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"I Can't Offer Them What Other People Could"

Multigenerational Punishment of Citizen Children

No. At the beginning, no [I didn't think being undocumented would affect my kids]. Until I had my next child. I was like, Oh my god, I can't offer them what other people could.

—MARTA SANDOVAL

Tears streamed down Marta's cheeks as she remembered giving up on her dreams because of her undocumented status: "I wanted to be a lawyer. Or like work for a radio station. Silly dreams. . . . But then in the 12th grade, I just realized that that was the end of me." She finished high school feeling that college was not an option. Instead, she spent four years earning below minimum wage working at small stores in the *callejones,* the wholesale fashion district in downtown Los Angeles. Tired of mistreatment, she looked for another job. Chuckling at her younger self, she recalled feeling "awesome" after being hired at Disney's historic El Capitan Theater in Hollywood. They soon ran her Social Security number and promptly let her go with a small check for her training hours. Her voice broke: "I never cashed it. I still have it to this day." Gulping back air, she explained, "Because no. To me it's—special. Even though, like, a lot of people are gonna think like, That's not even a good job—but to me it was." Over the next couple of years, she settled in to work at a fast-food restaurant, married, and had her first child. Her life hadn't changed much in the 10 years since.

Despite these strong barriers, Marta believed that her children's citizenship would shield them from the pain and disappointment she had experienced as an undocumented young adult. Yet, as her firstborn grew older and she had her second and then third child, she awoke to the shared nature of her and her husband's undocumented status. The kids wanted things that she could not afford. They were in the car when her husband was pulled over and ticketed for driving

without a license. They asked to travel places like their friends did. They worried about being separated by deportation. She lamented, "I can't offer them what other people could."

In this chapter, I focus on the citizen children of undocumented young adults to explore the extent to which parents' fears about their inability to provide are realized. Previous research has established that the citizen children of first-generation undocumented adults have poorer outcomes than children of documented or citizen parents. Studying children ages 0–3, Hirokazu Yoshikawa argues that parental undocumented status constrains children's developmental contexts, particularly the home and childcare settings where they spend the majority of their time; this is because parents limit interactions with legal authorities (including the use of social service programs), have few social ties, and experience poor work conditions.[1] Focusing on elementary-school-aged children, Joanna Dreby points to the enforcement context, in which deportation threats create economic and emotional uncertainty for families and disrupt children's well-being.[2] I extend my focus to 1.5-generation parents who have less fear of deportation and stronger social and cultural capital *and* to a broader age range of children up to age 15. This allows me to explore how constraints evolve as children age and how they emerge even when parents are more socially integrated.

I trace how undocumented young adults' citizen children experience the context of illegality and connect these everyday experiences to long-term consequences for their upward mobility. These endure even as their parents receive DACA, because illegality shaped children's early experiences of social exclusion and limited their mobility pathways. This is particularly clear among older children. I refer to this process as *multigenerational punishment,* wherein the sanctions intended for a specific population spill over to harm individuals who are not targeted by immigration policies. Overall, I highlight how immigration policies produce family-level inequalities that endure into the next generation as dependent social ties and daily interactions place citizen children in a de facto undocumented status.

"WHY CAN'T I DO THIS?": ECONOMIC BARRIERS TO CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT

As I showed in the last chapter, parents were plagued by concerns that they were failing to enable the next generation's upward mobility. They worked hard to meet their children's basic needs, spend time with them, and provide developmental opportunities for future educational success. Many found, though, that their economic instability restricted their children's development, perpetrating multigenerational punishment.

Parents' lack of employment authorization directly affected the types of jobs they could access and their ability to participate in their children's lives. Antonio

Mendez recalled working at a garment factory after high school, imagining how such labor-intensive work affected families:

> It was really demanding. My skin from my fingers was peeling. It was hard labor. . . . I was wondering [what] these other men and women who are working here, how is it that they go home and have the energy to interact with their children? To go to the park? To talk to them? . . . Me going in as an 18-year-old, I'm—I was doing cross-country and track at high school! And I'm dying, I'm tired! . . . How is it that this society expects these families to have healthy children?

Although Antonio did not have children, his job exposed him to the challenging balancing act that undocumented parents face. Many worked long hours, often at labor-intensive jobs. This was particularly common for fathers, including Elias Ruiz, who worked the night shift at a factory. His work left him chronically sleep deprived, so he often fell asleep in the car or at their destination during family time. Even when parents were physically present, their jobs often drained their mental and physical energy.

Parents' limited income, time, and presence ultimately hinder children's early development. Nicolás Fernandez, a recently legalized participant, was undocumented when his son was born and remembered working two jobs—at a fast-food restaurant during the day and as a gas station attendant at night:

> I didn't have time like, "Oh, let me read to you." It's like, "Well, I have to go to work." When you are about to go sleep, I'm already making my way to work. . . . It's not that you don't care about your kid, it's just that you literally don't have time to read to them or interact with them. . . . I was always fucking stressed 'cause it's like you don't have any money. I have to go to work, I have to work graveyard, I have to work the holidays. All these things. And the last thing that was on my mind was "Oh, let me talk to my child."

Now an English teacher, Nicolás was acutely aware of the importance of early literacy and language development. Other working parents also longed for time with their children, acknowledging its importance for cognitive development and emotional well-being.

Similar developmental concerns have been identified more generally among children from low-income families. Research shows that such children are exposed to 30 million fewer words by the time they are four than children in professional families; professional parents talk more, use richer language, and continue conversation longer.[3] This vocabulary gap can have long-term academic consequences. Studies show that illegality compounds these class inequalities. Yoshikawa finds that citizen children, ages 0–3, of undocumented immigrant parents experience delays in early cognitive development when compared to the children of documented immigrant parents.[4] These disparities persist in children's academic performance during preschool and elementary school.[5]

Parents quickly pointed to their undocumented status as compounding economic constraints. Nicolás believed that legalizing his status and transitioning into work as a teacher allowed him to deeply engage with his children. He now has money to buy them books *and* can consistently read them bedtime stories. Elias was more vague: "I think that it would be much easier [as a citizen]. I don't know exactly [how], but I imagine that it would be more easy."[6] In some cases illegality's structural constraints clearly emerged; in others, parents attributed economic inequality to immigration status. Regardless, illegality confounded the real and perceived socioeconomic challenges facing other low-income families.

Parents' limited income also determined their ability to afford extracurricular activities to support their children's intellectual and social development. Alfonso Rojas, a participant's undocumented partner, provided for their family on $1,800 a month before his partner received DACA and began working. They could usually afford what the family needed, but not always what their three sons (ages 4, 10, and 17) wanted: "There was a time that my oldest son wanted to play basketball, and he asked us for a monthly fee so that he could play [on a] basketball [team] in the park. It was not too expensive, but we could not cover our daily expenses and afford the fee."[7] Irene Correas declared, "Summer camps, they're so expensive! We want her to be active, but we can't really pay the tuition." Research confirms the importance of extracurricular activities for children's socioemotional development and academic performance.[8]

Many parents sought free or low-cost extracurricular activities. When Irene's daughter's friends went to summer camps, she pieced together activities. Many parents accessed free or low-cost programs, but these were often hard to find and get into. Nancy Ortega explained that she was able to enroll her two sons in a free karate class only because her sister worked for a nonprofit that helped parents access such services. A few, like Estefania Gutierrez-Estrada, tried to create their own opportunities; she recalled petitioning the local Little League baseball team to lower the cost for enrolling her son.

Parents often had to choose between earning income and having the time to support children's activities. In her first interview, Irene explained how she and her partner worked long, inflexible hours in a coffee shop, limiting their ability to participate in their six-year-old daughter's education: "Whenever they have asked us to volunteer in their schools, we can't because we have to go to work. We have long working hours, and so we can't really participate in her school as much as we want to." Like most parents, they valued education but simply did not have the time to participate in the way the school demanded.[9]

Alternatively, Delia Trujillo elected to switch jobs, leaving factory work to sell cookware door-to-door. Although this was financially risky because her income depended on a sales commission, she shared, "I like it . . . because I can take care of my kids. Because I can have time for them, their sports and everything."[10]

While she had a hard time supporting her four children (ages 4, 9, 10, and 13) on $600 a month, she could accompany them to a variety of extracurricular activities in the afternoons, including soccer, orchestra, cheerleading, and First Communion classes. Comparing Irene's and Delia's experiences suggests that most parents were unable to both make the money they needed to support their children's development *and* actively involve themselves in their lives.

Children's ages differentiated the amount of pressure parents felt to provide educational opportunities. Camila Escobar believed that her two daughters, ages nine months and four years, were not yet aware of the impact her husband Luis's undocumented status was having on their family's economic situation:

> I definitely think that the girls' lives are gonna be affected. They're being affected right now, but they don't know. They don't understand. If the situation stays this way, say, five years from now, 10 years from now, then it's gonna be incredibly affected. Yes, very much so! But right now, I don't think that it's really affected that much because I don't think they even care. As long as they have mom and dad and they get to play and get to eat, life is good. We could be under a bridge and life would be good. They don't understand yet.

She and Luis were not yet worried about the potential effects of living in a motor home and not having a stable income. But they anticipated that soon their daughters would see how their friends lived and begin asking for dance classes or other opportunities. Luis commented: "I don't see myself having her there [in the trailer] when she is five or six. She definitely needs a room by [then]. I think that is just common sense in child welfare."

Indeed, as children aged, they articulated their desires and began to differentiate themselves from their peers who had citizen parents. In her second interview, Irene shared how this was emerging with her daughter, now eight years old:

> I'm starting to see it now. Her friends' moms are either a doctor, a lawyer, an architect. They never had to struggle from being undocumented [and] not being able to work with your degree. Sometimes she asks, "Why can't I do this? . . . We just don't have money, huh?" For her, I would have to explain to her, we don't have the same situation as your friends' parents. . . . She understands. She's very good. But it's hard for her because she wants to do the things that her friends want to do.

Parents' continually constrained time and money began to instill a sense of inequality.

"WHEN AM I GONNA GO?": TRAVELING TO FIT IN AND MOVE UP

Mirroring the enduring consequences attributed to financial constraints, parents also found that an inability to travel limited their children's

development. Pablo Ortiz and Alvina Villanueva shared how travel emerges in young children's lives:

> *Pablo:* Even though she's small right now, sometimes advertisements come up. Legoland. SeaWorld. She wants to go to these places. But sometimes it hurts. It hurts me to hear that because I know that I cannot take her. It's because it's on the other side of the border *[laughs]*.
>
> *Alvina:* In terms of traveling, they want to go to Mexico, but I can't go. . . . I limit their travel and knowing other places.[11]

For Mexican-origin families in Southern California, travel limitations were often experienced as being unable to travel to local vacation destinations in San Diego or to Mexico to visit family. Not only were such trips expensive, but undocumented immigrants feel a limited ability to travel domestically because of the threat of deportation and the material risks of driving without a license. Although San Diego is only two hours from Los Angeles, traveling there is risky because it is close to the U.S.-Mexico border; there are permanent checkpoints on major freeways connecting the cities and heightened immigration enforcement in the region. Recognizing this, Pablo joked that it is on the other side of the border. Further, they cannot travel internationally because they would have to clandestinely reenter the country. Although citizen children technically did not face these restrictions, their young age and dependence on their parents often translated to a shared inability to travel. Travel may be seen as a luxury, but it plays an important role in teaching children that they are different from their peers and limiting their developmental opportunities.

Feeling Different

Sitting in the same classrooms as children who have citizen parents, the children of undocumented young adults become aware that they are different. Alfonso Rojas, an undocumented partner, shared,

> The other day I was writing a story with my son for school, a story of what they did for vacation. And we didn't do anything but go to the park, to take him to play. And his classmates, he saw that they went here, they went there. And he asked me, 'Why can't we do what my friends do?' Those limitations that he has, even in school, reflects that [our undocumented status]. . . . It makes him feel less than those in the same classroom.[12]

Informal social interactions and formal class activities can prompt children to identify missed opportunities, develop a sense of inferiority, and internalize parental immigration status as a source of social differentiation. Sociologist Joanna Dreby finds that children also hide their immigrant origin, particularly when their peers include high concentrations of Latinas/os/xs, to avoid stigmatizing peer interactions.[13] Janet Godinez recounted a similar experience in which her

preteen son asked her about going on vacation because "his friend and his mom and dad were gonna go to vacations together." She pointed to how these feelings of deprivation and difference emerge as children age: "Now that they're older, they see the difference. They understand more."

Although these instances surprised Alfonso and Janet, others anticipated such conversations because they reflected their own childhood experiences. Celia Alvarez worried that her undocumented status would eventually affect her daughter, who was only a few months old: "When she hears her classmates say, . . . 'We went to visit my grandma in Mexico,' she's probably going to wonder why we don't take trips like that." These questions echoed those that Celia had asked her parents as a young child. The resulting conversations were how she and other undocumented young adults often began to learn the limitations of their own undocumented status. They intimately knew the feelings of inequality and inferiority that came from being unable to participate in the same activities as their peers. They saw that their children would soon learn these same lessons of illegality.

Such feelings of difference can have lasting impacts on children's friendships and ability to fit in with their peers. As Celia predicted, Marta Sandoval's four-year-old daughter asked why they did not travel like her preschool friends: "She comes to me, 'Mom, my little friend told me her mom was undocumented too. That's so cool! We both get to spend vacation together!'" Marta's inability to travel shaped her daughter's social life, encouraging her to develop a friendship with a classmate who also had an undocumented mother. Her daughter's experience reflected Marta's own childhood as she remembered the pain of feeling "bad" when her friends talked about their vacations in Mexico. This had also shaped her childhood relationships by pushing her "to hang out with people that I thought were kind of like me"—undocumented.

Participants' specific travel desires and limitations reflect their specific context, including their Mexican origin and proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border. Similar experiences likely occur in other geographic areas and populations when the children of undocumented young adults cannot replicate their peer group's social norms.

Missing Opportunities

Parents also saw traveling as a critical opportunity for children's intellectual and emotional growth. Nancy Ortega and Daniela Sanchez explained why:

> *Nancy:* So they can see other places, learn different customs and traditions. Not only to San Diego [but] all around, especially in third world countries. That way they can see how easy they have it but also give them that desire to one day help [others].
>
> *Daniela:* For him to grow as a human . . . I want him to experience as much as he can with traveling. Because I haven't been able to

> see as many things, and seeing them on TV is bittersweet. So I would want him to kind of experience it. And realize . . . I'm no better. My way of thinking isn't the best. . . . What I've been taught in the school system isn't the best and the only way. There's more.

Like other parents, Nancy and Daniela saw traveling as a key means of raising their children to be open minded, responsible, and successful. It provides an opportunity to generate knowledge through lived experience and build cultural capital. Although Daniela noted that some of this can be transmitted through TV or other media, she recognized that this is insufficient for producing a deep sense of reflective, respectful, and critical thinking.

A few parents shared that they had sent their children to travel alone or with others to ensure that they had opportunities for socioemotional growth. Naya Camacho described how she recently sent her 10-year-old son to spend the summer with her sister in Mexico:

> He was so, so happy. He said, "I don't want to go back [to the United States]." Because they have the liberty to run, to play, to everything, and here you're in an apartment. You can't do this because [of] the manager and the neighbors. . . . In his case, I said, "OK, I'm going to give him the opportunity to go and know my other part of the family and know where we came from." . . . I told him, "See how the kids sleep there? If they are in need, leave your clothes there for them." He left everything. He only brought, like, the clothes [he was wearing]. He [left] everything. He said, "Mom, they need it more than me." And so I [did] it for that purpose, to know where we came from, our values.

Naya beamed with pride as she shared how her son's visit helped him develop strong values and solidify his sense of humanity. Few parents, however, could send their children on such trips, either because they lacked funds or did not have family members with the capacity to support such efforts.

Once older and independent, citizen children could potentially travel on their own, but memories of these childhood differences will continue to haunt them. Adán Olivera stressed to his two children, both in elementary school, that they could go to San Diego when they were older: "How do you explain that you can't go to SeaWorld? Sometimes I do try to tell them, 'You can't go because your mom and dad can't go because we weren't born here. You guys were, so you guys can go, but you can't go alone.'" Rather than hearing reasons like "it's too far" or "we'll go next year," children face legal explanations and an indefinite date of future travel. Alfonso Rojas suggested that these instances are internalized and persist: "They are going to grow up with this limitation. In the future when they are older, they are going to do it. . . . [But] when one has a memory like this, it is going to affect you."[14]

"MY SON DOESN'T DESERVE THAT!": DRIVING WITHOUT A LICENSE

Children's dependence on parents, especially at younger ages, links their physical mobility so that children share in the challenges of not having a driver's license. Cruz Vargas talked about his fear of driving with his one-year-old son: "What am I supposed to do if I get pulled over and I have my son? Some cops don't care. They're like, 'So? Take your son out and go walk.'" Extrapolating from his own negative experiences with police, he suspected that his son would share in the punishment of being undocumented—having a car towed and being stranded on the side of the road. He angrily insisted, "My son doesn't deserve that! My son's done nothing wrong to deserve that!" Thoughtfully, he continued, "I've done nothing wrong to deserve that, you know? I wasn't born and was like, 'Eh, I don't wanna have papers,' you know?" As parents sought to minimize the risks of driving without a license, they found that their children suffered through constrained opportunities for mobility and shared experiences of illegality.

As with leisure travel, parents believed that their children's development was being restricted by their attempts to limit the risks associated with local, everyday driving. Daniela Sanchez, who was six months pregnant, worried that it would be difficult to take her infant son to doctor's appointments because she refused to drive without a license. Estefania Gutierrez-Estrada found it impossible to not drive her seven-year-old son to school: "It's been an issue basically school-wise. You have to be there at a time, so we can't really rely on public transportation." Intent on minimizing the risk of police encounters, she refused to drive more than this. This limited her son's access to after-school programming and made it hard to visit public places like parks and museums where he can exercise, be stimulated, and learn new skills. These barriers became even more noticeable as children grew older and developed busier, time-dependent schedules.

Feeling pressured to meet their children's need for mobility, most parents drove unlicensed, developing strategies to limit their risks. Victoria Sandoval explained how she tried to avoid being stopped by police: "I always try to drive safely. And I'm always with my three-year-old, so I'm always careful." Many parents reported monitoring their driving behaviors: precisely following speed limits and rules about signaling, changing lanes, and making turns. Alicia Medina drives only "during the day, because the night is when they set up the checkpoints."[15] Others tried to keep track of when and where sobriety checkpoints were commonly set up so that they could avoid them. These management strategies seem to have served many well, since only a handful of parents reported running into a checkpoint with their children in the car.

Seeing parents' management strategies, older children often adopted a de facto sense of illegality as they began to look out for police cars and checkpoints. Alicia

explained how her 11-year-old daughter came to understand her fear of being pulled over: "Now she understands many of the things I can't do. When I'm driving, she understands. She helps me. She says, 'Pull over to the side, Mami. Over there I see a police car.' She alerts me to dangers that come with driving without a license."[16] Citizen children thus come to adopt a similar vigilance and outlook as their parents. This can take a psychological toll on them, adding stress and fear that children with citizen parents do not have to deal with.

Parents who had been pulled over with their children in the car reported shared trauma. Janet Godinez recounted having her car towed:

> They told me that since I don't have a driver's license, they were gonna take away my car. And they see my kids crying because they were taking the car. But they [the police] don't care at all. . . . I had blankets [and clothes] because I was gonna go wash [at the Laundromat]. And they told me, "Since your situation, I'm gonna, under the table, let you take out stuff." . . . Then my kids start crying when they were taking the car in the [tow] truck. And then the cops told me, . . . "Well, we're gonna take you home."

In Janet's case, she felt the police were relatively agreeable because her children were present, using their discretion to minimize (but not eliminate) the effect on her family. In other cases, though, police interactions triggered children's fears of detention, deportation, and family separation. This was true for Ignacio Nuñez's six-year-old daughter when they were pulled over. "[She's] telling me, like, 'Daddy, they're gonna take you to jail!' I'm like, 'No, Mami, they're just checking and that's it.' But she gets scared. She starts crying." Children who experienced these types of events were left traumatized and confused about the role of police, who they thought were supposed to "serve and protect."

Parents also worried that their unlicensed driving set a bad example. Nancy Ortega laughed as she remembered a recent comment made by her two sons, ages four and five:

> They do say, "I'm not gonna drive until I get a driver's license." They say that! If they get on the steering wheel, they'll just sit there. [They] would say, "I can't drive, Mommy, because I don't have my driver's license yet." So now I have one [because of DACA], but [their dad] doesn't. How do I explain that to them, that Mommy has one but Daddy doesn't?

Given that she had never discussed driver's licenses with them, Nancy was baffled about where her sons learned about them, perhaps on TV or in a video game. Tanya Diaz's 10-year-old son knew that she did not have a license:

> He jokes around, "I can't be in the car with you because you don't have a license." That he's a law-abiding citizen. "Mom, that's not right, you're driving without a license. I can't be in the car with you, Mom." I'm like, "Fine, get out." . . . I feel like a hypocrite: "Here, son, follow rules, while I'm gonna break them." It's hard to

> teach that to him. So I'm sure he's confused. Is it wrong or isn't it wrong? We'll see when he gets older, how it affects him.

Although Tanya and her son are teasing each other, she suggested that these conversations might have real implications for how citizen children will feel about themselves in relation to the law. Will her son follow the laws? Or break them unnecessarily because he had seen her do it? In extreme cases, citizen children might adopt oppositional stances because they see how the law unfairly treats their parents or that their parents do not follow it.

THE SPECTER OF DEPORTATION: SHARED FEARS AND RISKS

Most undocumented young adults I spoke to did not express substantial fears that they may suddenly be deported. They recognized that their deportation would drastically alter their lives and believed they would struggle to adapt to life in a country they no longer remembered.[17] Yet they reasoned that their deportation was unlikely, letting it fade to the back of their minds. Parents, however, were more likely to discuss fearing deportation because it threatened their family's stability. Parents struggled with two crucial decisions: Should they talk to their children about the possibility of their deportation? What would they do if they were deported? Regardless of their specific plans, parents suggest that their children will experience multigenerational punishment through emotional trauma and threats to their upward mobility.

"Why Can't the Parents Be with Their Kids?": Fearing Family Separation

Becoming a parent intensified fears of deportation. Cruz Vargas shared, "I wake up every day knowing I don't have papers, and I wake up every day knowing it's a possibility I can get deported." I asked if his feelings had changed since the birth of his son a little more than a year earlier. He shifted his gaze away, watching his son crawl around their cramped bedroom:

> [The thoughts] they're kind of more. You know? Because now I actually have someone that really depends on me. So now I have to be way more cautious. 'Cause before [if] I get deported, I can make it on my own. . . . It wouldn't be easy at all, but a girlfriend's [just] a girlfriend at the end of the day. . . . She'll get over it. I'll get over it. . . . But my son, my son's not gonna be able to understand that I can't be here. My son's not gonna be able to understand that I can't provide for him. . . . So I have to be way more cautious with everything.

Growing up, Cruz had been aware of the threat of deportation, but it had not pushed him to change his behavior. He frequently had encounters with

police. Once, he was stopped walking home with a friend late at night. He was charged—he claimed falsely—with a minor offense and served two and a half months in jail because "it was more expensive to fight it." Though he had already begun to change his ways, becoming a father increased his sense of caution.

Although parents were weighing deportation threats, many shielded their young children from this reality to protect their current emotional well-being. Edgar Gonzalez explained that he does not talk to his five-year-old daughter about his immigration status or the possibility of deportation: "She's too young to understand that stuff. I don't want to confuse her with all that stuff." Like Edgar, most parents felt that their young children were prone to misunderstanding immigration and the nuances of (il)legality.[18]

In some cases, parents' decisions stemmed directly from their own experiences being raised to fear deportation. Norma Mercado, the mother of an eight- and four-year-old, explained, "I knew since I was little that I didn't have papers and that I couldn't go anywhere. My parents would say, 'We can't go there because immigration will come.' So I don't want them to be scared [like I was]." By avoiding these conversations, Norma hoped to prevent immigration policies from reproducing emotional trauma.

Yet many parents elected to discuss deportation threats with their older children to protect their future well-being, especially if they already knew about their parents' undocumented status. Janet Godinez described her 12-year-old son's reaction to news coverage about deportation and family separation:

> When he sees that, he asks me questions: "Why are they separating the kids from the mom?" And then I have to explain [to] them: "Because they know that the mom doesn't have benefits [legal status]. And [immigration officials] went to their job [to take them] . . . And the kids have to stay here . . . because the kids are United States [citizens]." So he'll tell me, "But why can't the parents be with their kids? Because that's the only thing they want to do."

In addition to trying to help her son understand the nuances of immigration enforcement, Janet prepared her children for the possibility that immigration agents could detain or deport her or her undocumented partner:

> With my kids, what I've been telling them is that in case something happens and I don't go for them at school, to stay in school. Don't come home or don't run away. Don't get scared. Just be in school or whatever place you are, stay there until I come back. Or if you guys see someone that you know, go to them.

Similarly, Alicia Medina shared that she had similar discussions with her daughters, "as a way to not have them with eyes closed, covered. So they can see more or less reality."[19] Despite the fear this provoked, parents felt that this was the most responsible way to protect their children from emotional trauma if they

unexpectedly disappeared. Their actions reflect immigration advocates' recommendations to develop a family preparedness plan that specifies who will care for children and to talk with them about the plan.[20]

Despite best intentions, awareness of deportation threats often led to fear. Alfonso Rojas, an undocumented partner, described the cost of talking with his son, age 10, about the risk:

> It affects them. One time when the police passed near the house, on a chase, there was a lot of police, helicopters, and my son was on the balcony and he hid. He was hiding. He told me that immigration was coming. He doesn't have anything to do with this. But he did it because we have talked about this.[21]

"It's Too Much": Choosing between De Facto Deportation and Family Separation

During conversations about deportation threats, parents reported that children often asserted that they would accompany their parents. Victoria Sandoval, a single mother, recounted comments from her older children (ages 11, 12, and 15): "They say, 'We're going with you. We're gonna tell them [immigration officials], "We want to go with our mom because she's the only one that we have. We cannot stay with anyone else. We have nobody else but our mom." ' " These conversations made parents realize how their deportation would lead their citizen children to experience multigenerational punishment, either through family separation or through deprivation of opportunities in the United States.

Despite desires to remain together, parents struggled with the thought that their citizen children would experience de facto deportation if they followed their parent to the country of origin and lost the opportunity to pursue upward mobility in the United States. Tanya Diaz reflected on whether she would take her 10-year-old son with her:

> I couldn't. My mom was saying, "Let's just take him with us." But there is no life for him over there. I push school on him so much that I hope something good comes of it. He does put his education to use because he's a bright kid. There's no opportunities for him there. He could be so much more here.

Similarly, Abby Zamora shared, "I don't believe in family separation, [but] I wouldn't want to jeopardize my baby, taking her to a country where I don't even know how to survive." She worried about not being able to provide for her daughter's basic needs, let alone pay for her school. Confirming Tanya and Abby's fears, scholars find that the citizen children who accompany their deported parents often struggle in school systems that are unprepared to support them.[22]

On the other hand, parents anticipated that family separation would cause emotional trauma. Despite Tanya's clear assertion in her first interview that her son would remain in the United States, she said in her second interview that she

would take him with her because "I cannot be without him." Estefania Gutierrez-Estrada similarly asserted that separation was "out of the question":

> I experienced separation from my parents, and it's not something pretty. It's not something that you want a child to experience. My dad was never in the picture. My mom left [to the United States] when I was 10. I went through depression. Now that I think about it, it was clearly depression. I would get sick all the time. . . . Even the teachers and report cards [said], "This child is going through a lot of emotional hardship and she needs support" and this and that. And I was just crying constantly: "I want my mom. I want my mom here for Mother's Day. I want my dad here for Father's Day." Or for the graduations or whatever. So I know what it feels like, and I can't have my children do that, you know? I can't have my children experience that. The whole separation of families, it's too much.

Estefania grounded her decision in her childhood experiences in a transnational family—her mother had migrated to the United States in search of work, leaving Estefania with family in Mexico before they reunited in the United States.[23] This economic strategy comes at a high emotional cost, which Estefania intimately remembered. Hoping to prevent this emotional trauma in the next generation, she was adamant that her family would stay together.

Only one parent shared that their child's other parent had been deported. Flor Vega's daughter, three at the time of our interview, was only a few months old when her ex-partner was deported, so she did not feel the emotional impact. Yet other scholars have documented how older children experience severe psychosocial effects, including fear and anxiety, social withdrawal, and altered eating and sleeping patterns.[24] Flor's ex-partner had also helped her financially. His absence limited her ability to provide a stable household and developmental opportunities.[25] Emotional consequences also manifested later: "She asks for her dad, and I don't lie to her. . . . She knows her dad is in Mexico. . . . Sometimes she'll see another little girl with her dad and her mom, and she'll ask me, 'Where's my dad?' I want her to live with both of her parents too, but she can't."

"MORE NORMAL" BUT "A LITTLE TOO LATE": THE IMPACTS OF DACA ON CHILDREN

Most parents anticipated that receiving DACA would catapult them and their children into a world of opportunities. Early evidence suggests that children whose mothers are eligible for DACA have lower rates of adjustment and anxiety disorder diagnoses.[26] Aaron Ortiz, who had recently applied for DACA, hoped to go back to school. "I wanna pursue a career and try to live a more comfortable life," he said. A community college graduate, Aaron aspired to complete his bachelor's degree in horticulture and become a state park employee. Without DACA's employment authorization, he earned $2,600 a month as a self-employed

handyman. He was financially stable but aspired to more because he saw the multigenerational nature of inequality: "I wanna be able to have an opportunity and let my daughter have an opportunity. So that's why I want to file for that [DACA] because I really feel like I have a lot of potential in a lot of ways and I can't do a whole lot without anything [legal status]." Although Aaron and the other parents aspired to transform their family's stability and children's well-being through DACA, many found that some of consequences of illegality endured in their children's lives.

Establishing a Pathway to Integration (for Some)

After receiving DACA, some parents capitalized on their employment authorization to earn more money and afford better educational and extracurricular opportunities for their children. Luis Escobar put his college degree to use. He moved from a hodgepodge of jobs to one as a community organizer, almost tripling his monthly salary from $1,200 to $3,300. Aware of the importance of early-childhood education, he and his wife began investing in their oldest daughter's education. He felt DACA had improved his daughters' lives "200 percent!" He said,

> Just the fact that I am able to pay for a nice pre-K for her. I know I was able to take her to a regular pre-K. . . . [but] it is a reality that LAUSD [Los Angeles Unified School District] is still fucked up and they will get better opportunities [if they] go to a better school. So instead of like one teacher per 100 little pre-K kids, she is in a mini little private one with 15 kids and it is three teachers.

Though he exaggerates the student-to-teacher ratio in public schools, a well-resourced, private program will likely better prepare his daughter for educational success. Similarly, other parents discussed how moderate income improvements allowed them to afford enrollment fees for extracurricular activities.

Parents who obtained a driver's license after receiving DACA enjoyed a newfound physical mobility that allowed them to provide educational opportunities and support. Abby Zamora was looking forward to getting her driver's license. She imagined that this would open up opportunities for her toddler daughter's social and emotional development: "I'll be able to drive her around. I want her to be in sports, anything that is gonna help her learn discipline and just be a happy kid. So I wanna be able to drive her around without getting my car taken away." Similarly, Janet Godinez noted,

> I drive more confident, more normal. . . . Because before I couldn't drive all the way to school. I had to walk. . . . [If] they call from school, I'll go [there] driving, fast. I'll let them know if you behave bad, I'll go. Now they know that I have a car, I'll probably be in five minutes at their school.

She also remarked that this has allowed them to pursue activities outside the home: "With the family now we could go everywhere and we don't have to worry

about 'Oh, it's going to be dark. Oh, it's going to be late. We have to go back to the house' " to avoid checkpoints and police. In most cases, a driver's license removed immediate barriers so that there was significantly less fear and more freedom to parent and attend to children's needs.

Access to a driver's license and protection from deportation also allowed parents to feel comfortable traveling locally. In some cases, travel was the main way that young children understood their parents' newfound opportunities. Estefania Gutierrez-Estrada recalled her citizen husband and then five-year-old son's reaction to her receiving her DACA approval in the mail: "The first thing that my husband said [was] 'Well, congratulate your mom. Now we can go to San Diego.' And he's like, 'San Diego! Yeah!' So that was his understanding of this whole immigration thing." Adán Olivera, who had shared his children's desperate desire to go to SeaWorld in his first interview, instantly focused on travel in response to my question about how he thought DACA changed his life:

> It did affect me in a way that before we didn't go out to anywhere, like San Diego. We couldn't drive out of state. . . . [With DACA], we started going to San Diego. I took my kids to SeaWorld, [the] Safari Zoo. We did the whole weekend . . . spend the night and three days. It makes them happy. That's kind of the way it changed me, because now we go everywhere.

Over half of the 20 parents who had received DACA spontaneously talked about traveling to San Diego. Like Adán, most beamed with pride. These trips signaled that they could facilitate their children's social integration and close some of the most tangible gaps between them and their peers who had citizen parents.

Although most parents focused on other impacts, a few, including Naya Camacho, reported that their children had less fear of family separation:

> *Naya:* They feel like, "My mom is not going to Mexico. She's going to stay with us."
>
> *Laura:* Did they think about that before?
>
> *Naya:* Yes, 'cause for a long time they were having like the redadas [immigration raids], and in my corner by my house they had a redada, and they're so afraid. They are so afraid they said, "If you go to Mexico, we're going with you." But, yeah, and now that I have DACA . . . they said they feel more comfortable.

DACA recipients' protection from deportation also likely lessened the need for preparatory conversations about family separation, decreasing the frequency of emotional turmoil.

Unmet Expectations

While some parents were beginning to see early indications that their undocumented status would no longer hold their children back, many did not see

immediate and dramatic economic impacts. In many cases, illegality's enduring consequences on undocumented young adults' lives ensured that their children continued to experience barriers, particularly economic ones.

Partners Irene Correas and Julián Salinas both received DACA a year before their interviews. Irene, in her early 30s, had earned a bachelor's degree six years earlier and quickly found a job at a school district. It was a big step up from her previous job as a barista, but it had limited hours. She anticipated needing to earn a child development certificate or a graduate degree to turn it into a more stable career. Julián had been pursuing architectural training at various local community colleges for almost a decade. Now driven to complete his degree, he anticipated two or three more years of school before obtaining his bachelor's degree and being able to work in the field. In the meantime, he strung together part-time jobs in which he was quickly given raises to earn several dollars more an hour then his previous job as a barista. Like Irene and Julián, many undocumented parents saw some financial gains, but their economic integration was slow and did not facilitate their children's immediate integration.

Irene reflected on how DACA was slowly improving their family's financial situation: "little by little, we'll do more." They had committed themselves to moving their children to a better neighborhood and had enrolled their oldest, then eight, in several extracurricular activities, including "theater classes. She's taking violin classes now. She likes to play soccer outside with her little friends. She used to play basketball. Now she's trying out to swim." Yet, Irene noted that there were still differences between her daughter and her peers who had citizen parents:

> In the summer, some of her friends were going to summer camps, but it's a lot of money. It just wasn't very viable. So what I did was find this free music class. . . . She also likes to do activities on her own. Like, she has this activity book that will get her ready for third grade. She likes to read.

Irene's comments parallel those that she had made two years earlier, clearly establishing that DACA had not removed all the limitations that their immigration status placed on their children.

Persisting income limitations prevented families from taking advantage of new opportunities, like travel. A few parents shared that they were still trying to save enough to take their children to theme parks in San Diego, a minimum of $200–$300 for tickets for a family of four.[27] Several others shared that they could not afford longer family vacations, particularly ones that involved airfare. Vanessa Miranda felt that receiving DACA had changed her thought process about traveling beyond Los Angeles: "[Before I thought] I can't. What if something happens and I don't have my stuff [immigration status]? That was stopping me. Now it's not stopping me, but I don't have money *[laughs]*." Despite having a work permit, she continued to work in the same job as a full-time administrative assistant making $1,600 a month. This was not enough to fulfill her seven-year-old

daughter's dream of going to Hawaii. Further, international travel remained out of reach since DACA allowed recipients to travel outside the country only for educational, employment, and humanitarian reasons after a long and costly advanced parole process.

Too Little, Too Late

Despite receiving DACA, parents felt it was not enough to shield children from immigration policies' far-reaching impacts. They still experienced illegality through other undocumented family members and their previous experiences with inequality.

Parents who were partnered with first-generation undocumented adults found that their children's fears simply shifted to the other undocumented parent. Janet Godinez explained, "Now they're scared of my husband getting deported." Several highlighted DACA's exclusivity, as it was available only to a select group of undocumented young adults. Children remained in mixed-status families, since their other parent or extended family members were still undocumented. In light of these persistent fears, several parents spoke hopefully of the Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA) program, which was announced in November 2014 toward the end of my second wave of interviews. Though never put into effect, DAPA would have provided undocumented parents of citizen and permanent resident children with the same benefits of DACA—a renewable work permit and protection from deportation.[28] This program would have also improved children's economic stability; estimates suggest that DAPA recipients would have increased their wages by 6–10 percent.[29]

Parents of older children found that the remnants of previous limitations remained. Children had aged as their parents waited for the opportunity to provide them with more. Tanya Diaz remembered her 13-year-old son's reaction to finally traveling to San Diego:

> We went to SeaWorld. We went to Legoland, but he was too old already. I'm like, "Damn it, babe, I'm sorry." . . . It was nice. I wish he was younger. He still enjoyed it, but Legoland for sure is for little kids. . . . Past [the age of] 12, you don't even want to go there.

Tanya's son's experience suggests that there is a point of no return, an age at which parents cannot retroactively provide experiences and opportunities. Further, there is no chance to remove the memory of this previous limitation, so feelings of deprivation can persist. Many of the undocumented young adults remembered and regretted being unable to travel to similar places when they were young. Their own children will likely have similar memories, especially if they exited childhood before their parents received DACA.

Older children had also been exposed to their parents' undocumented status longer, allowing it to shape their sense of self and way of interacting with the world.

As Marta shared earlier, illegality had already limited her daughter's social networks. After overhearing some of our conversation, Nancy's 20-year-old citizen sister shared that watching her undocumented siblings and mother had shaped her own driving habits: "It makes me drive carefully as well. [Be] a bit scared of cops. Because they may not have shown it, but they were scared. . . . [And] checkpoints, it does make me be more aware." Allie internalized their hypervigilance: driving cautiously, fearing police, and noting checkpoints. This suggests that such practices are unlikely to disappear if they have become ingrained in citizen children's understandings of and approaches to the world.

Parents with younger children believed that DACA established a pathway to integration for their children. This was true in Luis's case. He quickly transitioned into a well-paid job at a nonprofit because of his strong social network. Luckily, this timing aligned with his daughter's being preschool age. If Luis's daughter had been older, he would have been unable to start her early education in a private preschool program. Children's ages noticeably affected how much they could benefit from their parents' legal integration.

"I WANT HER TO KNOW HOW I STRUGGLE": PASSING ON DUAL FRAMES OF REFERENCE

Parents longed to protect their children from multigenerational punishment, but when they realized this was not entirely possible, many sought to instill avenues for resilience. When I asked participants to consider whether they would discuss their immigration status with their children, many were quick to note the positives. Daniela Sanchez responded:

> A lot. I think I will [talk to him about my status], yeah. Just like I think my parents did when it came to that experience with bringing us here. You want to give your kids an idea of how things are. Just different hardships that you have so they value where they're at right now. Just like I value what I have right now because of what I know from my parents. . . . Even with all of these restrictions [of being undocumented], I still can see how lucky I am. . . . So I want [my son] to know what his grandparents did, what we [me and his dad] had to do, what other people are doing.

Coming to the United States at age four, Daniela only had a few hazy memories of life in Mexico. Yet her parents' stories allowed her to develop a narrative that life as an undocumented immigrant in the United States was better than life in Mexico. She believed that this kept her "moving forward every day because you always say, 'Well, it could always be worse.'" These conversations gave her an inherited frame of reference, one that she hoped to pass on to her son. Many parents planned to use their narratives of struggling as undocumented immigrants to foster their children's growth by teaching them an appreciation for what they had, persistence in the face of adversity, and compassion.

Scholars use the concept *dual frame of reference* to capture how first-generation immigrants evaluate their current opportunities in relation to those in their country of origin. These frames often allow them to feel positively about their current situation, despite marginalizing experiences.[30] As immigrant children, undocumented young adults often do not have sufficient knowledge of the origin country to fuel such frames; rather they draw largely on conversations with their parents to develop inherited dual frames of reference. They later hope to instill similar frames in their own children via conversations about the opportunities they were denied as undocumented immigrants and children's advantages as U.S. citizens.

Most parents delicately balanced shielding their children from their past struggles while also teaching children an appreciation for their privileges. Celia Alvarez shared how she planned to achieve this with her 2.5-year-old daughter:

> I want her to know how I struggle and like all this so that she can appreciate what she has. So in a way, I do want her to know. As soon as she's of age, I'm probably going to tell her . . . what I had to do for jobs and like, and like everything. So, hopefully—

Celia trailed off, further highlighting her uncertainty about the specific details she will share. Perhaps she will discuss having to work three jobs to put herself through community college, worrying about losing her job as a security guard, or being scared to drive her daughter around in the family's new car. And, as her citizen husband believed, these stories will teach their daughter "how hard it was and how easy she has it" as a citizen.

Intent on pushing their children to complete high school and pursue higher education, parents, like Janet Godinez, highlighted how citizenship status bred better opportunities:

> They ask me, "Why can't you work on something else instead of doing [that] for the minimum [wage]?" And I have to explain to my kids, because I don't have documents. And that's what frustrates me. . . . That's why I tell my kids that they have to go every day to school. Because . . . they were born here and everything. They have more benefits and they have more help than us. Because if we go somewhere, they deny the help or they tell us, "Oh, since you don't have a Social, we can't help you," or "You can't get this benefit." That's what I talk to my kids [about]. And I tell them, "You guys have to work hard, study hard. When you guys grow up, you will have a good job. A better position instead of, you know, winning the minimum [wage] or working 10 hours and still getting the minimum, no overtime, no benefits."

Explaining the limitations that her children see and telling them about other experiences that they don't, Janet spun her negative experiences into inspiring lessons. She sought to refocus their confusion and sense of injustice into hard work and persistence so they could achieve the upward mobility unavailable to her.

Parents also anticipated drawing on their stories to teach their children compassion. Aaron Ortiz imagined what these conversations might look like when his

one-and-a-half-year-old daughter was a little older: "I guess not to look people down. If a person doesn't speak the language . . . think about it, don't react just because he doesn't speak English. Or doesn't smell like chicken when you smell like chicken." We laughed, but it was unclear if his comment about chicken was his way of highlighting the ridiculousness of potential reasons children can exclude others. Or perhaps he was drawing on some deep-seated memory of lunchtime struggles, in which immigrant children are targeted for having the "wrong" kind of food. Either way, Aaron's and other parents' lessons often stressed compassion toward immigrant classmates, likely because of the teasing they experienced as immigrant children.

Finally, some parents hoped that these conversations would inspire a sense of justice. Speaking about the future he imagines for his six-week-old daughter, Bruno Reyes joked that she will become the president of the United States. Becoming serious, he continued,

> I just want her to have a good education, to think outside the books. A lot of stuff they teach you here is a lot of trash. . . . I want her to be aware and I want her to help out the people. That's why I want to teach her about my struggle. So she could be like, "Damn! People go through all this stuff. They don't teach me that over here."

Bruno hoped that his and his partner's undocumented experiences would move her so that "she will do what she can to change the law."

Irene Correas had successfully fostered this sense of awareness and activism in her daughter. She shared how she spoke to her daughter, then about five years old, about the differences between undocumented status and citizenship and why she was arrested as part of a civil disobedience action protesting rising deportation rates:

> There were images in the media and so she saw. And she's like, "Well, I saw this police officer take you. Why?" . . . And so I basically told her, my friends and I don't have the same opportunities as other people because we don't have a Social Security number. And so I kind of showed her her Social Security number . . . [and] that I didn't have that. . . . [And] some people believe that I didn't belong here and they wanted me to go back to Mexico. And there were families that will separate Mommy and Daddy and the kids.

She saw that her daughter seemed to understand these differences, and she wanted to highlight immigrant communities' power to resist, so she began taking her daughter to activist meetings and rallies: "She started to understand, 'Oh, OK, you just wanna go to college. OK, you just want to stay here with your friends.'" She proudly recounted her daughter's actions at a recent event: "While we were marching around the block, she started screaming, 'Undocumented and unafraid!' you know. 'I'm undocumented and unafraid!' And I just felt like really like—wow! She's understanding what I'm going through." While many parents hesitated with

how to discuss immigration-related issues with children, Irene's example shows how honest, focused conversation can open up the potential for transformation.

CONCLUSION

As undocumented parents raise their citizen children, they see their undocumented status steadily shaping the next generation. Immigration policies effectively produce family-level inequalities as children share in the consequences of their parents' limited economic and spatial mobility. These effects crystalize as children grow up and try to make sense of the differences they see between themselves and others. Some parents begin to see parallels between their own undocumented childhoods and those of their citizen children. Ultimately, children's citizenship status does not protect them from spending the beginning of their lives subjected to many of the same inequalities as their undocumented parents.

Children's experiences suggest that the enduring consequences of illegality can be reduced the sooner their parents transition into a legal or liminally legal status. The older children were when their parents received DACA, the longer they had lived in a context of illegality. They had already begun to comprehend and internalize inequalities when they did not have the same opportunities and experiences as their peers with citizen parents. It also meant that they were unable to access early-childhood educational opportunities or participate in extra-curricular activities. These experiences define children's early development and leave painful memories; neither can be undone by DACA, or even permanent residency and citizenship.