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**Feeling Status: What Emotion Reveals
About Immigrant Relationships
With The United States**

Faith Williams

Master of Arts in
International Migration Studies

THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

May 2023

Feeling Status: What Emotion Reveals About Immigrant Relationships With The United States

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

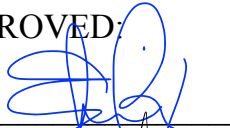
MASTER IN MIGRATION STUDIES

By Faith Williams
May 2023

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.


APPROVED:



Advisor

May 16, 2023

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May 16, 2023

Date

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Abstract

Traditional understandings of legal status focus on its role as a mechanism for state function without adequately acknowledging the emotional component of how it feels to navigate it, especially for immigrants. Drawing on the embodied wisdom of immigrants to better understand what legal status is and what role it plays in society, this study utilizes 13 semi-structured interviews conducted with immigrants now permanently documented in the United States as legal permanent residents or naturalized citizens, who previously lived undocumented in the country, to identify several patterns that highlight the limit of conventional notions of citizenship. By employing a person-centered approach to emotion and prioritizing the context of global inequality within which citizenship is distributed, my data draws upon existing literature on the complexity of citizenship to emphasize that even as legal barriers lift, emotional marginalization remains or grows more complex over time. Despite this, immigrants demonstrate agency as they use their legal status to navigate their relationships with the state in meaningful and empowered ways despite hostile aspects of the receiving context. Understanding legal status through immigrants' emotional experience can prompt theoretical conversations to be more committed to those most intimately involved with citizenship, and help support calls for policy that prioritizes pathways to legal status.

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I. Introduction: An Emotions Intervention

A 78-year-old woman from Mexico, Carmen, welcomed me into her brand new mobile home on a late summer evening. She had just arrived back from a ten hour day at the farm where she worked, and she shared her story over the soft whirring of a fan: one of womanhood, motherhood, labor, borders, and love. Formerly undocumented, she was now a lawful permanent resident (LPR) looking forward to citizenship “para sentirse más permanente” [*to feel more permanent*]. When asked what being a citizen meant to her, she referenced the responsibility to “dar lo mejor de nosotros” [*give the best of ourselves*]; however, when asked about any responsibilities the United States would have to her, the imbalance in how she understood her relationship with the state became evident: “No sé. Yo creo que [no] porque si él nos abre la puerta [...] como la puerta de una casa, [...] estamos como huésped [del país], invitados” [*I don't know. I think [no] because if they open the door to us, [...] like the door of a house [...], we are like guests, invited*]. Her comment makes clear the limit legal status has in substantively including immigrants and suggests the impact this has had on her experience in the United States.

Based on concern for the nature of immigrant relationships with the state and the role the state plays in the emotional lives of immigrants, in this thesis, I rely on the wisdom embedded in feeling to experience to address the following research questions: How do immigrants from Mexico and Central America who were formally excluded from citizenship in the United States describe how legal U.S. status feels? And what deeper insights does serious analysis of the emotions of status offer on legal state membership?

By making an intervention in how immigrant relationships with the United States are assumed to be experienced and disrupting some of the power that the nation holds through a

focus on emotion, we can imagine the way that the nation, instead of endlessly benefitting citizens, also is— maybe even primarily— a beneficiary of those who live within, and work for, it, even when those same people are excluded from legal citizenship (Clarke et al., 2014). This decentering, or refocusing, not only allows us to leave behind theoretical assumptions, but also can prompt theoretical conversations to be more committed to those most intimately involved with citizenship, and help illustrate the logic of reconsidering policies that overpolice, restrict, and manipulate the lives of immigrants in the United States (Bosniak, 2006; Volpp, 2007). Emphasizing the lived reality of citizenship reveals a new perspective in which some of the power that states employ to use socioeconomic status, education, gender, race, ethnicity, and class to distribute citizenship is deemphasized (Rangel-Medina, 2021; Volpp, 2007). When emotion and experience guide our understanding of citizenship, we realize that it lacks intrinsic values or characteristics, and, instead, is “imperfect,” a mere outgrowth of public discourse, and a result of ever-present government self-interest (Balibar, 2001; Bloemraad, 2006; Koslowski, 2000).

Citizenship determines who is obligated to contribute to the state and who qualifies for state services and support, making it central to state function (Marshall, 1950). Ideally, it facilitates the application of the law, the collection of taxes, and the allocation of public goods and services along with belonging, integration, engagement, inclusion, and opportunity (Bosniak, 2006). However, even within the bounds of “citizen,” the individual-state relationship often fails to reach its intended symbiotic form. Instead, there are members of the state—specifically women, people of color, immigrants, and queer folks—excluded from experiencing all that citizenship claims to guarantee (Bloemraad, 2008; Coll, 2010; Oishi, 2005; Suárez-Orozco, Hernández, & Casanova, 2015). By contrast, some members (often the wealthiest), evade taxes,

skip jury duty, opt out of voting , etc. and, by doing so, fail to meet the expectations that the state has of its members (Edwards, 2006). Therefore, citizenship is not impenetrable and represents a complicated contractual and implicit relationship difficult to enforce and susceptible to prejudice and inequality, something made evident through an approach based in feeling and experience.

Traditionally, academia, public media, and governmental institutions and agencies rely on sources of knowledge regarding immigration that ignore the wisdom and experiences of immigrants. As individuals who have ventured across a border, held multiple citizenships, navigated various statuses, and felt the lived impact of the political system, they possess invaluable wisdom and should be the center of any policy or conversation (Clarke et al., 2014). For people who have never navigated legal status, citizenship begs few questions (Benmayor & Flores, 1997; Coll, 2010). For people who cross borders, however, the question of what it means to belong within them remains constantly present, and their lived experience of legal status is critical to any understanding of it.

Drawing on the embodied wisdom of immigrants, this study utilizes 13 semi-structured interviews conducted with immigrants now permanently documented in the United States as legal permanent residents or naturalized citizens that previously lived undocumented in the country to identify several patterns that highlight the limit of conventional notions of citizenship. By employing a participant-centered approach to emotion and prioritizing the context of global inequality within which citizenship is distributed, my data draws upon existing literature on the complexity of citizenship to emphasize that the process is not linear and that even as legal barriers lift, emotional marginalization remains or grows more complex over time.

In the thesis that follows, I review the literature that currently dominates academic, as well as public, understandings of citizenship. Here, I argue for more integrated research that

accounts for the subjectivity of citizenship and promotes a more nuanced way of thinking that decenters the state, relying more heavily on the embodied wisdom and lived experience of individuals. Then, in the methods section, I outline the research procedure I used, provide rationale for decisions I made regarding my research design, and explain the impact of my positionality as a white researcher. Next, I present my findings to show what my interviewees suggested about the nature of immigrant relationships with the state, particularly how they perceive it both as a perpetrator of harm and a provider of relief as well as how they use their agency in choosing how to interact with it. Finally, I ask for increased commitment to immigrant voices and emotions in theoretical discussions of citizenship as well as in the development of policy that impacts immigrant lives in order to better recognize them as agents; then, I call for a less exclusive approach to citizenship in the United States in order to minimize the trauma sustained from the undocumented experience and identify possible directions for future research to make emotion a more central focus of migration studies.

II. Literature Review: Legal Status As Relationship

Centuries of literature on citizenship provide important background on its essential benefits for immigrants and its resulting legal implications. Yet, less work has focused on the complex emotional transition for immigrants as they navigate new statuses and manage their feelings toward the United States. Through use of in-depth interviews, this study seeks to bridge this gap by connecting various approaches to understanding citizenship at a macro level to more meso and micro level ideas of emotion and relationship to ultimately better understand patterns about the emotional condition of legal status.

The Member & The State

Like other social goods, citizenship has a more complex meaning and function than is often understood (Bosniak, 2006; Coutin, 2000), and some scholars even assert that its *undefinability* is an inherent part of its nature (Lister, 2005; Williams, 1983). This comes from the way it is constantly adapting, shifting, and contorting, both in its construction—in order to best meet the needs of the state—and in the way it is experienced—largely based on the intersecting social identities of the individual (Clarke et al., 2014). Its modern form emanates from western modernity and has been shaped by power and knowledge—both of which are inherently relational (Foucault, 1982). Combining these forces has allowed states to maintain dominance through “disciplinary power”—the mechanism that states employ to regulate the behavior of members through space, time, and activity—and “governmentality”—ideologies, knowledge, and power technologies that govern the exercise of authority (Foucault, 1982; Bissell, 2019). Citizenship allows states to maintain such power and to intensify it by emphasizing exclusivity and legally stratifying the distribution of political goods (Bosniak, 2006).

Rights & Obligations

In the most direct sense, citizenship represents a legally formalized political relationship between a person and a political body with administrative power (Marshall, 1950). For citizens, citizenship is intended to guarantee a set of rights along with a set of obligations (Hansen & Weil, 2001; Bosniak, 2006). However, modern nations, including the United States, rely on exclusivity to define their citizenry, meaning that the very act of excluding, based on any variety of characteristics, is considered a right by the nation itself which creates a hierarchy between the state, citizens, and noncitizens that becomes difficult to breach or bridge (Walzer, 1983). So, while in theory, citizenship comes with equally balanced rights and obligations, in reality, states “grant” citizenship and require pledged allegiance without providing a framework for guaranteed substantive protection for all (Arendt, 1951; Coll, 2010; Hall & Held, 1989). Ultimately, because the state acts as the gatekeeper of membership, it maintains a position of authority and superiority in the relationship between citizens and the state (Dowty, 1989; Hansen, 2008; Walzer, 1983).

With this, “legality” and “illegality” become socially complicated, and the experiences of individuals without legal status come with a heightened sense of “legal consciousness,” or reliance on legal categories and definitions to understand their place in society (Klare, 1977; Abrego, 2019). Here, legality refers to “the meanings, sources, authority and cultural practices that are commonly recognized as legal, regardless of who employs them or for what ends” (Ewick and Silbey, 1998, p. 22). Communally and individually, legal status has an emotional component, making the affective investigation critical to a more complete understanding of the micro-level multidimensionality of legal status and the way immigrants experience its impact (Hoschild, 2012).

Role of Colonialism

Colonial projects have accompanied the development of citizenship, making it a simultaneous outgrowth of international hegemonic structures as well as an agent of the perpetuation of colonial dynamics (Bloom, 2017). Historically, migration studies has lacked adequate recognition of the central role colonialism plays in modern mobility and displacement, an oversight that has held back theory on the function of citizenship (Tudor, 2018). Critical race, postcolonial, decolonial, indigenous studies, and third world approaches to international law (TWAIL) scholars have provided the tools to address the “mutually constitutive character of world politics,” yet the research that has informed policy and shaped more conventional scholarship on migration has presented modern movement as unprecedented and citizenship as inherent (Barkawi & Laffey, 2006; Achiume & Carbado, 2021; Mayblin & Turner, 2020).

If we instead use knowledge of our “connected histories” to recognize that the modern moment is inextricable from its preceding centuries, we can push against dominant narratives to make space for data and evidence that incorporate perspectives outside the mainstream (Bhabra 2010; Subrahmanyam, 1997). By streamlining a narrative of our history that denies the colonialism of the past and present, the government has “sanctioned our ignorance” by codifying a way of thinking that refuses to confront the past or take responsibility for it (Spicak, 1999), and in many ways, this has been possible by systematically overlooking the feelings and experiences of immigrants (Mayblin & Turner, 2020).

The Member & The Community

Because citizenship is not experienced independent of social groups and their own processes, it also has a cultural dimension (Ong et al., 1996; Stets & Turner, 2008; Hoshchild, 2012). “Cultural citizenship” provides added insight into this by highlighting how certain

communities, especially Latino, interact with the government (Rosaldo, 1997; Benmayor, Torruellas, and Juarbe, 1992) and describes a process by which group that have faced exclusion or marginalization claim membership and are negotiate their own enfranchisement (Flores & Benmayor, 1997; Rosaldo, 1997). By claiming cultural citizenship, they broaden the idea of how they can belong, and even in the face of legal and social disenfranchisement, communities create pathways for themselves to “demand to be what they are” as legitimized members of society (Gowayed, 2020; Silvestrini, 1997, p. 51). Besides connections to labor and performance as state subjects, socially developed emotions can also be assertions of agency that allow immigrants to “claim selfhood and belonging” in a world that questions their legitimacy and disregards their needs (Brennan, 2004; Faier, 2007; Hoschchild, 2012). This particular type of emotional labor is one of persistence; other scholars have addressed a similar concept by explaining the development of radical hope as an outgrowth of the emotional labor performed in the face of injustice and struggle (de Borja, 2021; Kallio et al., 2020).

For many native-born white citizens whose experiences dominate the national narrative, “culture” is something that only applies to the “other” and citizenship’s implications are generally far less tangible (Joppke, 2010; Volpp, 2007). In a way, culture and citizenship are unfortunately and unnecessarily positioned in tension with each other, with citizenship representing neutrality or belonging and culture representing a burden or threat (Rangel-Medina, 2021; Nakano Glenn, 2001). The idea of cultural citizenship is strongest for groups that have had to make space for themselves in a political and legal world with exclusionary boundaries, and represents resistance against pressure to assimilate (Ong et al., 1996). When the state attempts to control a group of people by excluding them from formal citizenship, cultural

citizenship maintains the group's connection to their culture, exerts the sense of self, and expands the group's presence in the civil sphere (Flores, R., 1997; Flores & Benmayor, 1997). Most research on the topic has been done in reference to Latino communities because of their long history as part of and in relationship with the United States, but the idea of strong cultural groups "claiming membership" and "remaking America" is something that could be broadened to apply to any marginalized group (Dixon et al., 2018). In any sense, understanding the role social dynamics and culture have on the way individuals and groups conceptualize citizenship also sheds light on the emotional aspect of their experience with legal status.

Impact of Exclusivity

Because legal status fails to capture all forms of belonging, substantive protection and integration depends on the presence of community-level factors alongside formal political membership (Herzog, 2011; Soto Saavedra, 2023). So, despite more traditional definitions that prioritize the legal character of citizenship, other aspects of membership function independently of any formal documents (Smith, 2003). For example, while lacking citizenship implies denial of the vote, limited access to most welfare benefits, and subjection to deportation, there are social, civic, and political ways of understanding membership that allow for participation in the less formal but still powerful processes of governance (Marshall, 1950; Smith, 2003; Patler, 2018; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015).

However, despite a strong presence in civic and political spheres, exclusion from formal membership has legal implications that maintain a division between undocumented communities and the nation's citizenry. This marginalization leads to overwhelming patterns of dissociation from government for individuals concerned with earning a living and remaining undisturbed in a locale that deems them invisible (Ulibarri, 1971; Volpp, 2007). In many cases, individuals

continue to contribute to the state as taxpayers, parents, leaders, and workers, just without the converse guarantee of rights through citizenship, making the affective implications of that exclusion important, both to this research and to efforts to promote meaningful inclusion (Dixon et al., 2018; Smith, 2003; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015).

Because of the layers of injustice embedded in U.S. state governance and the way exclusivity can be considered a central part of its function, seeking citizenship is not a simple alternative to status-based restrictions. It involves interactions with a system that threatens emotional well-being, is unpleasant and bureaucratic, and both explicitly and implicitly pursues the acculturation and assimilation of the “cultural other.” As a result, some with particularly negative feelings toward the United States consider it undesirable despite any benefits it may simultaneously offer (Gonzalez-Barrera et al., 2013). For others, the migration experience was always intended to be temporary, and their intention is to return to their home countries, making citizenship unnecessary (Gmelch, 1980). Additionally, the opportunity to seek out citizenship is a privilege: there are over 11 million estimated undocumented people living in the United States now; as it currently stands, the majority do not have a pathway to permanent status or citizenship (American Immigration Council, 2021; Migration Policy Institute, 2019). However, regardless of the multiplicity of immigrant responses to exclusion and marginalization, very little research has treated emotion as a relevant part of the conversation of citizenship or the experience of legal status.

The Member & Their Feelings

Little research has explored the emotional condition of citizenship, both for native-born citizens and immigrants. Within the general field of sociology, the term “emotional labor” describes the act of either inducing or suppressing feeling in order to produce a self that

satisfies the goals or desires of others (Hoshchild, 2012; Ho 2014). For immigrants, emotional labor directly applies as the United States uses naturalization as a way to position itself, by making clear what constitutes a “good” immigrant, requiring pledges of allegiance, etc., to influence immigrants’ feelings and behavior (Shukla, 2016). By viewing the emotional regulation that comes as a response, we can investigate how immigrants experience the affective condition of navigating unauthorization and reauthorization in a politically hostile environment and, from that, imagine pathways to progress that diminish this labor and promote immigrant wellbeing.

Additionally, through the theoretical background that all emotions exist within greater social contexts, it is clear that there is an embodied and emplaced nature to feeling, just as relevant in reference to citizenship as to any other social phenomenon (Hoshchild, 2012; Raffaeta, 2015). While emotion does not fully address the political and cultural aspects of citizenship, it contributes something critical to the conversation by bringing the human experience to the center of conversations about the state’s role in guaranteeing an equal access to rights. Through this lens we can better understand immigrants’ choices, facilitate greater well-being, and more meaningfully promote their success as valuable members of society.

Centering the Individual

While scholars can argue indefinitely about whether citizenship is political, cultural, or emotional, such arguments do little to empower productive thought regarding the ways groups and people *experience* citizenship (Coutin, 2007). Considering that citizenship cannot truly guarantee rights or belonging, there are formal and informal members of states that are never afforded full legal membership or, even if they do, are unable to access equal rights (Flores, W., 1997). And, because “immigrants” refer to individuals from all regions, religions, cultures, ages,

gender identities, races, and classes who cross borders for any reason, the narrowness of any particular framing fails to fully encapsulate the diversity of perspectives or ways of processing experiences (Bissel, 2019; Clarke et al., 2014; Gowayad, 2020).

Too often citizenship research has tried to answer questions from the perspective of the state without realizing that, in reality, the most meaningful manifestations of citizenship are instead in the ways the members interact with the state, each other, and themselves (Hall & Held, 1989; Clarke et al., 2014; Flores & Benmayor, 1997). By opening up to new ways of knowing that are centered on the way the impacts of inequality are felt and how they are responded to, we allow deeper and more complex presentations of citizenship into more contexts that apply to more groups and individuals (Clarke et al., 2014; Bosniak, 2006). With a focus on the emotional aspect of the immigrant experience and based on the framework of citizenship as a relationship between an individual and the state, this project aims to address this lack of perspective by contributing a new way of thinking about legal status that relies primarily on its role in the lives of those directly impacted instead of as a mechanism of state function, allowing it to address both its impact and its complexity.

III. Methodology: Engaging With Emotion

Research Design

In order to explore how residents and citizens describe experiencing their former legal exclusion within the United States, this project approached concepts of citizenship, legal status, national identity, and emotion qualitatively, and was based in grounded theory and phenomenology. Because the nature of this inquiry was based in experience and emotion, this project uses a participant-centered (traditionally referred to as ‘subject-centered’) model of in-depth interviews to center immigrants as sources of knowledge (Zhou et al., 2008; Lee & Sheng, 2023; Ryo, 2018). This approach allowed for a close analysis of micro-level dynamics within their larger structural contexts in order to highlight the ways legal status, as an outgrowth of capitalism, was lived and felt by those whose voices are least often yet most necessarily listened to (Zhou et al., 2008).

Sample

My population of focus was immigrants in the United States who, having experienced being undocumented at some point in their lives, now had permanent status as either naturalized citizens or lawful permanent residents (LPR). A naturalized U.S. citizen refers to someone who, previously a non-citizen, has acquired citizenship by completing the required process, and a lawful permanent resident refers to someone permanently authorized to live in the United States, albeit without the full rights or obligations associated with citizenship (Legal Information Institute, 2022). Typically, these were people who entered the country without authorization but also included individuals who overstayed visas. Because it is not currently connected to a pathway to citizenship, I did not include current DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) recipients in my sample, although some participants were

formerly included in that program.

There was also no particular geographic location within the United States of specific interest, and I interviewed a total of thirteen respondents in English and/ or Spanish. Six interviews were conducted with people in my hometown in rural East Texas, five were conducted with people based in the San Francisco Bay Area, California, and one was conducted with an individual in Utah. One interview was also done with someone from Huntsville, TX but who was living in El Salvador temporarily due to her husband's immigrant status. In Mariela's interview, her son (who had been my original contact) was also present and contributed to the conversation. Because he was a native-born citizen, none of his comments are included in my data, but his presence and perspective were still rich contributions to the interview. All other interviews were done without anyone else's commentary.

My final sample represented individuals from four different countries within Central America or Mexico, regions that account for the origins of 33% of immigrants in the United States (Budiman, 2020). Specifically, ten participants had migrated from Mexico, which is the origin country of 25% of immigrants in the United States (Budiman, 2020). Ten of the individuals in my sample were women and only three were men, underrepresenting the male immigrant population and likely a result of selection bias stemming from my own identity as a woman and resulting network of female friends and acquaintances (American Immigration Council, 2020). Approximately half of my sample (46%) were lawful permanent residents and the other half (54%) were citizens, providing significant representation for both types of permanent legal status and, while not addressing the estimated 23% who are undocumented (for reasons discussed previously), reflected the fact that an estimated 45% of U.S. immigrants are naturalized citizens. (See Appendix A).

Data Collection Techniques

My data collection was conducted from April to December 2022 and consisted of 13 in-depth interviews. Because of the sensitive nature of my research topic, in order to start from a place of trust and safety, initial recruitment occurred via my personal relationships and connections (Appendix B). I relied on mutual friends, my own membership in different communities, and social media to identify individuals who were interested in participating and who met the sample criteria as immigrants from Mexico or Central America who were formerly undocumented but had current LPR status or citizenship. By asking those I interviewed for references to others that they knew who might be interested and willing, I attempted to use a snowball sampling method but found that there seemed to be an understandable hesitancy from participants to disclose friends or family members as formerly undocumented. Ultimately, having broad criteria for my sample enabled me to recruit more successfully, and was of great value to my research process. Because of the lack of existing research on this topic, I felt it important to gather a wide range of testimonies, so there was no intended age range, gender preference, family status, country of origin, education level, or economic situation for my interviewees.

Regarding interview format, I offered in-person and virtual options based on the preference of each interviewee, and I ended up conducting 7 over Zoom and 6 in-person. I used a prepared interview guide (Appendix C), but also always asked additional questions. In every case interviews were conducted with consent to be interviewed for this project and with consent to be recorded (Appendix D). No identifying information was collected and pseudonyms have been used to protect identity. All participants were given the chance to choose their own pseudonym and only in cases where an alternate name wasn't provided did I

select one.

Coding and Analysis

After interviews were completed I noted prominent themes before beginning transcription. For some of the interviews conducted in English, I transcribed the entire dialogue by hand, but for most of them, I first used auto-transcription softwares and then listened closely to the recordings to make edits as needed. For the interviews conducted in Spanish, I was able to hand-transcribe some of the entire dialogues for the earlier interviews but, for efficiency, chose to use a selective coding technique for the later ones. In these cases I listened to the recordings and took general notes. From those notes I then went back and directly transcribed portions that were particularly relevant to the project. In order to provide an English translation of quotes in Spanish, I translated the excerpts myself and then had a native-Spanish speaker review and edit in order to best maintain the integrity of the original message.

Like most interview-based research, analysis of my data required open, axial, and selective coding that occurred in multiple phases. By making the experiences of others the focus and asking questions that explored emotional elements of the participants' relationship with the United States, I was able to gain important insight into the role of the state in immigrants' lives as well as on the impact status has on the well-being of those who experience it from multiple perspectives.

As a proficient Spanish speaker, the choice to conduct interviews in both English and Spanish was made in order to avoid potential bias from only including the perspectives of individuals with formal education in the United States. Offering Spanish interviews allowed me to better prioritize the interviewee experience to tell their story in their native language, when

preferred.

Limitations

Certain biases potentially exist as a result of my sample. Principally, the small sample size is restricted in its capacity to capture the complete range of experiences of the population and limited deeper analysis of demographic factors as mediator or moderator variables. There was also a wide range of current ages, ages at migration, and time spent undocumented, and without a larger sample size it was not possible to identify when or how these factors influenced my findings. In turn, future research could use more focused samples with various cultural and social groups and collect quantitative survey data in order to investigate how different variables impact the way immigrants' experience their emotions and understand their relationships with the United States (Stets & Turner, 2008; Hoshchild, 2012).

Further, only three participants identified as men, making it difficult to know how gender influenced my findings. My sample also did not control for the time period during which individuals migrated to account for changing social contexts within both sending and receiving countries. Both of these limitations, regarding my sample and the lack of mixed-methods, were due to the time and resources available as a student researcher, and future research could seek to close these gaps.

It is important to note that all of my participants were privileged to have been able to become citizens in the United States, something that immigration policy keeps out of reach for many other immigrants (Gonzalez-Barrera et al., 2020). For this project, it was my intention to focus on those with permanent status in order to compare their emotional management across types of status, but future research on the emotional complexity that exists for those who have not obtained status or choose not to seek it would certainly prove valuable.

Positionality

While I did my best to approach this project with awareness of and sensitivity to my positionality, many instances called to my attention the potential impact my identity as a white, native-born U.S. citizen had on my research, especially because of the sensitive nature of the content. Speaking on the undocumented experience involves remembering and sharing difficult and sometimes traumatic experiences, and I recognized the fact that much of that trauma was likely perpetrated by other white people or institutions run by them, making it especially important to take measures to minimize participant discomfort by establishing trust.

During recruitment, I used materials that asked for “storytellers” instead of “research study participants” to emphasize my objective to listen to and learn from those willing to speak with me. I also focused on my existing networks to rely on established relationships to minimize any distrust, and I only spoke to individuals with permanent status in order to minimize any potential risk to their security. I was conscious not to repeatedly invite individuals to participate or directly reach out to those that I knew fit the requirements of my sample in order to respect the boundaries of those with whom I was speaking.

During our interviews, it was important to me to establish an environment in which the interviewee knew that I deeply respected them and their stories. After my second interview (with Pafi), I felt prompted to express not only my deep thanks but also my commitment to her and her story, promising to treat it with respect and sharing my personal belief that stories are sacred. In response, she said she felt reassured and that in certain instances, she had felt anxious and had to remind herself that she was safe. Following this experience, I realized how important it was to explicitly state this and made sure to begin each interview with an unscripted version of that same message. I also mailed thank you notes to all of my “storytellers” with individual messages

of gratitude for their time and the privilege of learning from them.

During interviews, I was conscious that the responses I was collecting were potentially skewed, considering that the way someone would answer a question to a white outsider was inevitably slightly different than they would to someone with more shared racial or cultural identity and immigration experience. While I could not change my race or background, I held this knowledge close, something that helped me keep my focus on my participants and value their experience in the interview over my own data collection.

While transcribing, coding, and analyzing my data, I was constantly concerned about accurate interpretation of quotes, especially for interviews that had been conducted in Spanish. In an attempt to address this, I made sure to listen to each interview more than once and presented the original quote in my findings, especially in consideration of the complexity of translation. English translations are also included to increase accessibility of my findings to those who do not speak Spanish, and I consulted with a trusted native-speaker to help make edits that more accurately reflected the original messages.

In certain instances, I encountered data that I was unsure of how to address. I wanted to honestly present the data that had been shared with me, while also ensuring that the conclusions being drawn were not harmful to the greater movement for immigrant justice. As I struggled through declarations of gratitude for the United States alongside condemnations, I understood the importance of echoing both and, by doing so, hope that this research highlights the complexity that immigrants live and carry.

IV. Findings & Analysis: Making Connections Within Emotional Contradictions

Many immigrants who spoke with me described varying levels of concurrent appreciation and resentment when they talked about their legal status in the United States. For example, Pafi had grown up undocumented in San Francisco's historically Latino Mission District after crossing the border from Mexico as an infant with her mother. When asked to describe her fondest feelings toward the United States, she said, "It's mixed emotions. I love the United States, and I hate the United States." She offered specific reasons for both, justifying her love for the United States with expressions of thanks for education, safety, and opportunities and explaining her hate with descriptions of the lasting fear and frustration she had felt while undocumented.

While the emotions she named—love and hate—are opposites, Pafi's love doesn't diminish her hate, and her hate doesn't diminish her love. Despite specific calls for the United States to more meaningfully include her and her community, in the end Pafi was "glad [she's] in this country" and "wouldn't want it any other way," using her status as a citizen to contribute to her local community as a mother, social worker, and advocate.

Classical theoretical understandings consider citizenship as a contractual relationship between the citizen and the state (Marshall, 1950), but these understandings fail to explain what Pafi is experiencing as she navigates the associated affective condition. Far from a dichotomy of rights and obligations, citizenship for Pafi primarily manifests as emotions, and those feelings, while experienced and expressed at the individual level, are also social expressions of group dynamics (Fraser & Gordon, 1994; Hoshchild, 1979).

The conflicting emotions towards the United States that are described by Pafi and others reflect the inherent contradictions of U.S. citizenship—it protects and threatens, welcomes and

excludes. In the interviews, immigrants' feelings about obtaining legal status in the United States were positive, largely in contrast to the experiences that caused them to flee their home countries in the first place or to undocumented life. And, the negative emotions some felt towards the United States stemmed from the lasting emotional impacts of undocumented life alongside the continued discrimination they faced, even after adjusting to legal status. Despite this interplay of feeling, all interview participants found ways to assert themselves as agents of their own emotions, consciously engaging with the state through their status to serve civically, resist injustice, labor for the economy, foster community, and form identity.

“I love the United States...”: Post-Status Gratitude vs. Pre-Status Insecurity

Unlike native-born individuals, immigrants hold multiple frameworks for imagining the meaning of citizenship. Especially if, like those in my sample, they have experienced life without legal status, citizenship is not the “accident” that some scholars have deemed it to be (Bhabha, 2004; Schachar & Hirschl, 2007). Instead, their status is a choice made in response to two other contexts: first, the limits of the citizenship they had in their countries of origin, and, second, the limits of undocumented life that they faced in the United States. For my participants, the experience of these limiting alternatives directly shaped the gratitude they felt for the United States.

Insecurity in Countries of Origin

Because all those I interviewed came from Mexico or Central America, parts of the world that have experienced destabilization as a result of global hegemony and U.S. imperialism, producing gang violence, poverty, and civil wars, the comparison to the poverty and state of fear they experienced in their countries of origin impacted their assessments of the United States. Even before accessing the stability and security of legal status, my participants still felt, as stated

by Mariela, “más tranquilidad” [*calmer*] and considered the United States to be “mejor para todo” [*better for everything*] (Mexico, age 59). Nancy feels that “se vive un poco más mejor que en México” [you live a little better than in Mexico] and that “siento que vive en más tranquilidad” [*I feel like you live more peacefully*] (Mexico, age 48). In these instances and others, many of my participants used direct comparisons to severe insecurity in the countries that they had left to express appreciation for their life in the United States.

The conditions spurring modern migration today are a direct result of the global infiltration of the capitalistic economic system through colonialism (Espiritu, 2003; Portes, 1978). These endeavors have sought to control the international market, promote U.S. interests at the expense of international politics, and weaken other countries through warfare, massacre, and exploitation (Said, 1993; Lowe 1996; Lipsitz 1998; Ong, Bonacich, and Cheng 1994; Fernández-Kelly, 1983). As a result, citizens of these countries face economic insecurity, political instability, and violence that threatens their physical and emotional lives and leads to much of the migration we see today (Feagin 1997; Espiritu, 2003). Therefore, in regards to my participants, their marginalized status in the United States was a mirror of their home country’s status in the international order. And, with violence as a defining characteristic of colonialism and post-/ neo-colonialism, physical violence overseas, alongside the emotional violence of undocumented life in the United States, warrants no surprise (Espiritu, 2003).

For example, Bela left El Salvador in 2001 as a 36-year-old accountant after her boss issued her a death threat. Once in the United States, while separated from her family and working multiple jobs as a janitor and restaurant server, Bela had no choice but to “seguir adelante” [*push forward*]. Eventually, her children were able to join her in California, and through a son who married a U.S. citizen, she was recently able to become a lawful permanent resident. Despite the

tears she shed as she thought back on the loneliness and fear of the undocumented experience, Bela felt that the United States had given her “estabilidad, seguridad, puedo salir sin temor de nada” [*stability, security, I can go outside without fear of anything*], and she too was grateful. Compared to El Salvador, a country recovering from a civil war, physical safety in the United States was worth celebrating, despite the emotional cost at which it had come. In her case, ironically, the United States was simultaneously responsible for the destabilization of El Salvador and a safe haven from it. The United States was the source of her fear and frustration while she was undocumented, and the place where she made a home for herself and her family.

For participants who migrated as children, usually bundled in the arms of a devoted parent, their reflections were not necessarily based on their own experiences in their birth countries, but on stories from their parents or other second-hand sources. Josue’s parents had sought asylum from a war-torn Guatemala, and he felt grateful to be in America and to “not [be] worried about being killed sitting at this park like I would be where my parents are from.” Professional and educational achievements were another source of comparison. Nara, a lawyer born in a small town in Mexico, said that “opportunities for sure” were the greatest thing the United States had given him. “Like, I think if I was still in Mexico, [...] I wouldn’t have been able to have the opportunity to go to law school and become an attorney.” By holding assumptions about the types of lives they would be living had they never crossed the border, the appreciation these individuals felt toward the United States deepened.

Interestingly, when 25-year-old Carolina, who also immigrated as a child, spoke of her own feelings toward the United States, she primarily expressed anger and frustration about the treatment she had endured. However, when asked how she understood her parents’ feelings, the baseline she used to describe her relationship with the United States shifted from her

undocumented experience to the conditions in Venezuela. “We were able to have a level of comfort and security, regardless of being undocumented, that our family in Venezuela never got to enjoy, especially now that so many of them have had to flee,” she said. She continued, recognizing that while as undocumented Americans they hadn’t always had stable jobs, permanence, or residency, “at least it has meant safety and a hope for the future, access to good education, [and] access to a solid support system.” Here, she even noted that they have been able to “have all the things that [they] needed,” even specifically citing emotions like safety and hope—two things that she didn’t feel had been available to her as an undocumented person.

Taken together, this all shows how the type of connection participants had with their home countries, the level of unrest that had occurred in those countries since they left, and their position as a first- or 1.5-generation immigrant impacted the relevance of home country conditions on the emotions they carried toward the United States. What was constant, however, was participants’ recognition that life in the United States had provided relief from circumstances they were glad to have fled in their countries or origin, despite any role that the United States had played in creating those conditions.

Insecurity as Undocumented Americans

Alongside relief from origin-country conditions, the gratitude individuals expressed for the United States was often also expressed in reference to negative experiences they endured within its borders while undocumented. Josue, for example, is a 22 year-old university student who was born in Mexico to Guatemalan asylum seekers with pending U.S. cases, and he found out that he was undocumented while he was in high school. Soon after confronting his legal status, Josue was able to qualify for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), making it possible for him to work, attend college, and “have the power to do whatever [he] want[ed].”

Since then, he has become a lawful permanent resident and feels that the journey has “really taught [him] to be grateful,” especially as someone who “didn’t have this in the beginning.” Because Josue has been able to find success—studying accounting at a prominent university and securing a prestigious summer internship—he understands the United States as “the land of freedom,” equipped to offer that same opportunity to anyone else who is willing to “put in the work.”

However, when asked if those without status had comparable access to opportunity, the role his undocumented experience served as the baseline for his gratitude became evident. He backtracked: “That’s different, you know. Can’t get hired.” Still, he shared feelings of intense patriotism: “I love the U.S.,” he continued. “[When I] go to a soccer game, baseball, football game, [and] the U.S. anthem plays, I take my cap off, put my hand over my heart . . . this is my home.” Josue’s enthusiasm is possible because he recognizes the “nightmare”—what his life would have been like without DACA—that he has been spared, especially since becoming a lawful permanent resident with a clear pathway to citizenship. The limited future from being undocumented that threatened his adolescence never became his reality. And although it had been the United States who administered the original threat, the United States also administered the relief and, ultimately, the country is “all I know,” declared Josue.

For others, the “nightmare” of undocumented life that shaped their gratitude for the United States was not a theoretical alternative to their current lives, but an actual reality they had lived. Nancy came to the United States as a young newlywed with her husband, a man who had been harvesting mushrooms in Texas since he was twelve years old and had already naturalized as a citizen. They met in her hometown while he was visiting his mother and, after deciding to get married, made plans for her to cross the border in order to live together as a family. Of the

difference between the types of status she had navigated, Nancy said,

Te digo que cuando arreglas la residencia [...] pues ya tienes papeles [...] te sientes mejor y con la ciudadanía aun mucho mejor. Pues ya al agarrar a la ciudadanía ya no [...] batallas en muchas [...] y te sientes más cómoda [*I'll tell you, when you get residency [...] when you get papers [...] you feel better, and with citizenship? Even better. And, I mean, once you get citizenship you don't have to [...] battle in so many things [...] and you feel more comfortable*].

Nancy appreciated what citizenship makes possible—relief and comfort. However, she compared that to the *battle* she constantly fought as an undocumented American. Her use of war imagery to describe life without documents speaks to the particular intensity of fear, anxiety, and exhaustion that created the baseline against which she now understands life with status.

In another demonstration of multidimensional immigrant gratitude, Gabi, who first came to the United States pregnant with her oldest child remembered the transition being “triste—no conocía nada del idioma, era un país nuevo para mi, embarazada, y asi bien difícil” [*sad—I didn't know any of the language, it was a new country for me, and I was pregnant, so it was really difficult*]. However, having overcome the struggles of undocumented life, she would no longer “salir con miedo” [*go outside afraid*], or have to work three jobs to support her children, so she looked back on her adjustment to legal status as “algo bien bonito” [*something really nice*]. She elaborated that she is “muy agradecida por todo lo que [este país ha] hecho por mi y por mis hijos” [*really grateful for everything this country has done for me and for my children*], adding “Dios bendiga America” [*God bless America*].

Offering another description of complex feelings, Pafi, who came to California from Mexico as a baby with her mother, naturalized as a citizen decades ago after deciding that she

“c[ould] not continue being an illegal alien and feeling this way.” Looking back on her naturalization, Pafi said, “When I became a citizen is when I felt like I had wings,” which evokes stirring imagery of a bird set free. With a smile, she recounted the “cute little elderly white man” who had administered her exam, the questions she knew every answer to, the determination that had brought her to that moment, and, once she passed, the feeling of flying. In her words, “Like, watch out world!”

While Pafi’s initial statement framed membership in the United States as liberatory, as our conversation continued, she made sobering comparisons to the limitations of undocumented life. She said,

I didn’t have to go through that back door. I could [...] feel proud and show my Green Card and show my social security and [...] know that I was doing things legally. It was kind of like I felt like a butterfly. That I had wings and I can fly, and I can get the same treatment as others, you know the same benefits, that I can not feel embarrassed or fearful.

Becoming a citizen certainly changed Pafi’s reality in meaningful and valuable ways, but it is important to note that it was decades of shame and disenfranchisement that made status feel like such a shift. Pafi always had wings, as do all immigrants, so her comment suggests less about what the state made possible by counting her as a citizen and more about the way marginalizing her through the restriction from legal status had encaged her.

Together, my interviews highlight immigrants’ recognition of what the United States contributed to them while also including complex context for the alternate reality of undocumented life from which they were so glad to be free, both of which were results of U.S. power.

“...and I hate the United States.”: The Role of Undocumented Life in Negative Feelings Post-Status

Even after adjusting their legal standing, the undocumented experience continued to impact participants' emotional condition of status in a variety of ways. The salience of these experiences, in turn, also affected participant understandings of, and interactions with, the United States—four of which were particularly salient in the interviews. First, because a simple piece of paper ceremony could not erase the embodied experience of undocumented life, individuals carried the trauma they had endured with them post-status. Second, because of the communities of which these immigrants were a part, as long as the system of injustice remained in place, their hearts continued to ache for the plight of family members, friends, and others with stories parallel to their own. Third, after spending a significant amount of time mistreated by the state within a system that blamed them for their unlawful entry, some had internalized the idea that, because they were immigrants, they should expect less from the United States and from society. And, finally, racial discrimination that reached beyond the receipt of status complicated the simultaneous reality that it had, in other ways, provided relief. While these elements of the immigration experience did not diminish immigrants' appreciation for the United States, these aspects did entangle their gratitude with frustration and resentment.

Sustained Trauma

For many respondents, emotional trauma that they had endured while undocumented continued to mark their lives. Specifically, despite the consensus that the United States offered physical safety, almost everyone cited “fear” when describing life without status. Pafi thought back on her life before status, saying, “There were all of these emotions [...]. That fear of being caught, that fear of being deported, it just created a lot of anxiety inside of me. A lot of anxiety.”

Later, she described it as “walking on eggshells.” Living in California during Pete Wilson’s governorship, an era of vitriolic state policy targeting immigrants, she remembered feeling “so much fear,” carrying a constant sense of “This is it. I will get deported sooner or later. It will come, they will catch onto me.”

The political climate of the United States directly impacted Carolina as well, who was a DACA recipient at the time of the 2016 presidential election. The anti-immigrant rhetoric left her feeling “terrified,” and she recounted “I remember after [the election] happened, just the more and more [...] kids who were scared to go to school because they were worried that when they came home, their parents weren't going to be there.” The stakes were high, and deportation was a potential result of small interactions or infractions. Gabi, who moved to the United States as an adult for “una vida más mejor” [*a better life*] for her children, echoed this sentiment: “Imagínate—nada más un ticket de la policía por no tener licencia” [*Imagine—just a ticket from the police for not having a driver's license*].

Ale’s family migrated when she was five years old, and, unaware of her status growing up, she had to learn to be scared. Before fully realizing the risk, Ale reflected that “I used to tell everyone like, ‘Oh, yeah, I'm illegal,’ you know. I-I used to openly say it.” However, she remembered a moment when that changed. She was working as a server in a restaurant and was talking to some “sweet, sweet white people—Americans” who she had developed a relationship with and who were asking about her life. After mentioning that she didn’t have papers, her boss “chewed [her] out,” calling to her attention that the truth of her story as an immigrant and undocumented person was not just a threat to herself, but also to her family and to him, as the man who had illegally hired her. “He was like, ‘Don't you ever tell anybody else in here that you're illegal. First of all, because I hired you. You know they're gonna come here for me.

Second of all—aren't you scared? Aren't you scared?”

Because Ale immigrated to the United States as a toddler, she had never engaged in the “law breaking” that now impacted her life. As an adolescent, Ale came to recognize the illegality of her existence while also recognizing the insecurity of her position in the American working class. Not only did she have to manage her own emotions regarding her identity and sense of self, she was also tasked with protecting her boss from the consequences of his “law breaking.” He emphasized the vulnerability of her situation and its potential to impact him as well, making sure she understood the power of the system she was under. He said, “They might seem like sweet people, but they could call immigration on you, you know?” From then on, Ale “always feared telling people” and carried the weight of the threat that “Americans” posed to her ability to stay in the country that was her home. Later experiences, including one in which a potential employer accused her of lying about her DACA status, reemphasized this: “They [were] like ‘Well, that's pretty much like, you're lying. [...] You have to leave. You can't be here. We can like send you to immigration.’” The power differential Ale experienced had to do with the state, but also with the American people. Employers and fellow community members had the capacity to upend her life with a phone call, and her exclusion from citizenship limited her interpersonal relationships and was a threat to both herself and others.

This state-sanctioned fear, manufactured through the exclusivity of citizenship and present regardless of who was president, had important consequences. Particularly because of how large the threat was and how high the stakes were, this fear kept individuals from participating in certain activities, all of which were basic and some of which precluded access to human rights. For example, it impacted individuals' sense of safety to leave their home and buy groceries (Noemi), confidence that they won't be physically displaced from their family at any

moment (Nancy), access to freedom (Josue), ability to “ver a mis hijos, estar con ellos, conocer a mis nietos” [*see my children, be with them, know my grandchildren*] (Carmen), feel protected from exploitation and abuse in the workplace (Gabi), be able to access social services, and even their ability to not have their status affect others’ safety (Ale). For immigrants, particularly the undocumented, the opposite is true, and the state has everything to do with the most private aspects of their lives, the impact of which is emotionally significant (Lily López, 2021). These examples expose ways in which the United States interferes in family, education, work, health care, housing, and basic physical and emotional safety, “saturat[ing] areas of social life thought to be private or personal” (Nakano Glenn, 2001) and implicating the state as the perpetrator of abuse, using status as reason to ignore internationally recognized human rights (United Nations, 1948; Hansen, 2008). Because of the scale of these experiences, they unsurprisingly maintained relevance even after being formally relieved through the receipt of legal status.

Carolina (Venezuela, age 22) demonstrated this effect, speaking in the present tense to reflect on all that her struggle for inclusion had cost her. She said, “I just feel like for so long I gave so much of myself to fit into this mold or to be able to achieve the things that everyone told me I could in the United States.” Despite being taught, especially throughout her time in the American public school system, that hard work and her best behavior would allow her to achieve whatever she wanted, she eventually realized that, because of her status, that wasn’t true for her. After “sacrific[ing] a lot of my emotional and mental well-being to try to live up to that standard,” she realized that, as an immigrant and undocumented person, she was still limited. Nara, who came to the United States as an infant and spent his childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood undocumented was impacted just as deeply: “It really messed with me, like I, I didn't feel fully like a full human being. I just felt like my whole childhood was kind of a lie.

And I didn't [...] fully belong here.”

For both of them, growing up undocumented seemed to blanket their entire existence—Carolina spoke of giving “so much of herself” and Nara called his “whole childhood [...] a lie.” Their statements reflect the comprehensive hurt that so many immigrants are made to carry at the hand of the state, something that Pafi also echoes: “I have given them my tears. I have given them my sweat, [...] everything that I have earned has been through my sacrifice, my strength, my everything, my heart—I've given my heart, my soul.”

Because of this, Carolina conceptualized her relationship with the United States as “Toxic. Abusive.” While she recognized that there were many things that she received in return for all she gave by nature of living in the country, she also spoke to the “emotional baggage” that always remains and the ways it “keeps her up at night.” Carolina continued, speaking through tears. She said,

It's [the] feeling like I have done all these things, I have filled all these boxes just by virtue of having lived here for twenty-one years of my life, and still am you know, kept out of all of these rights and privileges that anyone else has access to.

The emotional impact of her experience navigating her identity as an American without legal status was heavy, and those memories were not ones she could, nor was willing, to forget.

Additionally, Ale reckoned with the feelings that had accompanied her previous desires to enlist in the National Guard. She remembered talking to her father about her plans and his question back to her: ““Why do you want to join the military and defend a country that doesn't even claim you—doesn't even want you first of all to fight for them?”” She remembered contemplating this and realized, “I [couldn't] even, like, they [saw] me as so little that I [couldn't] even go die for them, you know.”

For some immigrants who shared their stories with me, being included at all through legal status was enough, at least to validate their journey and provide sufficient relief from previous insecurity. However, for others—especially those of younger age, more advanced English language skills, and greater interaction with U.S. institutions—the memories of struggle, harsh treatment, and exclusion by the United States made legal status insufficient to remedy the existing emotional harm.

Internalized Sense of Deserving Less

Many of my participants expressed feelings that revealed low expectations for the kind of treatment they should receive from the United States which contributed to their interconnected and contrasting emotions. Decades of navigating exclusion and marginalization by the United States left some of them unsure of their social status—another demonstration of how the state’s dual roles can prove frustrating. In one instance, Ale (Mexico, age 25), a lawful permanent resident, said she “[was] not an American yet, I guess you could say,” and first responded to a question about what citizenship meant to her as, “I guess [to] be native to that land, you know, like being born there.” She then added that there were other ways to become a citizen of a country but, in those cases, felt that it required work, saying “You want to belong there, you know, like you, you work for it. [...] You should work for what you want.” Her comment reveals a sense that, for those born in the United States, citizenship and the accompanying rights were something to which they were entitled, but for her and other immigrants, it required work. As a DACA recipient who came to the United States as a toddler with her family, Ale even took on the responsibility of a criminal. “I just came here,” she said. “Especially, you know, I was breaking the law.”

At the time of our interview, Ale was eight months pregnant. Luckily, she and her

husband had not needed extra support in meeting the needs of their growing family, but she also expressed feeling that, as an immigrant, it wasn't something she deserved. I posed a situation to her in which another woman, a native-born U.S. citizen, was also pregnant, and then asked if both of them would have the same right to assistance from the government. She responded,

Well, I do feel like, obviously [the other person is] more entitled to it. I do think that the people who are born here, you know, who didn't break the law, do, I guess, deserve it more than I do. I guess I don't know if that's a good thing.

The end of her statement reveals that she feels some dissonance with the idea that she deserves less than others as a result of her immigrant status, but, still, she labels herself as a law-breaker and positions herself to accept continuous punishment through exclusion.

Racism plays a direct role in this view that, as immigrants, it is appropriate to receive less. Regarding discrimination, Gabi told me a story of mistreatment she had faced while eating out at a restaurant with a friend, but in the end was resigned, saying, “Tenemos que estar conscientes que siempre va a ver casos así” [*We have to be conscious that there will always be cases like this*]. When asked how this has impacted her sense of belonging, Gabi considered it a reality that she couldn't escape: “Como hispanos nos ha tocado estar así, estar así en esta situación. No es justo, pero si nos tocó” [*As Hispanics, this is just how it is for us, to be in this situation. It isn't just, but that's yeah it's how it is*]. She recognized that it wasn't fair, but didn't feel that justice was something she could expect or demand from her country, despite a longstanding presence and citizenship. Because of the ways these women had been treated by the United States and the clear rhetoric about the social station of immigrants, even as citizens of permanent residents they continued to view themselves as guests, grateful for whatever they received but never empowered to ask for something more or better.

Connection to Community Suffering

Not only is recognition of legal status unable to heal the trauma that an individual has already endured or address harm to one's sense of self, it also does nothing to challenge the system of inequality that continues to hurt others, making the plight of the undocumented community lastingly relevant in the relationships my participants had with the United States. Because my participants were still deeply connected with the undocumented community, they expressed profound concern for the struggle those without legal status endure despite it no longer being their own reality.

Even participants who said they didn't "meter en politicos" [*get into politics*] expressed strong feelings about how the undocumented community is treated, viewing it as unfair and unnecessary. In fact, despite the fact that my participants came from a variety of backgrounds and represented a range of political opinions, every time I asked what should be different about the United States, they brought up concerns about the lack of available pathways to legal status and the general treatment of both undocumented persons and the general immigrant population. By living through multiple types of status or the lack thereof, even when applied to their community rather than themselves, they primarily viewed legal status as an active presence in people's lives instead of just a mechanism of state control.

Gabi, a woman who treasures her work as a licensed massage therapist, shared her opinion that the country "debe la oportunidad de legalizar a las personas que están indocumentadas" [*owes the opportunity to become legal to the people who are undocumented*], citing their "manos trabajadores" [*hard working hands*] and the fact that they "sufren más" [*suffer more*]. She remembered that "manejar a sus trabajos siempre pero sin un seguro, sin una licencia es difícil" [*always managing your work without security, without license, is difficult*] and

felt that “esas personas que bien trabajan, muchísimas horas, que están dejando sus vidas en los trabajos para su familia, creo que ellos deberían estar en la primera fila para recibir [estatus]” [*those people who work hard, many hours, who are leaving their lives in their jobs for their families, I believe that they should be at the front of the line to receive status*]. Being undocumented led her to see and feel the injustice of the entire system, and that reality led her to long for a greater sense of accountability from the United States regarding the way others were still being treated.

Similarly, Zuria, a 58-year-old woman who left El Salvador with her husband in 1983, pregnant with a child whose future had motivated them to make the journey, reflected on memories of workplace training she received on what to do in case of a raid by ICE. She then said, “Siempre se siente triste uno por su gente que sufre por eso pues por no tener los documentos” [*You always feel sad for your people who suffer from this, for not having documents*]. Her experiences, while in the past, played an active role in the way she saw and understood what others were still enduring. Noemi (Mexico, age 46) also communicated a deep connection to the undocumented community, saying, “Tengo amigos que son ilegales que no tienen papeles aquí y tienen un trabajo. Trabajan muy duro, trabajan bien, y pues estan siempre con miedo. Un día lo pueden regresar al país” [*I have friends who are illegal and don't have papers here and have a job. They work really hard, really well, and they are always scared. One day they can be returned to the country*]. She followed up this comment with an expression of appreciation “de poder estar legalmente aquí” [*of being able to be here legally*], recognizing that “si no fuera legal, si me viviera con miedo siempre muy estresada, capas la vida no seria como tenemos ahora” [*If I wasn't legal—if I lived always in fear, always really stressed, maybe life wouldn't be like it is now*]. She recognized that, despite now having a different reality, those

living undocumented today had come, just as she had, to “superarse o [...] dar a [mis] hijos [oportunidades]” [*overcome or [...] give [opportunities] to [my] children*].

Continued connection to the plight of the undocumented community directly impacted participants’ emotions towards, and relationships with, the United States. Ale, for example, first said that she no longer felt that she carried the negative emotions that came from constant exclusion as an undocumented person, but then, remembering that her brother is still enduring it, added, “Well, I don’t know. Maybe it hasn’t changed, because [...] he can’t. So it’s still there.” Immigrants are individuals, but they are also siblings, children, parents, and friends, and those connections play a role in the social experience of emotion as an expression of group dynamics (Hoshchild, 1979). Similarly, despite being a citizen, Nara was unable to overlook the experiences of friends whose parents have been deported, or his friend’s sister who “was just biking along the Canadian border. And then she was just stopped and then deported [...] and now she's, like, not here anymore.” He still “think[s] all about like, all those stories of other people also, who are undocumented.” Like many others, as long as Ale’s brother or Nara’s friends were left marginalized by a lack of legal status, their relief didn’t simplify the way that they felt towards the United States or even about their own status. Again, the state was playing for both teams, including them as citizens while still harming their communities, and this created the emotions my participants labored to manage and which provided context for the relationships they had with the state.

Continued Discrimination Post-Status

While not specific to the undocumented experience, another element of importance in the way respondents emotionally interacted with the United States was the remaining complexity of their own *social* status even after receiving *legal* status. Although lawful permanent residency or

citizenship marked a shift in *political* membership of a state, such statuses did not account for the emotional or socio-cultural components of what it meant or how it *felt* to be concurrently included and excluded by the United States (Clarke et al., 2014; Soto Saavedra, 2023; Flores, W., 1997). Even after being a citizen for decades, Pafi expressed disillusionment, saying the United States was “pretty fucked up with us.” She continued, “being a Mexicana there's a lot of racism and a lot of inequality and a lot of injustice and the fight [...] continues. It happens all the time, so there's so much more we need to do.” For Pafi, simultaneous aspects of her identity as a woman, immigrant, and Latina barred legal status from facilitating the balanced and idealized citizen-state relationship between her and the United States.

While citizenship seems to be based on ideas of equality, the inherent and powerful inequality of class, race, and gender systems, has undermined substantive egalitarianism (Marshall, 1950; Nakano Glenn, 2001; Said, 1993). The discrimination my participants described explicitly referenced these dynamics, and no one claimed that their race was a non-issue to their inclusion. For Zuria, a lawful permanent resident since she was 23, it was “por tener el color hispano o moreno” [*because of my hispanic or moreno color*], that she faced discrimination, once again nodding to the relevance of race in understanding what it means to belong to or with the United States in ways other than what is guaranteed by political citizenship (Bloemraad, 2006; Nakano Glenn, 2001, Omi & Winant, 2014). Additionally, Gabi recognized the role of race in discrimination, noting instances when “gente que por ser de otro color, te rechazan” [*people reject you for being a different color*].

These incidents had lasting impacts on individuals’ sense of membership and belonging. Pafi, a decades-long citizen, explained that she has “always felt different” because of the way she feels perceived by “Americans,” particularly noting instances in professional settings when she

has been assumed as the translator or mother of a client instead of the social worker. When asked how it impacted her, she said, “I feel that they see me like I don't belong here, like this is their country [and] that I just crossed the border.” As immigrants interact with the racial ideology of the United States independent of their legal status, the disillusionment of citizenship creates a main battleground for marginalized groups to claim recognition and *substantive* inclusion regardless of intersecting identities of class, race, gender, sexual preference, disability, and, of course, legal status (Hall and Held, 1989; Clarke et al., 2014; W. Flores, 1997).

Discrimination on any basis has deep effects on a person's well-being, but it was clear from the data that these experiences also further complicated the way participants viewed themselves, felt toward the United States, and understood their legal status (Harrell, 2010). Being unable to remedy all of the negative rhetoric individuals received while living undocumented, these immigrants' many testimonies address the substantive limit of “citizenship” and how that led to increased frustration toward the United States even, and maybe especially, after receiving legal status.

“This is my home” : Emotional Agency in a Hostile Receiving Context

Despite the restrictive effects of discrimination, my participants demonstrated agency through their responses to the emotional complexity of their relationships with the United States. As formerly undocumented immigrants, choice had played a critical role in multiple moments of their interaction with the United States, including in the decision to cross an international border and to adjust their status (Lily López & Williams, 2023). Now, in additional expressions of agency, alongside frustration, my participants agreed that formal recognition was valuable, and they shared many ideas about the ways in which it improved their lives to receive green cards and/or be naturalized as U.S. citizens. This introduced a level of *emotional agency* to their

engagement with the United States that marked their responses to the hostile context they navigated through civic duty, political activism, military service, education, and community building (Patler, 2018; Hoshchild, 2012; Rocco, 1997; Soto Saavedra, 2023; Flores, 1997).

For example, Pafi beamed as she recounted the pleasure of civic engagement through jury duty: “Believe it or not, I love it. I went last month and it felt good to go because I knew [...] I’m a citizen, and I was doing my civil duties [...] I just felt so important. I felt included, you know?” Conscious of the injustice embedded in the U.S. legal system, Pafi knew that people like her father, a Mexican man with indigenous ancestry, often get “twice the sentence,” and the opportunity to use her citizenship to represent her community and protect against discrimination was something she treasured. Similarly, Nancy described her reason for pursuing citizenship as a response to the helplessness she had felt in the face of constantly changing politics that threatened her stability in the United States. She said, “Cuando [...] hay algo en las noticias, [...] tienes que ser ciudadana porque a veces hay cambios que no sabes de lo que pase” [*When [...] there’s something in the news, [...] you have to be a citizen because sometimes there are changes and you don’t know what could happen*]. As Nancy reflected on her feelings when she naturalized, she remembered, “feliz [...] porque [...] me sentía más que ya tenía algo más que contaba, que contaba más—ese papel de ser ciudadana” [*happy [...] because [...] I felt more that now I had something that counted, that counted more—this role of being a citizen*] and she now values participation in elections as an opportunity to assert herself within the U.S. citizenry and “opinar también” [*share my opinion too*].

Political activism also provided an avenue for participants to position themselves as powerful agents for change. Nara (Mexico, age 35), an immigration attorney and prominent actor in movements for migrant justice, considered “being an advocate” and “voicing my opinions,” to

be his greatest contribution to the United States. As a lawyer he constantly works to “remind[] [the government] that these laws are flexible” and “hold[s] that optimism to continue fighting for that justice that everyone deserves, especially immigrants.” His idea of the United States was shaped by his resistance to it, and his experiences in political organizing led him to believe in the potential for progress. He said,

For me, like the U.S. has a history of a bunch of really messed up policies and laws, and it’s not welcoming. But I think there’s potential to change and like, I think, the optimism, I like to stay optimistic and like, continue to, like, fight even to this day.

Emotionally, he chose to claim his experiences in a way that powered him forward, and he valued his increased capacity to do so through his legal status.

Carolina (Venezuela, age 25) similarly framed much of her life around advocacy, saying “Everything that I do is to try and change the United States or thinking about how the United States needs to change.” As a university student approaching graduation, Carolina had devoted her time on her campus to improving resources for undocumented students and looked forward to eventually becoming an immigration attorney. Looking back on the development of her relationship with the United States, Carolina recognized that her negative experiences had come to empower her and reflected that now “it’s less in a way of, I guess, trying to conform than it is to now, like, critically analyzing my relationship with it and trying to make it better.” For Carolina and Nara, their critical feelings led them to make continuous efforts to break down and rebuild the brokenness that they had felt. While the emotional labor of immigration required their management of contradictory and complex feelings, they did not want or feel that their relationships with the United States needed to end. Alternatively, they were relationships that they wished were better and were willing to struggle to improve, and political engagement

provided the unique opportunity to express both their gratitude and their discontent.

Service in the military was another recurrent theme in regards to how participants chose to engage with the United States. While no one in my sample had enlisted in the military, Mariela (Mexico, age 59) considered her greatest contribution to the United States to be that one of her daughters was in the Air Force and two of her other children worked for the criminal justice system. Additionally, Gabi (Mexico, age 49), expressed appreciation that the same daughter she had carried en utero into the country was now a member of the U.S. Air Force, “aprovechando muy bien” [*taking advantage*] of the opportunity and success that the United States made available and “luch[ando] por su país” [*fight[ing] for her country*]. Nancy’s (Mexico, age 48) oldest daughter was also in the Air Force, and Carmen’s (Mexico, age 78) oldest daughter, who was 9 years old when they crossed the border together, was in the Navy (something that had made both of their adjustments to legal status possible). And, finally, while Ale (Mexico, age 25) had not been able to enlist, she talked about the hopes she had had to join the National Guard. Not only did these individuals feel high levels of patriotism, but they passed it on to their children and “gracias a dios ellos han sabido apreciar el país que a ellos da muchas oportunidades” [*thank God that they have known to appreciate the country that gives them many opportunities*] (Zuria, El Salvador, age 58).

While research on immigrant military service lacks examination, especially from an emotional and relationship perspective, today nearly 5% of the armed forces in the United States is composed of immigrants, and their contributions as foreign language–interpreters and cultural experts are invaluable (Stock, 2009; Batalova, 2008). And, at least for some of my participants, despite awareness of disenfranchisement after obtaining legal status, their military service or their value for that of their children stemmed from lasting gratitude and belief in what the United

States could be, both for them and for others. Military service represented a highly valuable contribution to the state, and having their children choose to engage in that way seemed to empower my participants as members of American society.

Additionally, many participants explicitly used education as an empowering propellant in their understanding of their identities and rights. Zuria felt empowered through citizenship for the way it positioned her to “sabe[r] ya no es un ilegal, ya tiene los mismos derechos de ellos” [*know that you’re not illegal anymore, now you have the same rights as them*]. Legal status meant that Zuria no longer had to wonder about her rights or what kind of treatment she should accept, which was not only a source of relief, but also gave her permission to raise her expectations and claim her space within U.S. society. For other immigrants, education also served as a springboard. For example, Pafi explained that her education became a way to “feel more confident,” saying that once she “knew her rights” her sense of belonging in the United States was independent of the lasting discrimination she continued to face:

If you had asked me [if I felt like I belonged] probably 10 years ago, I probably would have said different, but now, yes, I do because I'm more aware, more educated. [...] I've learned so much. And this used to be Mexico. So hey! Watch out! This was Mexico. So I feel like I belong here now, because I have learned my history.

By consciously unpacking the history of colonialism and U.S. imperialism, Pafi was able to also unpack her feelings of undeservingness, not only as an undocumented person, but also as an immigrant and Latina. Aware that “the only way out is to educate myself and give myself that sense of empowerment and voice through my education,” Pafi had done exactly that.

Participation in co-ethnic and racial communities provided another means by which individuals asserted themselves and found a sense of home despite the endurance of more

negative experiences. Pafi lived in a neighborhood with a strong Latino population that “reminds me of my hometown in Mexico” and allowed her to “feel connected with my community, with my people.” As a bilingual woman working with youth as a clinical social worker, she also felt called to her profession and “look[ed] forward to waking up in the morning and going to work.” Her idea of home was formed around the connections she had made and the ways she had established herself to contribute to others and nurture her own sense of belonging. Nancy also remembered the disorientation and fear she felt just after arriving and said she now appreciates opportunities to “ayudar a personas cuando yo mir[o] que necesit[an] ayuda” [*help people when I see that they need help*] since “ya s[e] lo que ellos se s[ienten]” [*I know what they feel*]. Nara (Mexico, age 35) found meaning in opportunities to remind friends who are still undocumented that “happiness comes from all the other stuff, anyway,” and, finding that his professional work spaces included less people who “looked like [him],” was constantly encouraged to stay rooted in community work. Similarly, Josue (Mexico, age 22) valued opportunities to volunteer as a mentor to other Latinos, and often found himself using his networks, skills, and experiences to encourage others to believe in their own capacity to achieve their goals. He viewed his legal status as a “responsibility,” albeit one he was happy to assume, to support other members of the immigrant community. For these participants, a sense of commitment to others with shared cultural, racial, and legal status backgrounds rooted them to the United States as agents of growth and healing instead of subjects of oppression, a practice that allowed them to create space for their own sense of belonging at the same time (Benmayor & Flores, 1997).

Finally, some participants expressed a willingness to form their identities independent of state approval. Even as a citizen, Nara was willing to say that the United States didn’t really feel like home because “I think, for me, home means feeling like you belong in a place, feeling like

you can be yourself. I think for me, even though [...] I have this citizenship here now, I don't truly feel like that's true here.” By letting experience inform his feelings, he was able to challenge his citizenship for failing in certain substantive regards and acknowledge that, while he claimed space for himself and his community in the United States, the United States itself had facilitated a setting that truly felt like “home.”

In some instances, identity was formed against ways in which individuals were perceived by others. Carolina valued her family’s immigrant story and sought out ways to connect with her origins, despite knowing that “other people probably don't see me as Venezuelan. They see me as American.” While she realized that other people might perceive her in one way, she consciously maintained who she was and its value to her. And Pafi, who migrated as a baby and grew up in San Francisco, “identif[ied] [her]self as a Chicana.” “Yes, I know I'm Mexican,” she said, “but I'm a Chicana because I feel like I've been here my whole life and that's how I identify myself—like a Chicana.” Once again, by centering herself and navigating the multiplicity of her identity with pride, she is confident in claiming her experience for what it is. For these participants, identity was something that they could own, completely and unapologetically, and by doing so, they acted as agents in defining themselves through their emotional experiences instead of institutionalized prescriptions of who they were.

Regardless of how it manifested, it was clear that there was something conscious about the choice to emphasize and own certain emotions through assertions of individual agency, and these conscious efforts spoke back to the lasting value of citizenship for immigrants. While they couldn't do anything to change what they had experienced or the taxing emotional labor that accompanied it, because they conceived of their status as a relationship, they were still capable agents. With this lasting value they carried for citizenship, largely because of their experiences

without it, my participants didn't necessarily dream of a world without borders or citizenship (although some certainly did); instead, they all dreamed *towards* a world in which the pathway to substantive and multifaceted belonging would allow them and their communities to “andar como alguien que ha estado acá” [*walk around like somebody who's been here*] (Bela) valued and included as the Americans that, emotionally—based on their dynamic relationships with the United States—they already were.

While some researchers suggest that the significance of citizenship is dwindling in our modern, globalized, and largely privatized society (Sassen, 1999; Schuck, 1989), my participants suggest that any decline only applies to those privileged enough to have never lived without it and reflects the position largely taken by dominant categories to consider themselves ‘normal’ or ‘neutral’ against the variant group (Joppke, 2010; Nakano Glenn, 2001). This framework is often used to discuss how whiteness is considered raceless and men genderless, but is easily applied here as well: native-born citizens—especially those who also exist in other dominating social groups—are “citizenless,” at least in how they feel (or, rather, don't feel) about what it means to belong to state. To immigrants, however, this is far from true. The “paper,” albeit just a paper, matters. Instead of rejecting status or the state entirely, my participants seemed to ultimately value opportunities to *use* their status to voice opinions, seek educational opportunities, reform systems, and build community . While the complexity of their relationships with the United States remains a result of the concrete comparisons they made between life pre- and post-migration and pre- and post-status, the exercise of agency *through* conscious engagement with the state represented emotional resistance, strength, and resilience.

V. Conclusion: Thinking Forward With Feeling

Based on the relief and gratitude they shared, findings from this study demonstrate that gaining legal status was deeply important to my participants. However, the intertwining of their gratitude and resentment suggest there are inherent contradictions in U.S. citizenship. Still, as active agents in an imbalanced relationship with the powerful state, they engaged with their emotions to make valuable contributions to their own success, the health of their communities, and the state as a whole.

The primary contribution of this study is its commitment to the emotional components of navigating legal status as an immigrant. By recognizing that status is felt in ways outside the scope of common perception, my findings further dialogue about the ways we understand the impacts of legal status. Too often, conversations on migration are focused on economic and political factors with no regard for the individual's experience as a contributing member of social groups (Bosniak, 2006; Volpp, 2007). Instead, this study situates the experiences of individuals within the economic, political, sociological, etc. backdrops in which they exist. My findings raise concern about our reliance upon citizenship, and have the potential to bring accountability to the way it functions. It also challenges the way it limits equality and promotes racial ideology and asks for meaningful change in both state function as well as the culture of citizenship.

My data framed the United States as largely responsible for the emotional labor immigrants must perform, which implies the need to more critically engage with the structure of citizenship, as a global community. In one sense, the finding that immigrants are not recipients of the full scope of their human rights is not new. However, the idea that it is the very structure of citizenship that endows states with the power to determine which humans' rights merit protection begins to address a gap in our current conversations. Instead of merely assuming our social

function is dependent on citizenship, we need to contend with what it offers and *at what cost*—not to discontinue its use, but to examine who is excluded or “differentially included,” why that is, and how we can remedy it (Espiritu, 2003, p. 47). By doing so, we will be better able to recognize the disparate impacts of citizenship based on position and privilege, and to recognize that its value is constrained by its limited distribution.

Findings of the present study make clear that the undocumented experience is marked by fear, exclusion, hopelessness, and hurt, a reality that the United States has the capacity to minimize. Almost everyone I interviewed, despite having legal status, voiced deep feelings of sadness for the continued plight of undocumented people in America, citing amnesty and increasing legal pathways as ways for the United States to promote justice and relieve struggle. The country would permit and inflict less harm by expanding citizenship, humanizing immigrants and better facilitating justice. There is no reason to assume that wider inclusion would render the state less valuable or its role less important (Couter, 2000). Therefore, despite the fact that legal status should never be presented as a comprehensive solution to the harmful power dynamic of citizenship or the surrounding structural injustice, my data makes clear that (1) it is valuable and (2) should be accessible for those who seek it.

Additionally, the clear connection to immigrant agency warrants further attention. At a time when native-born U.S. citizens on both ends of the political spectrum are disillusioned with the United States and increasingly ambivalent toward it, my participants seemed to believe in the promise of the United States in a way that few others do (Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2021; Desilver, 2017). Often this belief was guided not by experience with a perfect state but by the complexity and struggle of their experiences. Instead of indicating a form of politics centered on state power and dependent on citizenship, they demonstrated the possibility

of an alternative, centered on experience and committed to justice, inclusion, and agency.

Scholars have argued that citizenship is “an essentially contested concept” (Lister, 2005, p. 2), that it “has no essential meaning” (Clarke et al., 2014, p. 172), is imparfaite (imperfect) (Balibar, 2001), and a “political creation” (Smith, 1997). By listening to the voices and experiences of immigrants, we can understand aspects of the structures of our system that no other approach will ever be able to provide. The participants in my study showed that citizenship was something that they felt in ways that, presumably, native-born citizens do not experience. As long as immigrant voices, experiences, and feelings are left out of our theoretical conversations on citizenship and debates on immigration reform, both will continue to be white-centric and short-sighted (Bernstein et al., 2021). Those who live in the “space between” are best equipped to lead us toward something better (Small, 1997, p. 193; Espiritu, 2003). Therefore, by approaching citizenship from the experience of those marginalized by the interest of the state, we can challenge the assumption of it as universal, abstract, and unproblematic (Clarke et al., 2014).

Future research should continue this conversation, addressing the limitations of the present project and involving various approaches to the topic. For example, a larger sample size would enable deeper conversation on the diversity present within immigrant groups and how that diversity impacts emotions toward and relationships with the United States. Data that compares generations, education level, language ability, types of status (particularly lawful permanent residency vs. naturalized citizenship), and a more specific examination of the role of race would facilitate a deepened understanding of the connections these factors have to emotion and experience. Additionally, a mixed-methods and interdisciplinary investigation of the relational and psychological aspect of citizenship would certainly be valuable, especially through the expertise of therapists, neuroscientists, and social psychologists. Continued work in these areas

would help citizenship and migration studies move forward in developing a more comprehensive and human-centric approach to legal status, specific to the modern moment.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Table 1

Demographic data of research participants

Pseudonym	Country of Origin	Current area of residence	Current Status	Former Status(es)	Interview Format	Gender Age	Identity	Age at Initial Migration ^a	Total Time Spent Undocumented (years)	Year of First US Entry ^a	Year Received US Permanent Legal Status	Occupation	Level of Education
Noemi	Mexico	Bay Area, CA	Citizen	LPR	Zoom	46	Female	28	3	2004	2007	Caretaker	Less than high school
Pafi	Mexico	Bay Area, CA	Citizen	LPR	Zoom	46	Female	1	20	1977	1997	Social worker	Associate's degree
Josue	Mexico	Bay Area, CA	LPR	DACA	In-person	22	Male	<1	17	2000	2021	Student	Some college
Carmen	Mexico	East Texas	LPR	—	In-person	78	Female	39	11	1983	2007	Farm worker	Less than high school
Nancy	Mexico	East Texas	Citizen	LPR	In-person	48	Female	22	3	1997	2000	Cleaning services	Some high school
Mariela	Mexico	East Texas	Citizen	LPR	In-person	59	Female	19	4	1982	1986	Retired (farm worker)	High school
Rey	Mexico	East Texas	LPR	—	In-person	56	Male	19	2	1985	1987	Construction	High school
Nara	Mexico	Bay Area, CA	Citizen	DACA, LPR	Zoom	34	Male	<1	24	1988	2013	Attorney	Professional degree
Ale	Mexico	East Texas	LPR	DACA	Zoom	25	Female	5	10	2002	2018	Entrepreneur	Some college
Gabi	Mexico	East Texas	Citizen	LPR	Zoom	45	Female	20	4	1998	2005	Massage therapist	High school
Carolina	Venezuela	Utah	LPR	DACA	In-person	25	Female	4	12	2001	2021	Student	Some college
Zuria	El Salvador	San Salvador, El Salvador	LPR	—	Zoom	58	Female	19	4	1983	1991	Farm worker	High school
Bela	El Salvador	Bay Area, CA	LPR	—	Zoom	57	Female	36	15	2001	2016	Housekeeper	Bachelor's degree

^a Some participants entered the US multiple times before staying permanently

Appendix B: Social media recruitment flyer

Seeking immigrant storytellers

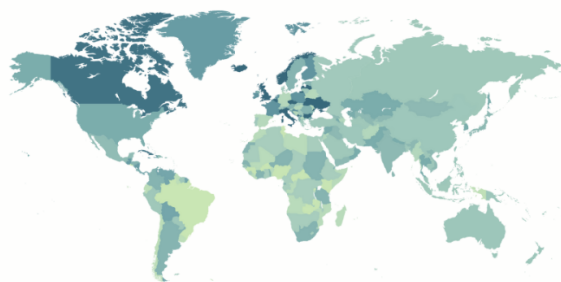
to share their experiences in the
United States



You are qualified if

- you are an immigrant (you were born outside of the US)
- you have a green card, asylum status, or citizenship
- you have previously spent time without legal permission to be in the country

Participation will include one interview session (approx. 1 hour) and will take place in a location of the participant's choice.



Contact Faith Williams:
(936) 714-1455
fjwilliams2@dons.usfca.edu

Note: Participation will be confidential.

Se Buscan Narradores Immigrantes

para contar acerca de sus experiencias
viviendo en los Estados Unidos



Te calificas si:

- eres inmigrante (naciste en país que no sea los Estados Unidos)
- tienes green card, ciudadanía, o asilo
- has pasado tiempo sin permiso legal viviendo en los Estados Unidos

La participación será confidencial, incluirá una entrevista (aprox. 1 hora) y pasará en un lugar que escoja el participante.



Si tienes interés o otras preguntas, ¡contáctame!

Llamadas y mensajes de texto: [\(936\) 714-1455](tel:9367141455)

Correo electrónico: fjwilliams2@dons.usfca.edu

Appendix C: Consent form



CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Below is a description of the research procedures and an explanation of your rights as a research participant. You should read this information carefully. If you agree to participate, you will sign in the space provided to indicate that you have read and understand the information on this consent form. You are entitled to and will receive a copy of this form.

You have been asked to participate in a research study conducted by Faith Williams, a graduate student in the International Migration Studies program at the University of San Francisco. This faculty supervisor for this study is Dr. Evelyn Rodriguez, a professor in the Department of sociology at the University of San Francisco.

WHAT THE STUDY IS ABOUT:

The purpose of this research study is to learn more about the relationship between the United States and immigrants who arrive. Specifically, the study will look at the way legal status impacts this relationship.

WHAT WE WILL ASK YOU TO DO:

During this study:

- You will be asked a series of interview questions by an interviewer in a one-on-one format.
- The questions will deal with the way you view your birth country and the United States and how these relationships have changed throughout your migration experience.
- You can decline to answer any questions or change your mind about participating at any moment without issue.

DURATION AND LOCATION OF THE STUDY:

Your participation in this study will involve one interview session that will last about one hour. If we run out of time and you feel like there is more that you would like to say, we can schedule a second session. The study will take place in a location of your choice that makes you feel comfortable, safe, and relaxed.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS:

The research procedures described above may involve certain risks and/or discomforts. These include emotional and psychological distress associated with recalling memories from your migration experience. If you wish, you may choose to withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time during the study without penalty. There are also mental health resources included at the end of this form in case you need them.

BENEFITS:

There are no direct benefits that you should expect from your participation in this study. However, a possible benefit to you of participating in this study is the opportunity to express your feelings about your migration experience.

PRIVACY/CONFIDENTIALITY:

Because you will not be providing any information that can uniquely identify you (such as your name or student ID number), the data you provide will be anonymous.

COMPENSATION/PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION:

There is no payment or other form of compensation for your participation in this study.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY:

Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate without penalty or loss of benefits. Furthermore, you may skip any questions or tasks that make you uncomfortable and may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty. In addition, the researcher has the right to withdraw you from participation in the study at any time.

OFFER TO ANSWER QUESTIONS:

Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you should contact the principal investigator: Faith Williams at (936) 714-1455 or faithjwill@gmail.com. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the University of San Francisco Institutional Review Board at IRBPHS@usfca.edu.

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES:

- For emergencies: Text HOME to 741741 to connect with a Crisis Counselor for free. Visit <https://www.crisistextline.org/> to connect to services through WhatsApp.
- National Therapist Directories (including Latinx, Black, immigrant, Muslim, and undocumented specific): <https://www.informedimmigrant.com/resource-type/therapist-directories/>
- Other resources (communities, disorders, family and parenting, and support groups): <https://www.informedimmigrant.com/resource-type/mental-health/>

I HAVE READ THE ABOVE INFORMATION. ANY QUESTIONS I HAVE ASKED HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT AND I WILL RECEIVE A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM.

PARTICIPANT'S SIGNATURE

DATE



CONSENTIMIENTO A PARTICIPAR EN UNA INVESTIGACIÓN

Abajo está la descripción del proceso investigador y una explicación de sus derechos como participante. Debe leer esta información con cuidado. Si da su consentimiento a participar, firmará en el espacio indicado que ha leído y ha entendido la información de esta forma de consentimiento. Tiene el derecho a recibir y recibirá una copia de esta forma.

Se le ha pedido que participe en un estudio de investigación dirigido por Faith Williams, una estudiante de posgrado en el programa de Estudios de Migración Internacional de la Universidad de San Francisco. La supervisora de este estudio es la Dra. Evelyn Rodríguez, profesora del Departamento de Sociología de la Universidad de San Francisco.

DE LO QUE TRATA ESTA INVESTIGACIÓN:

El propósito de esta investigación es aprender más acerca de la relación que existe entre los Estados Unidos y los inmigrantes que llegan. Específicamente, esta investigación se enfocará en la manera en que el estatus legal impacta la relación.

LO QUE TE PEDIRÉ:

Durante esta investigación:

- Le preguntaré una serie de preguntas en el formato de ~~una~~ entrevista.
- Las preguntas tratarán de cómo ve su país natal, como ve los Estados Unidos-y cómo estas relaciones han cambiado durante su experiencia migratoria.
- Puede negarse a contestar cualquier pregunta o revocar su participación en cualquier momento.

DURACIÓN Y UBICACIÓN DE LA INVESTIGACIÓN:

Su participación en este estudio implicará una sesión de entrevista que durará aproximadamente una hora. Si se nos acaba el tiempo y cree que hay más cosas que le gustaría decir, podemos programar una segunda sesión. El estudio tendrá lugar en un lugar de su elección que le haga sentirse cómodo, seguro y relajado.

RIESGOS E INCOMODIDADES POTENCIALES:

Los procedimientos de investigación descritos anteriormente pueden implicar ciertos riesgos y/o molestias. Entre ellos se incluye el malestar emocional y psicológico asociado a la evocación de recuerdos de su experiencia migratoria. Si lo desea, puede optar por retirar su consentimiento e interrumpir su participación en cualquier momento del estudio sin penalización alguna. También hay recursos para la salud mental al final de esta forma para recibir ayuda si la necesita.

BENEFICIOS:

No hay beneficios directos que debe esperar como resultado de su participación en esta investigación. Sin embargo, un beneficio potencial será la oportunidad de expresar sus sentimientos de su experiencia migratoria.

PRIVACIDAD/CONFIDENCIALIDAD:

Dado que no proporcionará ninguna información que pueda identificarle de forma exclusiva (como su nombre o número de identificación de estudiante), los datos que proporcione serán anónimos.

COMPENSACIÓN/PAGO POR PARTICIPAR:

No hay pago o ningún otro tipo de compensación por participar en esta investigación.

CARÁCTER VOLUNTARIO DE LA INVESTIGACIÓN:

Su participación es completamente voluntaria y puedes negarse a participar sin pena o pérdida de beneficios. Además, usted puede omitir preguntas que no quiera contestar si se siente incómodo. También, puede discontinuar su participación en cualquier momento sin penalización. Con eso, el investigador también tiene el derecho de retirar su participación en cualquier momento.

SI TIENES PREGUNTAS:

Por favor, si tiene preguntas hágalas en este momento. Si tiene preguntas después, debe contactar a la investigadora principal: Faith Williams a (936) 714-1455 o fjwilliams@dons.usfca.edu. Si tiene preguntas o inquietudes en cuanto a sus derechos como participante en esta investigación, puede contactar a la Institutional Review Board de la Universidad de San Francisco a IRBPHS@usfca.edu.

RECURSOS PARA LA SALUD MENTAL:

- **Para emergencias:** Envía un mensaje de texto con la palabra **AYUDA** al [741741](tel:741741) para comunicarte de manera gratuita con un Consejero de Crisis. Visite <https://www.crisistextline.org/es/> para usar WhatsApp.
- **Directorios nacionales de terapeutas** (incluidos los latinos, negros, inmigrantes, musulmanes e indocumentados específicos): <https://www.inmigranteinformado.com/tipos-de-recurso/directorios-de-terapeutas/>
- **Otros recursos** (comunidades, familia & paternidad, grupos de apoyo y trastornos): <https://www.inmigranteinformado.com/tipos-de-recurso/salud-mental-como-cuidarse-a-si-mismo-y-a-sus-seres-queridos/>

HE LEÍDO LA INFORMACIÓN DE ARRIBA. TODAS MIS PREGUNTAS HAN SIDO CONTESTADAS. DOY MI CONSENTIMIENTO PARA PARTICIPAR EN ESTA INVESTIGACIÓN Y RECIBIRÉ UNA COPIA DE ESTA FORMA DE CONSENTIMIENTO.

FIRMA DE PARTICIPANTE

FECHA

Appendix D: Interview Guide

1. Tell me about growing up.
 1. What was it like?
 2. What was your family like?
 3. Do you have any favorite memories? Customs? Foods?
 4. What do you miss most about your birth country?
2. Why did you (or your parents, etc) decide to leave your country of origin?
3. Why did you (or your parents, etc) choose the United States?
 1. What did you grow up thinking about the US?
 2. What do people in your birth country think about the US?
4. What were you expecting to find here?
 1. In what ways have those expectations been met? In what ways have they not been met?
5. How do you think Americans see you? Did receiving legal status impact that? Why or why not?
6. What do you feel the US has given you?
 1. Do you think that the US has given you anything?
 2. Do you have any examples?
7. What do you feel that you have given to the US? Has it changed over time?
8. Tell me what it was like trying to seek permanent status. What was that journey like?
9. What is the fondest emotion you have ever felt toward the United States?
10. What is the worst emotion you have ever felt toward the United States?
11. Imagine it's a relationship. How would you describe it?
12. What does citizenship mean to you?
 1. What does the United States mean to you?
13. What does home mean to you?
 1. Where do you feel the most at home?
14. What kind of home do you want your children to have?

1. Háblame de tu infancia.
 - a. ¿Cómo era?
 - b. ¿Cómo era tu familia?
 - c. ¿Tienes algún recuerdo favorito? ¿Costumbres? ¿Comidas?
 - d. ¿Qué es lo que más echas de menos de tu país de origen?
2. ¿Por qué decidiste (o tus padres, etc.) dejar tu país de origen?
3. ¿Por qué eligió usted (o sus padres, etc.) los Estados Unidos?
 - a. ¿Qué pensabas al crecer sobre los Estados Unidos?
 - b. ¿Qué piensa la gente de tu país de origen sobre los Estados Unidos?
4. ¿Qué esperabas encontrar aquí?
 - a. ¿De qué manera se han cumplido esas expectativas? ¿En qué aspectos no se han cumplido?
5. Cuénteme cómo fue el intento de conseguir el estatus permanente. ¿Cómo fue esa experiencia?
6. ¿Cómo crees que te ven los estadounidenses? ¿Influyó el hecho de recibir un estatus legal? ¿Por qué o por qué no?
7. ¿Qué crees que te han dado los Estados Unidos?
 - a. ¿Crees que Estados Unidos te ha dado algo?
 - b. ¿Tienes algún ejemplo?
8. ¿Qué crees que le has dado a EE.UU.? ¿Ha cambiado con el tiempo?
9. ¿Cuál es la emoción más grata que ha sentido hacia los Estados Unidos?
10. ¿Cuál es la peor emoción que has sentido hacia los Estados Unidos?
11. ¿Qué significa para ti la ciudadanía?
 - a. ¿Qué significa Estados Unidos para ti?
12. ¿Qué significa el hogar para usted?
 - a. ¿Dónde te sientes más a gusto?
13. ¿Qué tipo de hogar quieres que tengan tus hijos?