hair blonde, not speak Spanish, and even searched into permanent eye surgery to change her eye color as a child. “I don’t think white kids ever had to deal with because it was just like they are the standard of beauty. They were represented in everything. I was really resentful”. At the time, suppressing and attempting to change their identity to fit in caused them to have a lower self-esteem and to just “stay in their lane”. Many stated they felt anger seeing how others had less barriers than they did. They felt a sense of unfairness and they “hated everything and everyone”. Growing up, due the push on education, cultural differences, and identity struggles as mentioned above, many missed opportunities to engage with friends. This dilemma causes a sense of insecurity and less engagement socially unless they were alongside peers with similar cultural and identity experiences.

### *Relationships*

Additionally, lack of socialization with others could be due to parents’ mistrust and safety concerns but also can be attributed to familism which is common with Hispanic households. Participants repeatedly mentioned how strict their families were with no opportunity to go to sleep overs, parties, or simply just going to a friend’s house. This also affected relationships with their peers which soon led their peers to stop inviting them to social events. As Julia states, “My social life especially in school was really, really, really affected by how strict my parents were

and how much I wasn't allowed to do things out of my own good". For others, they even state they were not allowed to really have friends. This experience was very common that every single participant mentioned at least at some point in their childhood their parents were incredibly strict with their social outings. "I remember feeling that in my childhood I missed out a lot on building these relationships with my friends because my parents wouldn't let me go out, wouldn't let me do all these things". The strictness would lessen only if the friends with who they wanted to socialize with were other known Latinx individuals or children of immigrants. Parents would feel comfortable with friends with similar backgrounds. Participants recall thinking they were just shy individuals as they grew up but now believe it was due to not being able to socialize much with others.

### *Social Outings*

Some even now recall missed opportunities "I shape my entire life actually around the fact that my mom or anyone that I know because I know multiple people in that situation could be deported". Social situations or vacations are something to plan with that extra lingering fear which can diminish events. "I do continue to miss out on things or be affected by things". For Mateo he finds that "I don't have that many good social skills or anything. And so, I feel like not being able to hang out with friends while I was younger has socially impacted me and stunted my social growth now". Their parents lack of knowledge of how to navigate within the system in the US was another instance of lost opportunities within multiple areas.

These instances and strictness caused repercussions now which they are trying to unlearn. Participants state they still follow some of the rules enforced when they were younger to this day. For Julia, even though she does not live with her parents, she often felt she had to lie about her whereabouts to her parents. It took multiple conversations with her current partner to realize

she is an adult and can make her own decisions. Even so, she still feels guilt when she has social opportunities. “I feel very, very guilty as an adult for leaving home....A lot of subconscious guilt I think that still lives with me. Like if I go clubbing or something, I don’t really tell my mom”. Similarly, for Sophia they would call their mom when they first started college to ask her for permission to do certain things. Most participants are in college currently or recently graduated and explained that they have opportunities to socialize yet they second guess their choices. The guilt they experience from having these opportunities causes ambiguity, “ I still feel so much guilt going to parties”

### *Repercussions and Giving Back*

Furthermore, whether that is education, financially, or socially. Their parents didn’t have experiences to pass down to them. Many were left to figure out situations on their own causing mistakes or again missed opportunities which had the potential to be avoided had they received guidance. Some participants recall mistakenly taking classes in college they shouldn’t have done or especially in the workforce, having to work twice as hard as their coworkers. Learning to speak up and advocate for oneself was something they learned in a rude awakening when first starting jobs. They would attend networking events increasingly as they do not know or have family members with connections. Most are building up and attempting to catch up with their peers. Gabriel describes:

“I am dealing with a lot of the repercussions of their lack of knowledge from the past, now. So, they didn’t know much about savings, financial literacy, health, super basic things. And now I’m having to lean that for myself....So I feel like I have to kind of do a lot of catch up work”.

Regardless of these situations, most remanence and want to become more involved within their immigrant identity or cultural identity. Julia finds that as an adult “I started being a lot more accepting of my culture and kind of really proud of the fact that I speak Spanish. About the fact that I came from an immigrant household. I was really, really proud of it.” Participants started to change their viewpoints around high school or college where they felt as if they matured and want to explore their identities. Several participants underwent a cultural shock which pushed them to want to become more involved in their culture. Due to living within diverse areas and with other children of immigrants, when they moved to go to college, the shock was immense. They realized how dependent and how much their identity surrounds their entire life and became more accepting of it as they did not have a diverse environment anymore.

Additionally, as they started to get older and process their situation and experiences, those precise struggles and events they underwent made them want to help others and give back. As Julia states, “I look for opportunities to participate in things that give back to my community” while for Mateo “ I want to offer more, so that way other people have more”. Mateo contributes his past experiences of the pressure he felt to succeed to alleviate burden from his family to his goal of starting a business to help people get professional documents done. With a collaboration with his sister, he wishes to help people with resumes, cover letters, and other documents as some have no guidance to accomplish these which can create an uneven start to their carrier in the workforce.

One participant, Camila, even served as a diversity and inclusion officer in her corporate job as she realized many coworkers of color were struggling to work their way in the company. “Because of my upbringing and because I experienced challenges and because I know my parents’ challenges coming into this country, I do everything in my power and that I can to help

the next generation that is coming after me”. Overall, the experiences in their childhood and having an uneven start due to their child of immigrant identity and also as a Latinx individual, they want to now continuously help others and serve as a guide which they did not have.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS**

The goal of this thesis was to investigate how experiences within children of immigrant’s childhood potentially impacted them in their adulthood. I aimed to better understand this through analyzing experiences within their education, health, and social life. Through 13 interviews, I found that there were some repercussions based upon their childhood experiences. These children of immigrants as adults now are able to make the correlation of being affected from these events and are in a journey of trying to unlearn and process these experiences.

In regard of education, I found that school was one of the first places they remember feeling different from some peers. They necessarily did not know that this difference was linked toward being a child of immigrants at the time, rather they realized the distinction in their language. All participants were bilingual and were very aware of such which created a feeling of otherness. Following with language, participants parents were often not involved within school sponsored events. This was linked toward parents not being able to understand due to language barriers and therefore being uncomfortable to attend. Seeing their parent’s inability to attend such events created sadness and frustration further adding to their feeling of being different than their peers.

With homework assignments, participants recall not being able to easily receive help from their parents compared to nonimmigrant peers. Parents would again be constrained due to language barriers and also due to parent’s lack of opportunity to receive an education. Participant’s made sure however to emphasize that this was not necessarily a barrier but instead



just a difference they had from others. They would always find a way to figure things out on their own or from help from teachers. Communication between parents and teachers was difficult and translators were often a common presence within participants lives. Participants themselves also served as translators not only within their education system but in other areas as well. Every single participant mentioned such task in a joking manner, yet this created a lot of responsibility and a feeling of maturity.

In regard to peers, participants would make friends easier with other children of immigrants. They felt heard and comfortable as these individuals could relate to them, something their white nonimmigrant peers could not. Their view of education was similar as well. They felt a pressure to do the best they could and saw education as an opportunity as their parents many times did not have this opportunity. Now, as adults, they find that due to much of this pressure put on education from their parents, they decided to go to college. This pressure then translated to their college experience. Aside from the pressure, participants also mentioned that the application process and FAFSA were a struggle due to the lack of knowledge within their family about the education system. Most felt underprepared and had difficulties surrounding FAFSA due to status issues or general unknowingness about the process.

When discussing health, participants were quick to state that their mental health was specifically affected due to this child of immigrant's identity. A customary feeling was that of guilt and pressure to succeed that was tied toward coming from an immigrant background. From a young age they started hearing stories of their parents' journey of immigrating toward the United States and the conditions in which they lived in back in their native countries. Hearing these made participants feel spoiled and guilty for the opportunities they have. Even though they lived-in low-income situations and struggled themselves, they felt that mentioning their feelings

to their parents would invalidate them. Therefore, they kept their feelings inside and would not discuss with their parents. Additionally, mental health was not commonly spoken about due to Hispanic culture and the stigma attached to it. Parents would also be working hard and state there was no time for these feelings.

Participants only felt comfortable speaking to other children of immigrants about struggles and were thankful to have these connections. Others were not as fortunate to have this avenue as they lived in areas with no diversity. Now as adults they are in a journey of healing and unlearning. Even when stating that a lot of their traumas came from their parents and their journey to the U.S, participants made sure to acknowledge that their parents loved them tirelessly and fiercely. What they went through as children and even now as adults, it came from a place of a strive toward stability and a better life. Even when recounting moments that they knew the situation could have been handled differently and too much responsibility was put onto them at a young age, their parents did the best they could. They phrased these experiences in a manner in which they defended their parents as to not blame them because they made a journey that they will forever be grateful for.

Further struggles within their mental health came from fear and anxiety of law enforcement. This fear was created when they were young due to experiences of family deportation or interactions with law enforcement but aggravated when Donald trump became president. It was only when he lost his second term that some of these fears lessened but still present. Aside from law enforcement, the learned respect toward authority figures was instilled in them from a young age. This, however, would create some negative barriers within their adulthood as participants were often very strict with following rules and “staying in their lane”

which lessened their voices in areas such as the workplace. Once again, this is a learned view from their immigrant parent that they are trying to lessen to a degree.

With physical health, a surprisingly common mentioned theme surrounded body image and dieting. Participants recollect that growing up their parents would make remarks about their body and would participate and encourage dieting on and off. This caused development of struggling with body image and even eating disorders as adults. Following with physical health, participants mentioned interactions with doctors in the sense that they had to act as translators. They recall being young yet having to have knowledge about medical terminology.

Through all these experiences and recounting their struggles with mental and physical health, participants used words of thankfulness and gratefulness. They felt privileged for what they have as their parents and other individuals do not have such opportunities. Additionally, participants thanked me for doing this research. Participating in this gave them an opportunity to talk about their feelings and made them feel heard. They even mentioned how proud they were of me because they knew I was a fellow child of immigrants like them and seeing me completing a master's degree made them prideful.

Within their social life, it was found that looking back at their childhood, many felt insecure about their immigrant and cultural identity. They wanted to assimilate to societies standard which are very white centered. Participants think of the times in which they would go along with peers and others discriminatory remarks, hidden or "toned down" their culture, try to go along with beauty standards, and more. This created insecurity that they only just realized as adults.

There were reoccurring stories of lack of socialization with others due to parent's strictness from a young age. Participants missed out on sleep overs, hangouts, and more with

friends as their parents held fear for safety and as we can infer, due to familism, commonly occurring within Hispanic households. They feel as if they missed out on a lot of opportunities which as adults they still miss on due to sticking to these rules as a habit. Participants had to learn to allow themselves to engage in situations without having to ask for permission or feeling guilty.

Parents often times did not have educational or financial wealth/ knowledge to inherit to their children. Due to this, participants felt as if they had to work harder than others to catch up. Even through all of this, they are very active within their communities and strive to help others. They want to help other generations struggle less and have their journey go smoother than theirs. On top of that, participants are less conflicted with their immigrant and cultural identity and feel prideful.

To circle back to the life course perspective previously mentioned, we can observe that children of immigrant's life course similarly follows the standard timeline of events society deems right. Going to high school, going to college in most cases, finding a job and so on. However, their trajectory is one very culturally impacted by their family and their history. Particularly, the major event of their parents travels to a new country, even though decades prior, impacts them in multiple ways throughout their childhood and often some of the experiences as described above are so prevalent there are lingering effects into adulthood. This travel cannot be disregarded because of all the impacts observed shows us the importance of taking a life course perspective.

Overall, while children of immigrants were inherited beautiful culture, resilience, and strive, simultaneously they were also given the task of tearing down the walls of generations of traumatic events to achieve greatness. This task of greatness and the bearer of change initiated

from a young age through multiple experiences and responsibilities. From such young age, children of immigrants came to learn about stress which followed them to their adulthood. Although even now in their adulthood they undergo a burden of such pressure, they began to release and unlearn some of the engrained traumas and stressors they have experienced and validate their feelings. Participants are learning that it can be synonymous to acknowledge their childhood stressors while also being appreciative of their parents. It is a journey that does not come easy yet courageous, nonetheless.

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## **APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM**

You are requested to participate in a research study “Impact of Formative Childhood and Adolescent Experiences in Latinx Children of Immigrants Adulthood: Analysis of Educational, Health and Social Implications”. This study is being conducted by graduate student Alma Lopez from the Department of Sociology at Minnesota State University, Mankato with the guidance of Dr. Kristi Rendahl.

### **Purpose:**

The purpose of this study is to identify how formative childhood experiences being a child of immigrants, impacts individuals within their adulthood. This will be done through analyzing differing factors of individuals lives such as education, health, and social life.

### **Procedure:**

This study will require reflection upon previous and current experiences in correlation to being a child of immigrants. Through a series of demographical and targeted questions, you will be asked to elaborate upon your experiences. If you agree to participate, a meeting time will be scheduled whether that be through zoom or in person depending on your preferences. With your consent, your responses will be audio recorded. The interview is expected to take 45 minutes up to one hour in length.

### **Risks and Benefits:**

If agreeing to participate, society may benefit from this research by learning of the distinct experience’s children of immigrants undergo. By doing so, this research study can add to the body of literature of Latinx experiences in the United States.

As participants are Latinx, there is a risk of experiencing discomfort when recalling experiences when sharing racial or ethnic experiences. Participation is voluntary and you have the option not to respond to any of the questions if you feel uncomfortable. You may stop taking the survey at any time and your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with Minnesota State University, Mankato. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits.

If consent is received and the interview is audio recorded, the file will be immediately destroyed upon transcription. Records of the study will be kept in a password encrypted computer of which only the researcher has access to. Responses will be anonymous. Your name will be replaced with a pseudonym upon transcription of the audio to protect your identity.

With all the safeguards mentioned, whenever one works with online technology such as zoom, there is always the risk of compromising privacy, confidentiality, and/or anonymity. If you would like more information about the specific privacy and anonymity risks posed by online surveys, please contact the Minnesota State University, Mankato IT Solutions Center (507-389-6654) and ask to speak to the Information Security Manager.

Initial that you have read this page \_\_\_\_\_

**Questions:**

Please print a copy of this page for your future reference. If you have any questions, you can contact the graduate student conducting the research study, Alma Lopez, at (218)-831-5917 or at [alma.lopez@mnsu.edu](mailto:alma.lopez@mnsu.edu). You may also contact Dr. Kristi Rendahl at (507) 389-5215 or [kristi.rendahl@mnsu.edu](mailto:kristi.rendahl@mnsu.edu).

If you have any questions about participants' rights and for research-related injuries, please contact the Administrator of the Institutional Review Board, at (507) 389-1242. Communication with any of these contacts will be in reference to the IRBNet number 1896827.

**Consent:**

By signing I agree I have read the information received. I confirm I am at least 18 years of age and agree to participate.

---

Subject Name (Printed)

---

Date

---

Subject Signature

---

Date

---

Person Obtaining Consent (Printed)

---

Date

---

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

---

Date

## APPENDIX B: FORMULARIO DE CONSENTIMIENTO

Se le solicita participar en un estudio de investigación “Impacto de las experiencias formativas de la infancia y la adolescencia en los hijos latinos de inmigrantes adultos: análisis de las implicaciones educativas, de salud, y sociales”. Este estudio está siendo realizado por la estudiante de maestría Alma López del Departamento de Sociología de la Universidad Estatal de Minnesota, Mankato, con la orientación de la Dra. Kristi Rendahl

### **Propósito**

El propósito de este estudio es identificar cómo las experiencias de la infancia formativa de ser hijo de inmigrantes impactan a las personas en su edad adulta. A través del análisis de diferentes factores de la vida como la educación, la salud, y la vida social.

### **Procedimiento:**

Este estudio requerirá una reflexión sobre las experiencias anteriores y actuales en correlación con ser hijo de inmigrantes. A través de una serie de preguntas demográficas y específicas, se le pedirá que explique sus experiencias. Si acepta participar, se programará una reunión, ya sea a través de Zoom o en persona, según sus preferencias. Con su consentimiento, sus respuestas serán grabadas en audio. Se espera que la entrevista dure hasta 45 minutos.

### **Riesgos y Beneficios:**

Si acepta participar, la sociedad puede beneficiarse de esta investigación al conocer las distintas experiencias que viven los hijos de inmigrantes. Al hacerlo, este estudio de investigación puede agregar al cuerpo de literatura de experiencias latinas en los Estados Unidos.

Como los participantes son Latinos, existe el riesgo de pasar incomodidad al recordar y compartir experiencias raciales o étnicas. La participación es voluntaria y tiene la opción de no responder a ninguna de las preguntas si se siente incómodo. Puede dejar de participar en la entrevista en cualquier momento y su decisión de participar o no, no afectará su relación con la Universidad Estatal de Minnesota, Mankato. Si decide no participar, no implicará penalización ni pérdida de beneficios.

Si consiente y la entrevista se graba en audio, el archivo se destruirá inmediatamente después de la transcripción. Los registros del estudio se mantendrán en una computadora cifrada con contraseña a la que solo la investigadora tiene acceso. Las respuestas serán anónimas. Su nombre será reemplazado por un seudónimo luego de la transcripción del audio para proteger su identidad.

Con todas las salvaguardas mencionadas, cada vez que se trabaja con tecnología en línea como Zoom, siempre existe el riesgo de comprometer la privacidad, la confidencialidad y/o el anonimato. Si desea obtener más información sobre los riesgos específicos de privacidad y anonimato que plantean las encuestas en línea, comuníquese con el Centro de Soluciones de Mankato de la Universidad Estatal de Minnesota (507-389-6654) y solicite hablar con el Gerente de Seguridad de la Información.

Escriba sus iniciales para indicar que ha leído esta página \_\_\_\_\_



**Preguntas:**

Imprima una copia de esta pagina para su futura referencia. Si tiene alguna pregunta, puede comunicarse con la estudiante de maestría que realiza el estudio de investigación, Alma López (218)-831-5917 o [alma.lopez@mnsu.edu](mailto:alma.lopez@mnsu.edu). También puede comunicarse con la Dra. Kristi Rendahl al (507)-389-5215 o [kristi.rendahl@mnsu.edu](mailto:kristi.rendahl@mnsu.edu).

Si tiene alguna pregunta sobre los derechos de los participantes y sobre lesiones relacionadas con la investigación, comuníquese con el Administrador de la Junta de Revisión Institucional al (507)-389-1242. La comunicación con cualquiera de estos contactos se hará en referencia al numero de IRBNet #1896827.

**Consentimiento:**

Al firmar acepto que he leído la información recibida. Confirмо que tengo al menos 18 años de edad y acepto participar.

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Nombre del Participante (Impreso)

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Fecha

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Firma del Participante

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Fecha

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Persona Obteniendo el Consentimiento (Impreso)

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Fecha

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Firma de la Persona Obteniendo el Consentimiento

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Fecha

## APPENDIX C: SOCIAL MEDIA MESSAGE ENGLISH VERSION

Hi, my name is Alma Lopez and I am a 22-year-old master's degree student! I am working on a research study (IRB NET #1896827) at Minnesota State University, Mankato in Minnesota alongside my advisor, Dr. Kristi Rendahl. I am hoping to obtain participants for my research study who are willing to volunteer and over the age of 18. This research study will focus on Latinx children of immigrants who identify as second-generation immigrants/first generation. The purpose of this study is to identify how formative childhood experiences of being a child of immigrants impacts individuals in their adulthood. The study will take place through an interview using zoom for an expected 45 minutes up to a hour. Identities of participants will be protected using pseudonyms which can be further explained if interested.

I myself am a Latinx child of immigrants which is why I am passionate about this topic. I hope that through this research I will be able to add to the body of literature and help my community. Additionally, I am bilingual in English and Spanish so if interested, I can adjust to participants preferred language. Participant comfortability is important, and you may choose to stop or skip any questions you would like. If you are interested or know of others who may be, please contact me at [alma.lopez@mnsu.edu](mailto:alma.lopez@mnsu.edu) or Kristi at [kristi.rendahl@mnsu.edu](mailto:kristi.rendahl@mnsu.edu) for further details. Thank you!

**APPENDIX D: MENSAJE DE REDES SOCIALES VERSION EN ESPAÑOL**

¡Hola! Mi nombre es Alma López y soy una estudiante de maestría de 22 años! Estoy trabajando en un estudio de investigación (IRB NET #1896827) en la Universidad Estatal de Minnesota, Mankato en conjunto con mi asesora, la Dra. Kristi Rendahl. Espero obtener participantes para mi estudio de investigación que estén dispuestos a ser voluntarios y mayores de 18 años hasta 30 años. Este estudio de investigación se centrará en los hijos latinos de inmigrantes que se identifican como segunda generación inmigrante/primera generación estadounidense. El propósito de este estudio es identificar como las experiencias de la infancia formativa de ser hijo de inmigrantes impactan a las personas en su edad adulta. El estudio se llevará a cabo a través de una entrevista usando zoom o en persona si desea de hasta 45 minutos. Se protegerá la identidad de los participantes, que se puede explicar con mas detalle si esta interesando.

Yo misma soy una hija latina de inmigrantes, por eso me apasiona este tema. Espero que a través de esta investigación pueda agregar al cuerpo de literatura y ayudar a mi comunidad. Además, soy bilingüe en ingles y español, por lo que si esta interesado, puede adaptarme al idioma preferido de los participantes. La comodidad de los participantes es importante y puede optar por detenerse e omitir cualquier pregunta que desea. Si esta interesado o sabe de otros que puedan estarlo, por favor contácteme por mi correo electrónico [alma.lopez@mnsu.edu](mailto:alma.lopez@mnsu.edu) o a Kristi en [kristi.rendahl@mnsu.edu](mailto:kristi.rendahl@mnsu.edu) para mas detalles. ¡Gracias!

## APPENDIX E: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

### Demographical Questions:

1. How old are you?
2. Where are you located?
3. What is your gender?
4. What is your race/ethnicity?
5. How would you describe yourself in regard to your identity?
6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
7. Are you employed?

### Preguntas demográficas:

1. ¿Que edad tienes?
2. ¿Donde estas ubicado?
3. ¿Cual es tu genero?
4. Cual es tu raza/etnicidad?
5. ¿Como te describirías con respecto a tu identidad?
6. ¿Cual es el nivel de educación mas alto que has completado?
7. ¿Esta empleado?

## APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself?
2. When did you learn you were a child of immigrants/first generation American?
3. Growing up, were there any experiences you had that you believe were particular to being a child of immigrants/having immigrant parents?
4. Do you believe your education differed from peers who did not have immigrant parents in your childhood? Was it affected or not?  
*If currently in school:* What about now, is your education process impacted?
5. What connection, if any, is there growing up a child of immigrants in relation to peer engagement?
6. What connection, if any, is there growing up a child of immigrants in relation to authority figures such as law enforcement? How were you affected or not?
7. How has having immigrants' parents affected your physical or mental health, if at all?
8. Do you have an avenue or people to talk to about your experiences? Were your parents someone you could talk to?
9. Do you believe your social life and/or opportunities were affected due to your parent's immigrant status and subsequently your status of being a child of immigrants?
10. Do you believe your identity and feelings from your childhood of being a child of immigrants have changed to how you feel now as an adult?
11. Overall do you believe your parents' immigrant status affects you currently?
12. Do you have any last additional comments?

**APPENDIX G: PREGUNTAS DE ENTREVISTA VERSION EN ESPAÑOL**

1. ¿Puedes contarme un poco sobre ti?
2. ¿Cuándo supo que era hijo de inmigrantes/estadounidense de primera generación?
3. Al crecer, ¿hubo alguna experiencia que haya tenido que crea que fue particular de ser hijo de inmigrantes/tener padres inmigrantes?
4. ¿Cree que su educación fue diferente a la de sus compañeros que no tuvieron padres inmigrantes en su infancia? ¿Se vio afectado o no?
5. ¿Que conexión, si es que hay alguna, existe al crecer como hijo de inmigrantes en relación con la participación de los compañeros?
6. ¿Que conexión si es que hay alguna, existe al crecer un hijo de inmigrantes en relación con figuras de autoridad como las fuerzas del orden (policías)? ¿Como te afecto o no?
7. ¿Como ha afectado su salud física o mental tener padres inmigrantes, si es que lo ha hecho?
8. ¿Tiene una vía o personas con quienes hablar sobre sus experiencias? ¿Tus padres eran/son alguien con quien podías hablar?
9. ¿Cree que su vida social y/o sus oportunidades se vieron afectadas debido a sus padres siendo inmigrantes y con posteridad, siendo hijo de inmigrantes?
10. ¿Crees que tu identidad y sentimientos de tu infancia de ser hijo de inmigrantes han cambiado a como te sientes ahora como adulto?
11. ¿En general, cree que el estatus de inmigrantes de sus padres le afecta actualmente?
12. ¿Tiene algún ultimo comentario adicional?

## APPENDIX H: FLYER ENGLISH VERSION

 MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY MANKATO

IRB NET ID#: 1896827



# LOOKING FOR LATINX RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

**ARE YOU:**

- 18-30 YEARS OLD
- IDENTIFY AS LATINX
- IDENTIFY AS A CHILD OF IMMIGRANTS

**IF SO, WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR ABOUT YOUR  
EXPERIENCES AS A LATINX CHILD OF  
IMMIGRANTS. PLEASE CONTACT ALMA LOPEZ  
FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

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## APPENDIX I FLYER SPANISH VERSION

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**BUSCANDO  
PARTICIPANTES DE  
INVESTIGACIÓN  
LATINX****ERES TU:**

- ENTRE 18-30 AÑOS
- LATINX
- HIJO DE INMIGRANTES

**SI ES ASI, NOS ENCANTARÍA CONOCER TUS  
EXPERIENCIAS COMO HIJO LATINX DE  
INMIGRANTES. POR FAVOR COMUNÍQUESE  
CON ALMA LOPEZ PARA MÁS  
INFORMACIÓN.**

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