

Why Integration Matters: The Case of Undocumented Immigrant Youth and Moving Beyond Enforcement

BY ROBERTO G. GONZALES

Today's immigration debates have brought to the fore conflicting visions within the United States over how to address a population of eleven to twelve million undocumented immigrants. In the absence of a comprehensive set of immigration policies at the federal level, individual states and localities are left to reconcile these problems on their own. Unfortunately, most of the proposed solutions, to date, fail to address the complexity and diversity of the undocumented population and have focused chiefly on enforcement and less so on integration. As such, they have largely ignored the particular needs of families and children. While immigration enforcement is certainly a necessary ingredient for any comprehensive strategy, enforcement alone creates a deeper set of problems, particularly when not combined with integration policies.

Of the more vocal complaints, have been those lodged against efforts to enlist community officials—educators, social service and health providers, teachers, and police—to carry out immigration enforcement. Opponents of these measures argue that immigration enforcement by the police or other community providers erodes community trust and compromises their ability to effectively carry out their jobs.

A relatively understudied segment of the undocumented population, the youth, provides policy makers and community officials, alike, a different lens through which to examine questions of immigrant reform and community responsibility. Undocumented youth represent a sizeable and vulnerable population.¹ These children grow up and are schooled side-by-side with American born youth. They experience childhood and early adolescence without many of the restrictions that impact their parents, as the Fourteenth Amendment guarantees their access to a free public education.² However, after high school they are excluded from participating in most forms of adult life. They cannot vote, participate in the labor force, and, in most states, drive. These young men and women are directly affected by a confusing and contradictory immigration system that leaves more questions than answers.

Because the transition to adulthood marks their entry into undocumented life, these young people find many of the defining roles of adulthood to be beyond their legal limits. As a result, they spend much of their late adolescence and early adulthood contending with blocked opportunities, stigma, and fear. However, many of these young people have to contribute to their families and take care of themselves. On a daily basis, they spend much of their time looking over their shoulders and worrying about what might happen to them and their family if they come in contact with their legal limitations.

While the particular circumstances of these young people may warrant a broader discussion on legalization, immediate integration efforts are of equal importance. Undocumented youth, particularly those transitioning to adulthood, are in need of a range of community services to ensure

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they grow up healthy, receive the benefits of an education, and develop trusting relationships with community members. However, when they are in constant fear, they retreat into the shadows, do not seek the help they need, and become susceptible to engaging in illicit activities. The findings in this paper suggest that while enforcement efforts are counterproductive, police and other community officials have an important role to play in the integration process of undocumented youth.

Contemporary Immigration Enforcement

It has become the contention of most Americans that the current immigration system is no longer adequate and requires a major overhaul. However, there are diverging opinions on what immigration reform may entail. On one hand, many Americans favor guest worker programs, a pathway to legalization, and increased access to education. On the other hand, many others favor tighter enforcement, an expansion and fortification of a fence along the border, and stricter punishment for those in this country without proper authorization. However, Congress has failed to provide any solutions to the nation's complex immigration problems. And with efforts towards comprehensive immigration reform stalled in Congress, states and local jurisdictions have attempted to make their own reforms by drafting and passing piecemeal immigration legislation.

As a result, the last two or three years have witnessed huge increases in state- and local-level activity. In the first quarter alone of 2008, state legislators across the country considered more than 1,100 proposals related to immigration in 44 states. Twenty-six states have enacted 44 laws and adopted 38 resolutions or memorials. These numbers are comparable to those of 2007 at the beginning of the first quarter, and double those of 2006 (National Conference of State Legislatures 2008). While some states adopted measures to help immigrants by protecting them from exploitation and by extending education and health care to immigrant children, the political tide ran generally against immigrants (Olivas 2008). Many other states drafted a wide range of legislation to limit undocumented immigrants, including: education, employment, driver's licenses, law enforcement, legal services, public benefits, housing and rental, alcohol and tobacco purchases, gun and firearm permits, flag displays, and juvenile reporting requirements (Rumbaut and Menjivar 2008). Further, municipalities and counties considered hundreds of harsh provisions aimed at undocumented immigrant renters, use of English-only documents, the use of a public library card, and prohibition of the sale of Mexican food from trucks (ibid). Many of these local ordinances have been struck down in the courts, but many more are still pending.

Meanwhile, immigration enforcement efforts have increased. The Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) initiated Operation Return to Sender in 2006. Since then, ICE agents have carried out removal efforts in homes, shopping mall parking lots, bus terminals, farms, meatpacking plants, and other public and work places across the country. As a result, thousands of unauthorized migrants have been deported, many more children have lost their parents due to deportation, and increasing numbers of students have been targeted.

In fact, since September 11, 2001, immigration enforcement has received a significant amount of attention. The contention by some that the federal government is not equipped with resources

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sufficient to enforce immigration law has prompted a discussion on state and local law enforcement's role in the enforcement of immigration law (Seghetti, Viña, and Ester 2004). To date, a handful of states and localities have entered into agreements to deputize officers and assist the federal government with enforcing certain aspects of immigration law. Georgia's law, for example, contains a provision that allows state and local law enforcement to detain arrestees for federal immigration law violations, and several other counties and local municipalities have followed suit.

Many other state and local enforcement agencies, however, contend that it is the federal government's role to enforce immigration law, in light of limited state and local resources and immigration expertise. Moreover, many police officials have expressed concern over proper training, finite resources at the local level, potential civil rights violations, and the overall impact on communities.

The stance that many police officials have taken is that immigration enforcement by local police, among other things, erodes community trust. Already, ICE raids and local measures against unauthorized immigrants have elevated a climate of fear within the immigrant community. A recent Pew Hispanic Center survey (2007) found that more than 50 percent of Latinos living in the U.S. fear that either they or someone they know will be deported. For many, the constant fear of deportation exacerbates physical and mental health problems. In San Pedro, California, "a school principal told reporters that the raids and presence of ICE agents near the school has created a climate of 'ongoing, relentless terror' with more students absent from school or distracted by the possibility of their parents being gone when they arrive home" (Rumbaut and Menjívar 2008).

Defining the Problem

Over the last three decades, however, dislocations in sending countries, increased labor recruitment, and dramatic changes in immigration policy have dramatically altered the complexity of international migration and the immigrant family. Until the 1980s, unauthorized immigrants were mostly seasonal labor migrants who left children and families home in their countries of origin. The unauthorized now consist of larger proportions of families and children who will grow up and be schooled in the U.S.³ These unauthorized children, who come to the U.S. before the age of twelve, represent a relatively new and vulnerable population. Given the size and relative recency of this population, what happens to these children is of great scholarly and policy significance. To date, however, there has been a dearth of scholarly research on undocumented youth (Abrego 2008, 2006; Gonzales 2008; Perez-Huber and Malagon 2007; Seif 2004), and a scattered few notable policy reports and articles (Gonzales 2007; Batalova and Fix 2006; McGray 2006; Passel 2003).

The 1.5 Generation

Unauthorized children find themselves betwixt and between two worlds. Most of them only know their country of birth through their parents' stories. They may feel a nostalgic connection to their homeland, but with every year lived in the United States they feel a growing distance between them and their parents, as they speak more English and less of their parents' language. Ironically, though, each of these years also brings them closer to the realities of their parents' undocumented lives.

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These children, born abroad and brought to the U.S. before the age of twelve, represent a relatively new but significant population. Their generation, referred to as the 1.5 generation, fit somewhere between the first and second generations (Rumbaut 2004). They are not of the first generation because they did not choose to migrate, but not of the second generation either, as they were born and spent part of their childhood abroad. While they have some association with their countries of origin, their primary identification is affected by experiences growing up American. They straddle two worlds and are often called upon to assist their parents in the acculturation and adaptation process. Their dual frames of reference provide both advantage and difficulty. Those of the 1.5 generation tend to be bicultural and attain linguistic characteristics similar to those persons born in the U.S. This unique positioning could provide them an advantage in the global economy, as they are equipped with bilingual and bicultural skills. However, many of these youngsters fail to experience these advantages.

Rumbaut and Ima (1988) explain that the 1.5 generation faces two challenges: adolescence and the transition from childhood to adulthood, and acculturation and the task of managing the transition from one culture to another. Similar to their parents, they must successfully acculturate to the values and norms of the host society. Many will find more ease in this process than will their immigrant parents. However, they must do so while simultaneously making transitions from childhood to adulthood. Because of their legal status, these dual transitions are often in great conflict.

From childhood to early adolescence, legal status has little meaning in the lives of undocumented youths. During this buffer period, undocumented children move through their own development and participate in community institutions, notably the school system, and are sheltered from the constraints their parents experience. Once undocumented youth reach late adolescence, however, the limits imposed by their immigrant status make themselves known. American culture creates various needs and thus defines what it means to successfully pass from one phase of development to the next: obtaining a library card, renting a movie, applying for a driver's license, obtaining a work permit, moving on to college, marrying, and buying a home. From about the ages of fifteen to sixteen on, these various turning points mark and define successful transitions from childhood to adolescence and adulthood. However, many of these important stages require important forms of state-issued identification and legal status. Without the ability to produce such forms of legitimizing identification, undocumented young adults are shut out of these important activities and distanced from their peers.

Exclusion from these important rites of passage circumscribes their limited roles within adult society and sets them apart from their peers. While certain avenues are closed, others are restricted. In order to help their families, support themselves, and pay for school, they must face the dilemma of whether or not to work. And, in order to get to and from work and school, they must make tough decisions about how to get around. In most states, the unauthorized cannot obtain a driver's license. Hence, they cannot purchase a car, buy insurance, or legally drive. In cities with good public transportation systems like New York and Chicago, this is a viable, yet limited, option as many of the manufacturing jobs have moved out to suburban areas. In

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metropolitan areas like Los Angeles, however, the prospects are dim. Given the limited public transportation options and the sprawling nature of the municipality, reliance on public transportation limits employment and school options severely. Taken together, these numerous barriers severely limit the mobility of these young adults. At every turn, daily decisions are tantamount to putting their lives on the line as any of these pursuits can place them face-to-face with immigration authorities.

Suddenly the world changes substantially for these youngsters, as does what it means to participate in society. Not only do undocumented youth experience exclusion, they are also unable to meet the demands of adult life and are forced to make important decisions that have consequences not only for the present but also for the future. This new status within society and their communities proves extremely difficult to overcome, both in terms of the numerous new barriers and the psychological effects.

What happens in the early years has a strong bearing on later life chances. Blocked opportunities early on can cause these youth to retreat underground and to seek illicit alternatives. However, the longer the buffer period, the stronger the opportunities to successfully compete in school, develop positive self-image, and prepare themselves for full and active participation in the legal world. By the time they reach adulthood, the impediments and opportunities faced as adolescents play strong determining roles in how their adult lives will unfold.

Without adequate education and requisite job skills, many undocumented youth will find difficulties securing steady work, as options with or without legal status are both limited and limiting. However, early opportunities in education and community-based mentorship can help them hold on to aspirations and ready themselves for the possibility of a change in status.

Data Section

The following discussion draws from more than three years of fieldwork in Southern California, seventy-eight in-depth life histories, and observations of more than 250 young adults, ages twenty to thirty-six, who migrated clandestinely with parents before the age of twelve.⁴ While a portion of these young men and women have regularized their status, all of them began and spent most of their school years in unauthorized status. I have also stratified the interview sample so as to be able to compare diverse experiences. Half of the interviewees went on to graduate from high school and went to college, while the other half exited before college, either by dropping out of high school or ending their education upon completion of high school. This sampling choice helped me to draw out the various contexts and structural mechanisms that promoted upward trajectories and downward spirals.

Transitioning to Illegal Lives

Among my respondents, many described this period as one of great stress and anxiety. Because most of them were not required as children to produce forms of identification, when they attempted to insert themselves into the American mainstream, they found themselves without the proper credentials. And because their own status did not pose too many restrictions as they grew up, many of them simply did not think of legal status as an issue in their lives. In fact, many

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believed themselves to be just like their U.S.-born peers. However, their status came as a surprise to many who were unaware they were not legal citizens.

Rodolfo described to me this pivotal period and the moment he realized he was different.

Rodolfo: Well you know what, I never actually felt like I wasn't born here. 'Cause when I came here, I was like ten and a half. I went to school, I learned the language. But it was like, I first felt like I was really out of place when I graduated from high school, when I tried to get a job.

Roberto: Why was that?

Rodolfo: Because I didn't have a social security number..Well I didn't even know. I mean, I didn't even know what it meant. You know social security, legal, illegal. I didn't even know what that was. I asked my mom and [she] said, "it's in the process." In the process? I didn't even know what that meant. I don't know why she would tell us that.

Prior to this experience, Rodolfo was never required to produce his social security number for entry and acceptance and, as a result, his early life was not defined by his legal status. However, the process of looking for a job forced him to discover what he was missing and to confront the implications of not having legal status. This sudden discovery and hard lesson had immediate and severe consequences, as Rodolfo's plans were quickly diverted and his hopes for some level of inter-generational mobility were quickly derailed.

It took Rodolfo some time to come to terms with the meaning of his status, whether it was temporary or permanent, and what it meant for his day-to-day life. While his stepfather had gone through a local immigration attorney to try to sponsor his family, at the time of Rodolfo's job search there were no legal options.

I have talked to many adults who experienced similar discoveries of their limitations during this critical period, many blaming their parents for keeping them in the dark during their childhood. While it was true that in most of those cases parents withheld information about their legal status, a social security number was not the defining factor of childhood and early adolescence that it became for late adolescence and early adulthood. It was not the decisions made by parents on whether or not to disclose to their children, but the intersection of late adolescence, the cultural requirements of that particular period, and legal restrictions that make the experience of this transition so jarring and potentially traumatic. As one respondent described to me, "It's like living a nightmare, but not being able to wake up."

Indeed, the sudden and dramatic changes that accompany these transitions alter the lives of undocumented young adults in profound ways. As these young people come to grips with their new status, the recognition of their limitations sets in. Many of my respondents described a sense of hopelessness as they looked ahead to an uncertain future. Miguel explained to me that during most of high school he believed he had his whole future laid out, but when his mother alerted him to the reality of his status, everything was "turned upside down." As a result, his school work and attendance trailed off. When Cory found out, she ran away from home. Many other

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of my respondents concurred that their levels of productivity and optimism about the future fell considerably during their last year or two of high school.

This transition can also be quite stigmatizing, as it occurs during a corresponding period in which American-born peers and siblings are making similar, albeit unrestricted, transitions into adulthood. Until then, they sit in the same classrooms, participate in the same social functions and compete uniformly for the attention of school personnel. However, legal limitations during late adolescence separate many undocumented youths from their peers and siblings.

As the world of adulthood was opening up to their peers, a succession of doors was simultaneously being shut on them. My respondents recounted numerous instances whereby they also felt as though they were forced to explain why they did not drive, could not meet their friends at bars, or could not travel to local destinations that led them across immigration checkpoints.

The confusion and fear of unauthorized adult life leads many to a state of perpetual limbo. Many of the young people I met had gone through various processes of legalization, while others were waiting. Over my three-plus years in the field, I met many young people who were in the process of being sponsored by a family member or spouse for residency. However, many found the waits to be long and became discouraged and doubtful after long periods of waiting. However, the fear of something happening to jeopardize their immigration case renders many of these undocumented young adults immobile and afraid to invest time, money, or hopes in their future. Living their lives in a narrowly circumscribed present, several of these young men and women let go of their aspirations to have anything more.

While the consequences of being caught while working and driving are severe, the effects of inactivity can be numbing. Many of these young adults stay frozen in a state of limbo for long periods of time. They do not gain work experience and become increasingly dependent on others to meet their needs. Over time, many of them become so fearful, they stop holding on to things, such as material possessions, relationships, and aspirations. Living only for today, many of these young men and women lose a sense of the future, while only the past and present are their realities.

Nevertheless, many feel as though they do not have the choice whether to work or drive, as family and individual circumstances necessitate the entry of these young adults into the workforce. The act of working also sets into motion a myriad of other decisions that have equally grave consequences. Faced with such dilemmas of needing to take care of themselves and their families, but not being able to legally meet these needs, their circumstances require many to take the risk. However, in doing so, they place themselves in direct contact with their legal limits and in a perpetual state of fear.

Working without the proper authorization is always a precarious venture. The risks of getting caught include jail and deportation. However, many undocumented immigrants feel as though they have little choice. While some adult migrants have learned the ropes and are skillful at finding safer jobs and dealing with the consequences, for many of the undocumented 1.5 generation navigating the world of unauthorized work and the subsequent consequences is a daunting challenge.

Similarly, many take the risk of driving without licenses. Driving, like work, is a necessity for most. Public transportation is neither highly accessible nor convenient for many. Those with

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children explain that getting to daycare and then to work require commutes of up to three to four hours a day on the bus and waking up two hours early in order to get to work on time. Regardless of their situation, however, by driving they face potential legal trouble. Most of my respondents were well aware of the consequences, yet felt as though they had little choice. Nevertheless, even a minor traffic violation or accident can throw their lives into peril.

Over time, the jarring transition, the day-to-day efforts to conceal their status, and the constant stress and fear take their toll on these unauthorized young adults. Many of these young undocumented men and women in my sample experienced stress, fear, and worry, as a result. A common experience among most is the continual looking over their shoulders. Many of these young people, do not, however, have the luxury of time and space needed to pull their lives together. Faced with impending deadlines for colleges and economic pressures to work, few experience comfortable transitions. As a result, the corresponding entrances into adulthood and the constraints of undocumented life create numerous points of stress. Many find that the pressures of adulthood and the numerous decisions they needed to make in order to survive—with respect to working, driving, going to school, raising families—have tremendous consequences for their present and future lives.

Community Support and Divergent Paths

While the transition to adulthood and the accompanying constraints of unauthorized status are stressful and difficult, unauthorized youth do not experience them uniformly. A range of factors creates divergent outcomes, including family resources, individual choices, social ties, and mentorship. Of crucial importance, assistance from adults within the family and community can enable some unauthorized youth to seek out and access resources to alternative and legal avenues. However, without such resources and support, limited and limiting options place unauthorized young adults in more direct contact with their legal constraints and further expose them to stress, fear, and anxiety. Taken together, this confluence of unfavorable circumstances pushes many of these youth underground and more vulnerable to fringe elements within the community.

Above all sources of support, mentorship from adults provides these young people with distinct advantages with respect to information and resources. High school teachers and counselors, social workers, church officials, human service providers, and local police are important sources of information, advice, and support. Many of these community-level officials have the capacity to help youngsters access the needed financial support and continue their schooling.

For unauthorized youth, the ability to seamlessly move from high school to college is tremendously important. Because school is one of the few legal avenues accessible to the unauthorized, staying in school allows young people a productive and viable pursuit. Moreover, the college campus preserves a certain level of protection, sheltering unauthorized students from potential run-ins with hate groups or immigration officials.

César's story provides further insight into the benefits of mentors and a post-secondary education. Ever since he was young, science has been César's passion. At the end of his senior year of high school, he was accepted to the University of California, Berkeley. His excitement was short-

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lived, however, after receiving a phone call from the office of admissions asking for his social security number. At that time, there was not an allowance for undocumented students to pay in-state tuition, and César's family could not afford to send him to Berkeley. However, he had support from teachers and counselors who encouraged him to continue his schooling. The following fall, he enrolled in a community college and finished with a 3.8 grade point average and honors. Meanwhile, his parents took extra jobs and saved enough money to pay for his tuition at UCLA at nearly \$25,000 a year.

César graduated two years later with a bachelor of arts in molecular, cell, and developmental biology. He was offered a job in a cytogenetics lab, analyzing chromosomes under a microscope, but lost out because of his undocumented status. Thanks to a tip from a leader within the community, however, he was able to take an internship in a similar lab (albeit without pay). César continued his schooling, finishing a master's program in public health at a California State University campus and a one-year post-baccalaureate program in medicine at a nearby University of California campus. Upon acceptance to the program, community leaders pooled money together to come up with his tuition costs.

César continues to pursue education, while waiting for a door to open to medical school. As he waits he tutors neighborhood children, runs a summer youth leadership program for low-income males, and speaks regularly at community events. To his advantage, he has a strong network of support and resources among his family, school personnel, and community members. Because of this extensive support system, César has successfully navigated obstacles at every step along his post-secondary educational journey. This important support has enabled him to find alternatives to work, access important sources of financial support, and actively pursue education while he waits for a change in his circumstances.

Among the young people in my study who went on to college, each of them had similar systems of support that enabled them to push over barriers, access needed resources and opportunities, and participate in community service. On the other hand, not having such sources of support proved to be the chief difference between young adults experiencing productive educational and career pursuits and those facing day-to-day constraints and troubled involvement with neighborhood countercultures.

Gabriel's late adolescent-early adulthood trajectory helps to provide a contrast to that of César, and an example of the potentially debilitating effects of unauthorized status on 1.5 generation youth. After Gabriel's family was evicted from an apartment in Anaheim, he decided to find a place of his own in order to alleviate the burden on his mother. He felt like a "dead weight," not being able to contribute financially to the family because of his legal status. On his own, Gabriel needed to work in order to support himself. He found factory jobs and used someone else's social security number in order to secure employment. However, he has twice received No-Match letters from the Social Security Administration stating that his social security number did not match the name he was using. He lost one job because of this and is fearful that future employers will also find out. Beyond being scared, Gabriel is frustrated and angry about his status. Moreover, Gabriel is increasingly turning to illicit means in order to support himself: he stopped taking the bus in

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lieu of driving after receiving a warning from an employer that his tardiness would cost him his job; when he could not buy a cell phone through regular channels, he bought one from a guy in his neighborhood only to find that the number had more than four hundred dollars of charges on it. To further weigh him down, Gabriel served a three-year probation sentence for an attempted robbery as an accomplice, after being pulled over with a group of guys with which he was hanging out. As Gabriel's situation indicates, restrictions due to immigrant status limit the scope of choices and structure decisions.

Based on my interviews and observations, Gabriel's situation is not uncommon. In fact, many others described to me similar limiting circumstances that they felt pushed them into illicit activity. For many years Josue made his money selling drugs. Contemplating the alternative of working clandestinely in a factory or restaurant, he chose the street, where he felt he had some power. As he looks ahead at his future, with little formal job training, he cannot help but to compare these different experiences and outcomes.

In a way it's hard to get a job, you know? Get paid the way we want to be paid. And back then I used to skip that you know? You know what I'm not gonna work for a job. I'm not gonna bust my ass for someone who can be yelling at me for like \$5.75, \$5 bucks an hour. Nah nah hell no. If I get a job, I wanna get paid \$20 bucks an hour. Because I thought that man, I speak English, I do good, I do that, but actually I didn't have any experience and I decided to start selling drugs, you know, because I thought, this is easy. I got my own schedule, I can do whatever the hell I want to the whole day, I can scream at them, nobody is gonna scream at me. Nobody is gonna do nothing to me because I am the one in control.

However, Josue's activities caught up to him and put him in a life-threatening situation. At twenty-six, he finds himself struggling to put his life together. He refuses to go back to selling drugs but is having a hard time competing with adult migrant workers for low-wage jobs.

Discussion and Conclusion

While undocumented young adults face limited choices and debilitating circumstances, some, in fact, find sources of support to bring them into mainstream institutions, provide them with safe and productive alternatives, and allow them to experience the transition to adulthood without undue stress and anxiety. Comparing César and Gabriel, whose stories provide important analytical contrasts, suggests some clues about community-level contextual factors. At 27, these two young men are the same age, both came to the U.S. before they were eight years old, grew up in Southern California, and neither has regularized his immigrant status. While they share many common characteristics, the differences between the two are several.

César has three degrees, including a master's in public health, and runs a successful private tutoring business. Gabriel, on the other hand, works in a factory with low-skilled immigrant coworkers. He has been laid off from several jobs and has received No-Match letters from two of them. Although he has community college credits, Gabriel is no longer in school after several interruptions. He lives on his own and from check to check.

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None of the differences between César and Gabriel are coincidental. César's parents both work and, before he began high school, managed to move to a quiet neighborhood with an academically strong high school. With the constant encouragement of his parents to excel in school, he brought home good grades and attracted the attention of several teachers and counselors. His strong high school record earned him admission to several universities. The transition from high school was relatively smooth and without many of the constraints of his status. When he realized he could not attend his dream school because of family finances and had to attend community college, his network mobilized resources and raised enough money for him to attend the University of California. With his degree, he was able to continue to pursue education while he waited for a change in his status.

Gabriel, however, experienced the cumulative disadvantages of unauthorized status as he transitioned out of school. He was kicked out of high school for excessive absences and did not finish on time. Although he eventually earned his diploma at a continuing education school, his progress was slowed considerably. While his mom wishes for him to be successful and to go to college, she has very little means to support those endeavors. Her monthly income is often insufficient to meet monthly expenses. A few years ago, Gabriel felt as though he was a burden on his mom and moved out. Over the years, he has gained work experience in low-wage sectors and has become conditioned to the limitations and hazards of low-wage work. Because two of his employers were sent No-Match letters from the Social Security Administration, he is fearful of getting caught at work and being deported. He takes the risk of driving, relies on underground means for providing basic needs, and is surrounded by a peer group that has, more than once, brought trouble.

While parental experiences shape children's trajectories, educational attainment determines whether or not the transition to adulthood will be successful. Gabriel was one of the almost 50 percent of his entering freshmen class who left high school before completion. As a result, he did not have any mentors to guide him through the barriers that awaited. César went to a high school that was ethnically and economically diverse and enjoyed a range of honor's and AP classes. He accumulated a strong network of supporters in high school, was active in extracurricular activities, and carried his network and skills to college and community service. While he remained undocumented, he was, however, able to seamlessly move on to college and concentrate on his studies. As a result, he graduated within four years and moved on to attain two graduate degrees.

The divergent trajectories of César and Gabriel provide important illustrations of the key determinants of mobility and incorporation of the undocumented 1.5 generation into the community. There is good reason to be cautious attributing success to human characteristics alone, as family circumstances, quality of educational opportunities, the presence of adult mentors, and access to community resources structure opportunities for these young adults. Because of modest levels of family success, César was able to attend a stronger high school. His friends were of different ethnicities, and he experienced greater opportunity. He also benefited from a wide range of classes, teachers who advocated for him, and important school resources. Gabriel, on the other hand, went to a large, crowded high school that was over 80 percent low-income. His classes were large, and he had little contact with his teachers or school counselors. And when he

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left school, there was no one from his school reaching out to him. As a result, Gabriel was not able to enlist the support needed to develop resiliency and coping strategies.

The presence of adult mentors in the lives of unauthorized youth is of paramount importance. And because, in most states, college offers a legal and legitimate means to participate and compete in American life, moving on to post-secondary institutions is critical. Adults in the community can play an important role in not only helping these young people navigate these stressful transitions but also providing guidance and resources that will enable these young men and women to continue to play active and productive roles in communities.

While the immigration debate stalls in Congress, on the ground local-level decisions regarding health care, education, and law enforcement are shaping communities across the U.S. This paper is an attempt to contribute to localized conversations about today's immigrants and how we respond to them.

Contemporary immigration is taking shape differently than it did a century ago. The increased presence of unauthorized immigrants—young as well as old—compels us to make important decisions about their role in communities. However, in order to do so, it is important that we move beyond one-size-fits-all approaches to this complex set of issues.

Based on extensive observation in immigrant communities and in-depth interviews with unauthorized young adults, this paper has focused on a particular subset of the unauthorized population and their experiences of unauthorized adult life. As I have found in my research, these experiences prove to be quite difficult. Saturated with fear, stigma, paralysis, and physical and mental health problems, day-to-day life can be challenging and unpleasant. For a group of young people who grow into these limitations as they are acculturating, the net effect can be quite debilitating. These experiences, however, provide evidence for the potential benefits of integration efforts. To be sure, policies that criminalize the unauthorized fail to account for these unique circumstances. Moreover, increased enforcement efforts that keep these young people in fear and away from critical services they require are limited and limiting.

The transitions young people make from childhood to adolescence and to young adulthood are of critical importance. Because of the circumstances of unauthorized youth, these transitions are often traumatic. As a result, unauthorized youth require a range of services that cover education, occupation, and physical and mental health issues. Moreover, their unique circumstances require trusting relationships with institutions and mentors within their communities. However, when health care officials, social service providers, and community police perform immigration-related duties, the level of fear and anxiety in communities is ratcheted up and exacerbates mental and physical health problems. Moreover, unauthorized youth lose trust in community officials, do not seek out the help they need, and shy away from cooperating and participating in important community-level institutional efforts. This scenario is neither good for unauthorized youth nor the community.

The youth are the future of our communities. What we must decide is whether we want a healthy and productive generation of young people marching forward, or whether we are ready to deal with the consequences of an undereducated, underground, frustrated population of

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young men and women with limited access to mainstream opportunities.

By virtue of their status, unauthorized youth cannot work, vote, or drive in most states. However, they can go to school and make positive contributions to our communities. When they are presented with a narrow range of options, necessity forces them to move beyond the legal realm. Here is where they come in contact with increased exposure to fringe elements within the community. While channels of legalization are beyond the scope of this particular discussion and the purview of community-level decision makers, we can strategize ways to eliminate dangerous and illicit choices by broadening the range of possibilities for unauthorized youth to participate in productive activities.

This research suggests a need for increased community awareness and for adult stakeholders better educated on the issues these youth confront. By mobilizing community resources, schools, community-based organizations, chambers of commerce, and police districts can work together to provide alternative solutions, a broader range of activities, and increased educational access for the youth of the community.

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Endnotes

¹ According to recent estimates, undocumented youth who are under the age of 24 and who have lived in the U.S. for 5 years or longer number 2.5 million. At 20 percent of the total undocumented population, these numbers are significant enough to warrant attention.

² The Supreme Court ruled in *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) that, because these children are “persons” under the Constitution and thus entitled to equal protection under the law according to the Fourteenth Amendment, they cannot be denied access to public elementary and secondary education on the basis of their legal status. This decision has enabled thousands of undocumented students to graduate from high school each year. See Michael A. Olivas, “*The Story of Plyler v. Doe, The Education of Undocumented Children, and the Polity*,” in David A. Martin and Peter H. Schuck, eds., *Immigration Stories*. New York, NY: Foundation Press, 2005, pp. 197-220.

³ As of 2005, there were an estimated 4.9 million children of unauthorized parents living in the U.S. Of these, about 1.8 million are unauthorized, while an additional 3.1 million are U.S. citizens (Passel 2006; Passel and Suro 2005).

⁴ This paper is based on ongoing research with adult children of unauthorized Mexican migrants. The entire sample consists of 102 in-depth interviews with 1.5 and 2nd generation young adults in the five-county Los Angeles metropolitan area. For this paper, I am focusing only on the 1.5 generation respondents within that sample.

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APPENDIX E

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