# NATIVISM AND DEPRESSION AMONG UNDOCUMENTED MEXICAN

# IMMIGRANT WOMEN

A Thesis

by

SAN JUANITA EDILIA GARCIA

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

August 2010

Major Subject: Sociology

Nativism and Depression Among Undocumented Mexican Immigrant Women

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Approved by:

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| Co-Chairs of Committee, | Zulema Valdez |
| | Rogelio Sáenz |
| Committee Member, | Linda Castillo |
| Head of Department, | Mark Fossett |

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# ABSTRACT

Nativism and Depression Among Undocumented Mexican Immigrant Women.

(August 2010)

San Juanita Edilia García, B.A, Sam Houston State University

Co-Chairs of Advisory Committee: Dr. Zulema Valdez
Dr. Rogelio Sáenz

Anti-immigrant sentiment particularly against Mexicans in the United States has had a dramatic influence on the lives of immigrants and on how they perceive the host society. Today, little research has addressed the extent to which this enmity has affected the mental-well being of immigrants. Based on 30 in-depth interviews in Houston this study investigates the degree to which nativism contributes to depression among Mexican-origin immigrant women. The findings reveal that undocumented status was salient and contributed to symptoms of depression. Additionally, my respondents revealed perceptions of intra-ethnic conflict among Mexican Americans. This thesis further explores how segmented assimilation theory can be expanded to better understand the complexities and nuances that Mexican immigrant women endure taking into consideration immigration status, racial/ethnic identity, and the structural barriers which plays a major role in their integration and mental health well-being.

# DEDICATION

## Dedicatoria

Para mi madre… gracias mami por todo el apoyo y por enseñarme a seguir luchando en la vida, viviendo la vida siempre pensando positivamente. Gracias por todos sus sacrificios y por darme lo mejor que podía darme.  Le prometo seguir echándole ganas en mis estudios y futura carera.  ¡Gracias por enseñarme lo que es luchar!  Gracias por enseñarme que el ayudar al prójimo es nuestro deber y de pelear por causas que ayudaran a nuestra gente.

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INTRODUCTION

**STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

In the post-9/11 environment, immigration reform and policy enforcement have taken center stage, as evidenced by ongoing political and public policy debates. Coupled with an increase in anti-immigrant sentiment and heightened levels of surveillance by the Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE) agency, immigrants, especially the undocumented, are more vulnerable to experiencing discrimination, racism, and inequality. In this hostile context, the Mexican-origin population is particularly at risk for negative mental health outcomes. Yet, scant attention has been given to the relationship between this social environment and ethnic minority mental health outcomes (Vega and Rumbaut 1991; Viruell-Fuentes 2007).

The current anti-immigrant climate and the contexts of reception of the United States can play a significant role in the integration process and mental health outcomes of Mexican immigrant women. Undocumented immigrants face barriers as a result of their immigration status as well as their social position in the United States. Particularly, today, Mexican undocumented immigrants are not viewed in the most favorable light. This increasing anti-immigrant hysteria is evident in the rise of hate crimes particularly against Latina/o groups, the increase of anti-immigrant group membership, and the restrictive immigration legislations that have been passed both historically and in present

_____
This thesis follows the style of *American Sociological Review*.

times (Huber et al. 2008).

In viewing this anti-immigrant movement, it is likely that this will have a detrimental effect on the mental health outcomes of immigrants. Particular attention needs to be placed on a vulnerable group that continues to be marginalized and oppressed (Viruell-Fuentes 2007). Anti-immigrant sentiments perpetuate a devaluation of Mexican immigrants and contribute to an anti-immigrant rhetoric that claims that the United States is being threatened by the massive growth of Latina/o immigrants (Johnson 1998). The demographic realities of the United States support that Latina/os will indeed be the largest racial/ethnic group (Sáenz 2004). Nativist and anti-immigrant views contribute to the notion of the Browning of America or the Latinoization of America. These views are perpetuated by conservative media and scholars.

Samuel Huntington, a political science professor from Harvard and a fairly reputable man, particularly in the conservative circles, contributed and stirred up anti-immigrant emotions. According to Huntington:

> The persistent inflow of Hispanic immigrants threatens to divide the United States into two peoples, two cultures, and two languages. Unlike past immigrant groups, Mexicans and other Latinos have not assimilated into mainstream U.S. culture, forming instead their own political and linguistic enclaves—from Los Angeles to Miami—and rejecting the Anglo-Protestant values that built the American dream. The United States ignores this challenge at its peril (Huntington 2004a:30)

Huntington adds flame to the already heated discussion of immigration. Huntington's views are clearly anti-immigrant or anti-Mexican. His views are widely accepted and hailed primarily by conservative and anti-immigrant groups. These views contribute to the support of legislative policies such as the most recent Senate Bill 1070. This law

was signed by Governor Jan Brewer in Arizona on April 23, 2010. S.B. 1070 criminalizes undocumented immigrants and those that provide them any type of assistance or support. This anti-immigrant piece of legislation clearly violates the constitutional rights of human beings and justifies or legitimizes racial profiling among the police enforcement agency. These types of laws are exclusively targeting those that appear to "look" Latina/o, based on the color of their skin. Arizona residents or visitors are required to show their residency or citizenship if stopped by police enforcement officers. It is evident that legislations such as S.B. 1070 are rooted in racist ideologies that overtly target a certain group of people.

It is in this negative, anti-immigrant contexts of reception in which my study focuses on capturing the experiences of undocumented Mexican immigrant women and how their undocumented status and the nativist contexts of reception impact their integration process and mental health outcomes, specifically depression. Previous mental health literature supports findings that show Mexican immigrants have better mental health and overall healthier profiles than U.S.-born Mexican Americans or other racial/ethnic groups (Escobar 1998; Vega et al. 1998). These findings are not projected or expected especially among Mexican immigrants who are leaving developing countries.

Additionally, it is likely that the increasing dangers associated with crossing the border clandestinely and its increased militarization, coupled with rising anti-immigrant sentiment, have had a negative impact on the well-being of Mexican immigrants – especially among those who are the most disadvantaged – undocumented women

(Sullivan and Rehm 2005). According to Vega et al. (1998), however, second and later generation Mexicans are also at risk for developing psychological disorders, even more so than recent immigrants. This may be troubling given that immigrants, specifically undocumented immigrants, encounter many barriers in the United States ranging from low socioeconomic status to being limited by their undocumented status. Yet, Vega et al. (1998) suggest that by the second generation, Mexican Americans confront discrimination, racism, economic decline, and frustrated social and material aspirations when compared to the "mainstream," all of which lead to a rise in psychological distress and disorder. Moreover, acculturation to the dominant White society increases the risk of developing substance abuse disorders.

These research findings are supported by the Latino Health Paradox (also known as the Epidemiological Health Paradox). The Latino Health Paradox also alludes to research findings that suggest Mexican immigrants fare better health profiles than U.S.-born Mexican American citizens (Markides and Coreil 1986). Some scholars relate this paradox to the "healthy migrant" hypothesis meaning that the strongest and healthiest immigrants are the ones that decide to migrate to the United States (Aranda and Miranda 1997; Jasso et al. 2004; Palloni and Morenoff 2001). Moreover, the "salmon bias" hypothesis alludes to the underreporting of immigrants who are ill given that they return to Mexico, therefore contributing to an underreporting of unhealthy immigrants (Palloni and Arias 2004).

I argue for a serious look at the contexts of reception, namely the anti-immigrant sentiment societal reception and undocumented status, in investigating how these major

barriers impact the integration process and symptoms of depression among undocumented Mexican immigrant women. Furthermore, I argue that contrary to previous research studies perhaps there will be a rise in depression among undocumented Mexican immigrant women given their current vulnerable position in society and the unfavorable contexts of reception. Particularly, in current times, the significance, social ramifications, and views among the dominant society on what an undocumented Mexican immigrant signifies today, especially in an enforcement and anti-immigrant era, could severely impact these women's mental health outcomes.

Given the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment coupled with the rise of enforcement as evident by the augmentation of raids, deportations, and anti-immigrant legislations, I argue that this further oppresses my respondents in a negative manner which puts daily strains and structural barriers in their lives. Moreover, I argue that these constant pressures ultimately have a grave impact on the mental health, specifically contributing to depression symptoms among undocumented Mexican immigrant women. The barriers they face ultimately trump the buffers that have typically protected Mexican immigrants; this is especially true for the undocumented population.

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS**

My thesis aims to merge research literatures from the mental health field, immigration, and critical race studies, namely Latina/o critical race, in order to capture the social realities among undocumented Mexican immigrant women living in the United States. In situating my thesis study among the immigration literature, I use the segmented assimilation theoretical framework to guide my study. Specifically, I view

the contexts of reception, namely the governmental policies (undocumented status) and societal reception. The contexts of reception for immigrant groups play a major impact in their integration process. For instance, if immigrants are welcomed and given refugee status or are able to enter the United States with legal documentation, then their receptivity will positively impact their integration process (Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Zhou 1997).

Given that undocumented Mexican immigrants enter a negative context of reception such as by lacking legal status and by the negative societal reception among the host communities, these limitations contribute to the lack of opportunities and a constant fear of deportation. It is my goal to move beyond simply looking at what segment my participants' route into but to examine the inequities which set structural barriers for them regardless of their drive, passion, and motivation to succeed. I am interested in looking beyond what segment my participants fall into but instead question why and how these women are subjugated and oppressed given their documentation status which greatly impedes their opportunity for upward social mobility. Additionally, my respondents enter a racialized society that puts people of color at more risks for discrimination and racism (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Feagin 2000; 2006). Because my respondents are Mexican and mainly undocumented, this puts them at a major disadvantage due to their color and undocumented status.

Through this thesis study, I hope to extend the theoretical discussion among segmented assimilation theorists specifically, by focusing on the importance of documentation status and the racialization of immigrants. Moreover, I am interested in

explaining the social costs of what it means to be undocumented in a nativist and racist society and how this affects the mental well being of Mexican immigrant women.  In order to critically examine the social injustices and racist nature of the United States, I turn to the Latina/o critical race literature to assist me in analyzing my findings.  My thesis fills the gap in the literature which specifically focuses on Mexican undocumented women and the structural barriers they face living in the United States.  It is my aim to advance academic scholarship by merging literatures to assist me in analyzing a critical and timely research project.

**AIMS OF THE PROJECT**

My thesis study explores the following questions: 1) How does nativism (the favoring of U.S.-born over foreign-born) affect undocumented Mexican immigrant women's mental health, specifically depression?  More broadly, 2) What is the relationship between integration and depression? and 3) How does integration and undocumented status affect depression?  These are the central questions that guide this study.  This research is timely, not only because this marginalized group endures discrimination at every turn, but because heightened nativism among anti-immigrant groups, alongside enforcement policies make undocumented immigrants much more vulnerable for deportation.  This study is significant and much needed especially in aiming to uncover how a hostile environment impacts Mexican-origin women's mental health and how this contributes to their integration process.

My study deals with nativism and this term is defined by John Higham (1955) as an "intense opposition to an internal minority on the grounds of its foreign connections,"

or the favoring of the native-born citizens over immigrants (p. 4). I also use the term anti-immigrant sentiment and this refers to strong opposing views to immigration as seen by restrictive policies/laws, racism, or anti-immigrant groups. There are times in which these two terms are used interchangeably given that these terms both imply a notion of anti-immigration. Undocumented immigrants refer to people who do not have the "legal" documentation to be in the United States. This includes immigrants who have crossed the border clandestinely and have not been able to obtain naturalization and people who have "overstayed" their visas.

Moreover, I use the term undocumented instead of illegal to describe the participants in this study. I do not agree with using the term illegal because much of the anti-immigrant rhetoric focuses on who is "legal" versus "illegal" masking the deeper problem of racism and nativism. Therefore, anti-immigrant people claim they are not racist and attempt to make their arguments based on legality i.e. "legal" versus "illegal." Similarly, this is a type of nativist thinking and an othering that occurs by viewing immigrants as "foreign" (Feagin 1997). This frame of thinking simply masks the deeper and more rooted notions of exclusion, inequality, and restrictive immigration policies that perpetuate a nativist and racist frame of thinking. Therefore, I stay away from using the term illegal and use the term undocumented to describe my participant's immigration status.

**BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF METHODOLOGY**

The methodology I employed in this study is qualitative and exploratory in nature. I conducted 30 in-depth interviews with Mexican immigrant women in Houston.

I used the snowball sampling technique to assist me in recruiting participants. Using a qualitative approach, allowed me to capture the complexities and detailed narratives of what life is like as an undocumented immigrant in an anti-immigrant era. This qualitative approach also adds to a much silenced and understudied group, namely undocumented Mexican immigrant women. In-depth interviews allowed me to capture life experiences in vivid detail; this is not possible to do with survey data. Although my research findings may not be identical to the dynamics occurring in other places, they nevertheless provide essential and important insight into the complexities of living as an undocumented immigrant.

As the largest racial/ethnic group, nativism and discrimination against Latinos—and more specifically Mexicans—have a global effect. The anti-immigrant movement and sentiment that abounds perpetuates racism and the devaluation of immigrants or even those that appear to be immigrants. In the current anti-immigrant climate which permeates the present position of the United States, being an undocumented immigrant has major implications for these immigrants and their families. The meaning, stigma, and experiences of undocumented immigrants especially in present times may also affect not only the immigrant community but the Mexican-origin community overall and even those that are U.S.-born Mexican Americans.

The experiences of the participants in this study represent the complex and unjust circumstances that occur in a nativist society. They also show the importance of research that addresses inequalities such as those imposed on vulnerable populations, like Mexican immigrants, and elucidates the importance of examining documentation

status and its social implications in the integration process as well as the psychological distress they experience given their documentation status. These stories not only demonstrate the broader impact of how undocumented status limits their opportunities for upward mobility and how this affects their integration process, but they prove that the experiences of undocumented women are far more complex than what has been explained through trichotomous typologies of segmented assimilation models.

**OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS**

This thesis consists of five chapters: I.) Introduction; II.) Literature Review and Theoretical Frameworks; III.) Research Methods; IV.) Research Findings; and V.) Conclusion. In the second chapter, I explore my research questions by first reviewing the literature on nativism and anti-immigrant sentiment against Mexican immigrants. Next, I introduce the theoretical frameworks which guide my work. Then, I discuss relevant literature on the debates regarding ethnic, racial, and panethnic identities among Latina/os and the racialization process of immigrants. Additionally, I discuss literature on gender and migration specifically addressing how today women are migrating at comparable rates to men. This is followed by the research literature connecting immigration and mental health well-being among Mexican immigrants. This chapter ends with a discussion of the theoretical frameworks and my aims to fill gap in the literature. More specifically, I discuss the shortcomings of segmented assimilation theory such as not adequately tackling on racism, legal status, and the social consequences/impediments this has on immigrants integration and mental health well being.

In Chapter III, I discuss the research methodology I used to conduct this study. First, I discuss my positionality as a daughter of Mexican immigrants and a native Houstonian. I discuss in detail the data collection process and data analysis. This chapter describes the interview process, selection criteria, and my research sample. In this study, I conducted a total of 30 interviews with Mexican-origin women. I had a total of nineteen women who currently have undocumented status, nine that are documented but were once undocumented immigrants, and two whose immigration statuses are in limbo (undocumented but in the process of trying to legalize their status). My findings focus on the undocumented experience; therefore, I asked questions retrospectively to my participants that are documented about what life was like as an undocumented immigrant.

In Chapter IV, I discuss the major findings derived from the interviews and fieldnotes. This chapter is split into two major sections titled: A) The American Context of Reception among Undocumented Mexican Women; and B) Mexican Immigrant Women's Perceptions of Intra-Ethnic Conflict. In the first section, I provide quotes that represent three main factors of the undocumented experience that affect my respondents' mental health, namely depressive symptoms. These factors are: 1) Fear; 2) Family Fragmentation; and 3) Economic Uncertainty.

In the second section of my research findings chapter, I provide detailed excerpts from my respondents on their perceptions of intra-ethnic conflict. My respondents reported feeling discriminated by Mexican Americans more than any other racial/ethnic group. In attempting to understand this conflict I turn to the Latina/o critical race

literature and Joe Feagin's white racial frame, to assist me in explaining how, why, and where these perceptions may be stemming from, such as through racist ideologies that are rampant in the United States. My respondents describe feeling more discrimination by their own people, "*mi propia gente.*"

The perception of intra-ethnic conflict as expressed by my respondents is a common theme that came up time after time. Although the relationship between intra-ethnic conflict and depression symptoms are not as cogent as that between legal status and depression, my evidence suggests that Mexican immigrants are preoccupied with and concerned about the lack of ethnic cohesion between Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants. However, given that this theme emerged and re-emerged in my interviews, it is reasonable to conclude that the perception of intra-ethnic conflict influences their mental health. In this section, I provide three possible associations that assist me in explaining my respondents' perceptions of intra-ethnic conflict. They are: 1) Assumptions and Expectations of Reciprocity; 2) Competition and the Crab Mentality Metaphor; and 3) Separation and Distancing.

In Chapter V, I provide a brief summary of my findings and conclusions. I also discuss research limitations such as that of not being able to provide the perspective of U.S.-born Mexican American women, particularly in discussing the intra-ethnic conflict that was reported by my participants. I also discuss future research and the broader implications my research provides for the race/ethnic relations and immigration literatures. I end this chapter with policy recommendations.

**CHAPTER II**

**LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS**


Latina/os are the fastest growing racial/ethnic group in the United States. This increase can be explained by several demographic factors such as the youthful age structure of this group, high immigration rates, and high fertility rates of Latinas (Sáenz 2004). Mexico is the largest country and source of immigration to the United States. In the years 1990 to 2000, the Mexican-born population more than doubled with numbers growing from 4.3 million to 9.2 million (Passel 2004). The growth of the Latina/o population, and more specifically, the growth of the Mexican population have contributed to nativist sentiments among anti-immigrant supporters (Huber et al. 2008; Perea 1997; Sanchez 1997). The demographic reality that projects Latina/os to be the largest group in the United States stimulates controversies especially in issues and concerns regarding immigration policies and immigration reform (Perea 1997). Mexican women are also migrating at high rates comparable to Mexican men migrants.

Mexican migration was merely discussed as a male trend focusing on the male migrant and significantly undermining Mexican women's migration, as it was described as deriving from family reunification migration (Kossoudji and Ranney 1984). The feminist movement pushed for scholarship and academic studies to focus on the importance and contribution of women migrants. This push for a re-focus on the international migration literature to include or explore the conditions and motivations of women migrants was particularly vocalized during the 1980s and 1990s (Hondagneu-

Sotelo 2003). Pierrete Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) suggests that contemporary Mexican undocumented immigration is comprised by a significant presence of women and, even further, entire families.

Mexican undocumented immigration has also been a hot topic as espoused in the daily news, nativist sentiments, and anti-immigrant rhetoric and discourse. Moreover, these views are exacerbated by the racial/ethnic demographic changes, the tight or current economic recession, and an enforcement era post 9/11 (Galindo and Vigil 2006; Huber et al. 2008). Recent years have witnessed a resurgence of nativism (Perea 1997; Sanchez 1997). The term nativism was first coined by John Higham (1955) and is defined as an "intense opposition to an internal minority on the grounds of its foreign connections," or the favoring of native-born citizens over immigrants (p. 4). Nativist sentiment and anti-immigrant groups claim to be worried about the "current state of the problem," namely unwanted (undocumented) immigration (Galindo and Vigil 2006).

Given that undocumented Mexican migrants face structural barriers in the United States due to their immigration status, their lower levels of socioeconomic status, and the limited social resources available in the host community, it is probable that being an undocumented immigrant, particularly a Mexican undocumented immigrant, may contribute to feelings of depression and marginalization. Although numerous studies have identified a healthy profile among Mexican foreign-born immigrants (Escobar, Nervi, and Gara 2000; Vega et al. 1998), little analytic attention has been paid to research merging the immigration, mental health, and nativist literatures. Specifically, by focusing on undocumented immigrant women, a very much silenced and

marginalized group, and how undocumented status can impact depressive symptoms, especially in current times as defined by a resurgence of nativist sentiments, allows me to extend scholarly research to a timely topic.

This study builds on and contributes to the scholarly literature in the mental health field which has been quantitatively dominated, by the qualitative nature of the study employing in-depth interviews with undocumented Mexican immigrant women. I argue that qualitative research is critical in order to further explore and document the experiences Mexican undocumented women face. This study focuses on a specific group of Mexican immigrant women which allows me to get real lived experiences of what life is like as an undocumented immigrant in an era of heightened anti-immigrant or nativist sentiments and how these factors attribute to symptoms of depression.

Moreover, this study fills a gap in the sociological literature that broadly speaks about undocumented Mexican immigrant women, nativism/anti-immigrant sentiment, the racialization process of immigrants, and how these aspects affect the incidence of symptoms of depression. To address the relationship between undocumented status, nativist sentiment, and mental health, I investigate how the process of migration and settlement, and nativity and legal status affect depression among Mexican-origin women in the context of increasing nativism. The research questions that guide this study are:

1. How does nativism affect undocumented Mexican immigrant women's mental health, specifically depression?

The broader question that I explore in this study is the following:

2. What is the relationship between integration and depression?

More specifically:

3. How does integration and undocumented status affect depression?

These research questions are critical in understanding depression among Mexican immigrant women. Moreover, these questions aim to address the relationship between nativism and depression in the United States. Specifically, participants will discuss their perceptions of the migration experience, settlement in the United States, their perceptions of anti-immigrant sentiment, racism, depression, and coping mechanisms. These central questions will help to uncover the hidden crisis of depression among the Mexican-origin women population. In light of the cyclical recurrence of nativism, it is essential for us to understand and provide services for this vulnerable population.

This chapter examines the literature related to this thesis. I begin by discussing the literature on nativism and anti-immigrant sentiments against Mexican immigrants. Then, I introduce the theoretical frameworks which guide my work. Additionally, I discuss relevant literature on the debates regarding ethnic, racial, and panethnic identities among Latina/os and the racialization process of Mexican immigrants. I also discuss literature on gender and migration followed by the research literature connecting immigration and mental health. I end this chapter with a discussion on my thesis study and my aims to fill the gap in the literature.

**NATIVIST, ANTI-IMMIGRANT, AND RACIST SENTIMENTS**

Nativism has an ancient history in the United States, particularly in response to mass immigration, such as the era of Americanization ushered in during the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Higham 1955) and what is today coined as the "new

immigration" consisting of migration from Latin American and Asian countries in the post-1965 period (Perea 1997). Nativist attitudes become especially rampant during times of national stress and fear, as in times of war, economic recession, or demographic shifts stemming from "unwanted" immigration (Galindo and Vigil 2006). These anti-immigrant attitudes cause stress and fear and trigger "restrictive laws aimed at persons whose ethnicity differs from that of the core culture" (Perea 1995). The growth of immigrants of color along with anti-immigrant sentiment in the host country has reenergized a nativist society as seen by anti-immigrant enmity, exclusionary, and restrictive policies (Perea 1997).

Current nativist sentiments are directed against a group of immigrants who are predominately people of color from Latin America and other non-European countries (Feagin 1997; Huber et al. 2008). The ethnic/racial backgrounds of these immigrants accentuate the complexity of the nativist sentiments that are directed against them, which involve an intersection of both racism and defensive nationalism (Galindo and Vigil 2006). Anti-immigrant sentiment and nativist attitudes perpetuate racist thinking in the United States against certain groups, such as Mexicans. For instance, Samuel Huntington identifies Latina/os, particularly Mexicans, as a threat to American society (Sáenz, Filoteo, and Murga 2007). In his book titled, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (2004b), Huntington argues that America's national identity is being threatened by the massive amount of immigrants that he presumes are not assimilating to American culture. Notably, he considers Anglo-Protestants who

immigrated to the United States in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as settlers and not immigrants (Sáenz et al. 2007).

Huntington (2004b) argues that Mexicans are not assimilating because they do not learn English which he attributes to not being well integrated into American culture. He suggests that it is unlikely that Latina/os will become assimilated and due to their massive growth, he fears American identity will be demolished by negatively changing what he claims the United States represents – the Anglo-Protestant, Puritan culture, values, and the way of life in the United States. His claim of what the U.S. represents is one pushed by white supremacy groups which stimulate nativist perceptions of who belongs in the United States. Nativism is not only a recurring phenomenon but also a racialized one rooted in notions of white supremacy that considers Anglo-Saxons to be U.S. natives (Higham 1955) similar to Huntington's views.

Attitudes like Huntington's are indicative of how the immigration debate is currently framed in the United States and also who this framing targets – Latina/o immigrants generally and Mexican immigrants in particular (Huber et al. 2008). Moreover, these attitudes and ideological manifestations of whiteness are prevalent in nativist organizations like the Minute Men, Border Watch, and other anti-immigrant/racist groups. For instance, the Minute Men are racist vigilantes who patrol the United States and Mexico border aiming to stop what they see as the overturning of the United States by an undesirable people (Mexicans) (Huber et al. 2008). In times during economic recessions, anti-immigrant sentiment increases and Mexican immigrants are targets of such xenophobia and nativist sentiment. For example,

Mexican immigrants are accused of taking jobs away from U.S. citizens and of draining public services (Feagin 1997). Also, current racial/ethnic demographics indicating that Latina/os are the largest ethnic group in the United States, has led some conservative groups to worry or question what has been referred to as the "browning" of America. Further, they question the implications of these demographic changes for the hegemonic order. Among some conservatives, the concern is the belief that the growth of the Latina/o population and the Spanish language will result in the disuniting or fragmenting of the United States (Schlesinger 1991).

Also, public anti-immigrant sentiment is also increasing and accepted as seen in the ways in which the media blatantly portray immigrants (Chavez 1997; 2001). For instance, Otto Santa Ana (1999), in his article titled "Like an Animal I was Treated: Anti-Immigrant Metaphor in U.S. Public Discourse" shows how the political debate regarding Proposition 187 in California was reflected in a negative manner by the media and how its messages transcended to the public. The media disseminates and legitimizes negative portrayals of Mexican immigrants as dangerous criminals, invaders, unwanted, enemies, dirty, sub-human animal-like beings (Chavez 2001; Santa Ana 2002).

Therefore, given the rise in nativist and anti-immigrant sentiments, I argue that these sentiments will perhaps have a detrimental effect on undocumented immigrants. I argue that these anti-immigrant views stimulate the passage and acceptance of anti-immigrant laws, therefore, directly impacting undocumented immigrants. I focus on undocumented Mexican immigrant women because of the dearth of studies that document the experiences of this group (Hondagneu Sotelo 1994; Menjívar 2000;

Pedraza 1991). Additionally, I focus on mental health, particularly depression, because previous studies suggest Mexican immigrants have better health profiles than U.S.-born Mexican Americans and other racial/ethnic groups including Whites (Markides and Curiel 1986). Contrary to previous studies, a focus on the undocumented population and the contexts of reception and how these affect the integration process is a critical area to explore. Moreover, the undocumented population and the nativism or negative societal reception they experience need to be considered in evaluating the mental health outcomes of Mexican immigrant women.

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS**

In this study, I use a theoretical framework drawing on the segmented assimilation hypothesis which acknowledges that U.S. society has gone through massive changes making it less receptive for new immigrants than earlier eras of mass immigration (Portes and Rumbaut 2006). This theoretical framework examines how and why the new immigrants and their children experience different routes of integration into U.S. society as opposed to the straight-line assimilation experienced by the earlier waves of immigrants (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes and Zhou 1993). Portes and Zhou (1993) predict three common paths to integration or adaptation into the United States society, described in the following ways: 1) similar to straight-line assimilation replicating the time or years in the United States with parallel integration into the white middle-class; 2) the second leads to permanent poverty and assimilation into the "underclass" community – a complete opposite direction to the straight-line assimilation perspective; and 3) the third is caused by rapid economic mobility with intentional

preservation of the immigrant community's values, beliefs, and tight solidarity – this is similar to the definition of biculturalism in the acculturation literature.

### Mexican Immigrants and Their Route of Integration

Segmented assimilation theory argues that the contexts of reception facing immigrants upon arrival play a vital role in their integration as well as their children's integration and adaptation (Portes and Rumbaut 2001;2006). Portes and Zhou (1993) describe three features of the social contexts that the new immigrants encounter today that create certain groups to become more susceptible to downward assimilation. Specifically, they assert that post-1965 immigration is composed primarily of immigrants of color causing them to experience racism based on skin color. The second feature of the social contexts which affect likelihood of downward assimilation is that of location. Immigrants who reside in inner-city or co-ethnic communities are vulnerable to downward assimilation because it allows new arrivals to live with native-born minorities. This close contact among new arrivals and natives allows whites or the majority to categorize both groups as one. Moreover, this close contact among foreign-born and native-born exposes second-generation children to an adversarial subculture developed by marginalized native youths who created this subculture as a form of resistance and coping with their marginalized identities (Portes and Zhou 1993). The final social contextual source of vulnerability towards downward assimilation deals with changes in the host economy that has nearly eliminated occupational ladders for intergenerational mobility (Portes and Zhou 1993; Valdez 1996).

Portes and Zhou (1993) discuss how undocumented Mexican immigrants tend to "downward assimilate" given the barriers they face due to their undocumented status. However, my study sheds light on the social realities and the subjugation these women experience living in anti-immigrant contexts of reception and how their precarious undocumented status further limits their opportunities for upward mobility. Moreover, this study focuses on how undocumented status and a nativist societal reception relate to depression symptoms. Therefore, the purpose of my study is to investigate the barriers these women face and how these barriers affect their integration process. I move from stating what segment these women fall into in a segmented assimilation theoretical framework to critically analyzing how these women are oppressed and subjugated given their undocumented status.

Past studies using segmented assimilation theory focus on the success of immigrant groups. We have seen that those who have documented status are eligible for certain programs in the United States and therefore have more opportunities for being successful in the United States. This demonstrates how critical governmental support is for immigrants because documented immigrants are provided with an array of resources that do not exist for immigrants who are undocumented. According to Portes and Rumbaut (2006), when the governmental policies are not favorable for an immigrant group, it may cause exclusion which prevents immigration or compels immigrants into an utterly underground existence.

Distinguishing between immigrants who are authorized from those who are unauthorized to be in the United States is extremely critical in understanding those who

have access and availability to full social and economic resources of the host communities (Ellis and Almgren 2009). Not only is undocumented status an important variable to examine for the integration outcomes of first-generation immigrants, but this can also play a major role in the integration process of second-generation children (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). Undocumented immigrants will have limited access to the host society's governmental resources and constantly face discrimination and stigma for being undocumented (Ellis and Almgren 2009).

My thesis intends to portray the voices and the struggles that undocumented immigrant women face in the United States as they live their everyday lives surviving in a nativist society. This thesis provides a way of understanding how a nativist context of reception can impact undocumented Mexican immigrant women's mental health particularly depression. This study aims to provide a voice and paint a picture of the realities that undocumented Mexican immigrant women face as they attempt to adapt to the U.S. culture and how they cope or deal with the structural barriers imposed on them given their documentation status. In order to understand the complexities and nuances of Mexican undocumented immigrant women, I use Critical Race Theory (CRT) to assist me in analyzing the real life stories of undocumented women.

**LATINA/O CRITICAL RACE THEORY**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged from the legal arena to uncover historical and present patterns of racial exclusion (Parker and Lynn 2002). Critical race theory has expanded too many academic fields and extends over a broad array of literatures, namely, sociology, history, ethnic studies, women's studies, philosophy and law.

Critical race theory allows the development of theoretical, conceptual, methodological, and pedagogical approaches that take into consideration the role of race and racism and work toward eliminating racism (Solórzano and Yosso 2001).  CRT shifts the researcher's lens away from viewing societal issues from traditional or mainstream research which normally holds people of color responsible for the structural inequities they face (Romero 2008).  The five major tenets of CRT are: 1) "The centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination; 2) the challenge to dominant ideology; 3) the commitment to social justice; 4) the centrality of experiential knowledge; and 5) the transdisciplinary perspective" (Solórzano and Yosso 2001:472-473).

Latina/o critical race theory (LatCrit), along with other groups that discuss the racialized experiences of women (FemCrit), Native Americans (TribalCrit), and Asian Americans (AsianCrit) emerged to move away from the Black/White binary which limited the understanding of a multitude of ways in which people of color continue to experience, challenge, resist racism and other forms of subjugation (Yosso 2005). LatCrit scholars acknowledge and stress that racism, sexism, and classism are experienced on top of other forms of inferiorities based on phenotype, culture, sexuality, surname, linguistic accent, and immigration status (Johnson 1999; Montoya 1994). In this thesis, I focus in on LatCrit as well as Joe Feagin's work on the white racial frame in order to assist me in analyzing the ways in which undocumented immigrants face structural barriers based on their immigration status and their racialized positions in the United States.  Using the segmented assimilation theoretical framework, namely, the

contexts of reception does not allow me to provide a critical analysis to the oppression and subjugation of my participants. Moreover, the LatCrit and Joe Feagin's work allows me to view the structural barriers women face, moving away from the literature that supports Mexicans and their offspring are simply "downward assimilating." I merge this with LatCrit and Joe Feagin's White Racial Frame in order to move the segmented assimilation theory forward and to fill the gaps in the immigration literature that does not take into account the racialization and subjugation of my participants.

Mary Romero (2008) advocates for a research agenda in which immigration scholars "place race at the center of immigration analysis" (p. 24). Further, she argues that the main focus of CRT offers vital and necessary models for "bridging the growing antagonism and increasing anti-immigrant sentiment that impacts citizens and non-citizens in the global context" (p. 24). According to Romero, Alejandro Portes and Ruben G. Rumbaut in their book titled *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation* (2001) "devote only about four pages to 'the race question' and a paltry eight pages to the determinants of ethnic and racial identities" (p. 25). Similar to this notion of the lack of tackling race head on, I found in Portes and Rumbaut's book *Immigrant America: A Portrait* (2006) a very limited discussion to the concept of race. They state or allude that race is a defining factor in being victims of discrimination; however, they do not fully critique the concept of race and how it affects the life chances and process of integration for immigrants and their children. The index of the book has racial discrimination listed from pages 255-258 with pages 256 and 257 being tables.

Therefore, there is a major gap in the segmented assimilation theory that does not tackle race head on. My thesis aims to advance the literature in this area by focusing on the barriers of undocumented Mexican immigrant women face and how the racialization process affects their integration process and mental health outcomes. My work will address the racist, exploitative, and unjust environments Mexican undocumented immigrants enter. In doing this I turn to the Critical Race Literature. Merging both literatures allows for the extension and creation of knowledge that builds upon the segmented assimilation theoretical framework to include the racialization realities that exist among understudied, vulnerable, and oppressed groups such as Mexican immigrant women.

Huber and colleagues (2008) recognize the need and significance of critiquing the integration process through a critical lens specifically using LatCrit in conceptualizing the term racist nativism. Some scholars argue that the distinction between foreign and native can easily be based on legal citizenship status (Huber et al. 2008). Johnson (1997) explains post-1965, immigrants of color have been viewed as not assimilating into American society compared to earlier European groups. Moreover, he asserts that nativism is not determined by citizenship status but by the perception of who is native or "American." This assertion supports that the power of nativism goes beyond citizenship status particularly by focusing on nativism (the distinction between native and foreign) allows natives to identify and oppress others based on their perceptions of being native.

Huber and colleagues (2008) argue that this distinction between native and foreign allows scholars to connect nativeness to nativism in the same influential way that they can relate white supremacy to racism – "by tracing the 'symptom' back to the 'disease'." Using a Latino critical race framework, Huber and colleagues further theorize the concept of "racist nativism" in an era marked by high levels of anti-immigrant sentiment. They argue that the legacy of white supremacy significantly informs racialized perceptions of what is considered a "white American identity", whereby white Americans are perceived as native to the U.S. and all others as non-native. They define racist nativism as the "assigning of values to real or imagined differences, in order to justify the superiority of the native, who is to be perceived white, over that of the non-native, who is perceived to be People and Immigrants of Color, and thereby defend the right of whites, or the natives, to dominance" (p. 43). They conclude that undocumented Mexican immigrants suffer the most violent forms of racist nativism, and legalized Mexican immigrants and even Chicana/os continue to be racialized as undocumented and therefore perceived as non-Americans (Huber et al. 2008). The distinction between native and foreign is critical to examine further given that although undocumented Mexican immigrants face many structural barriers, even Mexican Americans are sometimes perceived to be undocumented, therefore receiving unfair treatment regardless of generational ancestry in U.S. citizenship. This is particularly true for dark-skinned Mexican Americans (Murguia and Telles 1996; Telles and Murguia 1990).

**THE RACIALIZATION PROCESS OF IMMIGRANTS**

Race is defined as a socially constructed category (Feagin 2006; Haney López 2006; Omi and Winant 1994). Race powerfully becomes evident in the lives of people of color as it vigorously manifests itself in all actions and lives of people, especially people of color. As these manifestations become publicly disputed in the competition for different forms of power, race not only distinguishes between racial groups but it also promotes a hierarchy (Bonilla-Silva 2001; Feagin 2006). Moreover, there is a competition for power which enables or promotes a hierarchy that justifies one race as superior over other races (Bonilla-Silva 2001; Feagin 2006). Racial hierarchies are created and maintained by the social structure and are justified through an ideology that positions one race as superior to all others (Feagin 2006; Bonilla-Silva 2001). Racial hierarchies are maintained by notions of white supremacy based on a social system of racial domination and exploitation where power, prestige, and resources are inequitably and unjustly distributed to privilege Whites and subjugate People of Color (Bonilla Silva 2001; Dubois 1999; Feagin 2006). Furthermore, racial hierarchies operate on the basis of white supremacy where whites dominate and exploit People of Color. Power, prestige, and resources are unequally distributed in order to privilege whites and oppress People of Color (Bonilla-Silva 2001; Dubois 1999). White dominance is masked by notions of the American Dream, individualism, meritocracy, which all contribute to the racial ideology of color-blindness (Bonilla-Silva 2003).

In examining the history of the United States, it is evident how the immigration system has excluded and restricted certain ethnic/racial groups. Since the inception of

the United States, northern Europeans (Anglo-Saxon Protestants) argued that they were the superior race and deemed native to the United States and concluded that southern and eastern Europeans i.e. Italians, Czechs, and Poles, were an inferior race (Feagin 1997). Anglo-Saxon Protestants were considered racially superior and deemed native to the United States (Huber et al. 2008). This sentiment was promoted and perpetuated by Social Darwinism which argued that races are at different stages in the evolutionary scale creating a false justification that positions the white race at the top of the racial hierarchy (Feagin 1997; Merenstein 2008). This sentiment continued and was later justified scientifically in the twentieth century by eugenics research (Grant 1916; Kamin 1974). As eugenics research grew, it legitimized the discrimination, violence, and racism directed towards southern and eastern Europeans entering the United States. This treatment became critical in differentiating natives from foreign people – hence a nativist sentiment.

Moreover, this type of racial superiority or nativist belief caused exclusionary and restrictive immigration policies such as the Johnson-Reed Act (the Immigration Act of 1924) which created a quota system that guaranteed northern and western Europeans preferable admittance into the United States (Ngai 2004). The Johnson-Reed Act also required official documentation such as visas and passports as proof of national identity for entry to the United States. Moreover, the Johnson-Reed Act also created the U.S. Border Patrol and geographic points of entry into the U.S. with more patrol officers placed at the Mexico-U.S. border (Ngai 2004). The National Origins Act of 1924 was

the first restrictive immigration law driven by racism which barred entries from most countries explicitly based on racial considerations (Ngai 2004).

Although white ethnics, i.e. Italians, Czechs, Poles, and Jews, were once discriminated against by northern Europeans, they eventually became accepted by northern Europeans.  This acceptance into the white race was due to white privilege, a concept that makes the experience of white ethnic immigrants crucially different from immigrants of color (Huber et al. 2008).  With the acceptance of the mainstream whites, white ethnics became beneficiaries of white privilege regardless of the racial difference from Anglo-Saxon Protestants, social, political, and economic interests mainly to maintain white dominance and white supremacy (Bell 2004).

Derrick Bell (2004) posits that the acceptance of white ethnics into the mainstream white world was a strategic decision made by white elites who feared white poor ethnics and Black slaves forming a class alliance because it posed a threat to their power.  This fear or threat led white elites to extend white-privilege to white ethnics forming a race-based alliance and the maintenance of a Black/white racial divide in U.S. society (Bell 2004).  White privilege as a product of white supremacy has never been extended to racial/ethnic groups and therefore cannot be extended to immigrants of color.

**THE WHITE RACIAL FRAME**

In *Systemic Racism* (2006), Joe Feagin provides theoretical frameworks that provide ways in which researchers can seek to uncover the U.S. system of racial oppression.  He asserts that the United States is a nation founded on racism and

oppression. More specifically, systemic racism includes "a broad range of white-racist dimensions: the racist ideology, attitudes, emotions, habits, actions, and institutions of whites in this society" (Feagin 2006:2). Feagin provides a theoretical framework that helps explain how racism has been perpetuated and maintained in all social institutions, namely the White Racial Frame.

The White Racial Frame (WRF) is "an organized set of racialized ideas, stereotypes, emotions, and inclinations to discriminate" (Feagin 2006:25). Furthermore, most White Americans' frame includes negative stereotypes, images, and metaphors involving people of color along with positive or superior views of whites. Feagin and Cobas (2008) state that immigration scholars specifically those that focus on immigrant adaptation, overlook a very critical discussion in the integration process of immigrants, namely "the dominant white group's racial frame, that is, its everyday racial 'common sense.' (p. 40).

The White Racial Frame concept was developed to examine white-black oppression. However, in Feagin and Cobas' article titled, "Latinos/as and White Racial Frame: The Procrustean Bed of Assimilation," they extend an analysis of the WRF and apply it to Latina/os. Using data from 72 in-depth interviews of mainly middle-class respondents, their findings suggest that Latina/os consciously or unintentionally formulate their views on racial matters from a white racial frame. These findings have broader implications, namely the ways in which people of color have adopted the WRF. This is even common among immigrant groups such as undocumented Mexican immigrants. Moreover, this shows how powerful and useful the WRF can be to analyze

and understand intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic conflict. This theoretical tool of WRF assists me in better understanding the integration process of Mexican-origin immigrant women. Moreover, it provides an insightful way of understanding the self-identification of Mexican groups. Next, I turn to the literature on Latina/o ethnic and pan-ethnic identity.

**LATINA/O ETHNIC/PANETHNIC/RACIAL IDENTIFICATION**

Today, Latina/os are generally identified by some social scientists as an ethnic group and even as a panethnic group rather than a racial group. The label Hispanic began to be widely spread throughout the country after 1970 by America's institutions and state-sponsored government agencies, like the U.S. Census (Oboler 1995). The term Hispanic gained notoriety by the U.S. Census Bureau, other government/state agencies, and the media, rather than from the actual people that made up this label; therefore, it is also referred to as an imposed label (Calderón 1992).

The Hispanic label identifies people in the United States whose ancestry is predominately from one or more Spanish-speaking countries. Specifically, the term Hispanic acknowledges the presence of Spain (Oboler 1995). This term, enables people from different national backgrounds to be lumped under one ethnic umbrella, regardless of racial, class, linguistic, religion, and gender experiences (Valdez 2009). Moreover, the term Hispanic, ignores the reality of U.S. conquest particularly for the Mexican and Puerto Rican populations (Padilla 1985). This term also ignores the historical context of the different groups and furthermore attempts to homogenize all groups as one (Ochoa 2004). Going further, the term Hispanic ignores the heterogeneity among recent

immigrants from Mexico, Central, South America, or the Caribbean nations (Oboler 1995). Additionally, nativity status or generational status is ignored given that recent immigrants are also lumped under the same category as native-born U.S. citizens and residents.

Another term that is often used is Latina/o and is preferred as a form of uniting Latino groups whose identity is socially constructed by U.S. foreign policy (Hayes-Bautista and Chapa 1987). The term Latina/o is more prevalent among activists and academics (Calderón 1992). Although Latina/os cannot be considered a homogenous group, there are commonalities among the groups that cause unity and mobilization in the struggle against repression (Calderón 1992). Particularly, in the city of Chicago, the term Latina/o emerged from the unity between the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements in the early and middle 1970s and was used to symbolize the common issues rampant in the Chicano and Puerto Rican struggles as well as their collective actions (Padilla 1985). Felix Padilla (1985) refers to "Latinismo" as the forging of unity among Latina/os in the struggle for full citizenship rights and social justice in the United States. However, he notes that Puerto Ricans and Chicanos would first identify with their ancestry before accepting Latinismo.

Many implications and issues exist in the racial classification of groups particularly in addressing the gap between government-and state-sponsored requirements versus the political consciousness and how people self-racially identify (Omi 1997). Racial classification is a complicated matter even more so among new immigrant populations. For instance, it is crucial to examine the shifts in racial self-identification

among immigrants pre-migration and post-migration. Perhaps immigrants may change the ways in which they racially identified before migrating and once in the United States (a racialized nation), their conceptualization of race or how they identify may change. Additionally, given that race is a social construct, people elicit different responses on how they racially self-identify throughout their lifetimes (Omi 1997). Racial identity is a fluid concept which may change according to social context, group membership, or historical period (Omi 1997).

Latina/os tend to be perceived by most whites in racial terms, particularly in terms of skin color, i.e. as brown (Kilty and Vidal de Haymes 2000). It is critical to note that the United States is structured along racial lines, and all social institutions, organizations, and even some social relationships promote a racial ideology that supports a racial order that values whites and devalues people of color (Merenstein 2008). The racialized social system perpetuates and creates the "color line" deeming whites superior and people of color inferior. In addition, this has led to the creation of a racial hierarchy in which whites are the top and blacks at the bottom with all other groups in between (Feagin 2000; Bonilla-Silva 2004).

Moreover, given the racialized social system, Omi and Winant (1994) argue that the United States paints a picture of what the term American means, specifically this term is often equated by many as American means white. Immigrants of color also buy into this racial ideology bringing with them their preconceived notions of race in the United States equating Americans to whites (Merenstein, 2008). However, given the demographic changes in the population and the current rise of anti-immigrant hysteria,

the United States may also move towards a structuring along ethnic or nativity lines. This is an indispensable phenomenon that deserves careful attention and further research.

Eduardo Bonilla- Silva (2004) predicts that the racial stratification of the United States will move more towards a tri-racial stratification system as opposed to the bi-racial system, in which whites will remain at the top, honorary Whites, will be in the middle, and the non-white or the collective Black will remain at the bottom of the hierarchy. It is imperative to examine where and how immigrants of color will fit in the U.S. racial hierarchy and the social implications their place will have on their psychological outcomes. This is particularly crucial to examine where undocumented immigrants of color will fit into the racial hierarchy.

Documentation status is a salient characteristic to examine given that undocumented immigrants face structural inequalities, anti-immigrant sentiment, and hostility given their migration status in addition to facing racism given their skin color. Moreover, it is necessary to study the nativist sentiment of the United States and how this may impact immigrants of color racial location on the hierarchy. The social outcomes and implications of living in a racist society may affect the mental well being of immigrants of color (Viruell-Fuentes 2007). Also, Leo R. Chavez (1997) recognizes that anti-immigrant discourse mainly targets women and children or the reproduction of the immigrant labor force. He states: "The logic is that denial for social services to immigrants reduces the incentives for immigration and thus fewer immigrants will decide to come to the United States" (p. 69). Researchers also have brought in other

aspects of the migration experience to explain their identities and integration process,

namely how gender plays a role in the migration experience of immigrants (Espiritu

1997; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Mahler and Pessar 2003; Pessar 1999; Pedraza 1991).

This thesis examines the relationship between nativism and depression among

undocumented Mexican immigrant women given that they are targets of such

xenophobic attitudes.  The following section deals with research literature on gender and

migration.

**GENDER AND MIGRATION**

For a long time the trend of Mexican international migration was solely focused

on men without notice of women as migrants or only viewing women immigrants as a

result of family reunification laws (Kossoudji and Ranney 1984).  Since the 1960's the

number of female migrants has increased to nearly as large as male migration--today

both female and male international migration is nearly equal in numbers (Portes and

Bach 1985; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994).  Since the 1980s and 1990s, migration research

has focused on the gendered characteristics of immigrants, the cultural factors affecting

women's decisions to migrate, and the impact of women's migration on the community

of origin and household (Goldring 2003; Honagneu-Sotelo 1994; Mahler and Pessar

2003; Pessar 1999; Pedraza 1991).  Contemporary Mexican undocumented immigration

is comprised by a significant presence of women and, even further, entire families

(Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994).

Studies focusing on women immigrants viewed migration as an emancipating or

liberating experience (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Lamphere 1987).  Such studies

argued that the process of migration ultimately resulted in an increase of autonomy given the labor market or employment opportunities and therefore, contributing monetarily to the household (Pessar 1999). Other studies focused on the legal aspect of the United States, mainly on laws that are geared to protecting women such as the protection against domestic violence and therefore conflicting men's ability to control or abuse them (Hirsch 1999). Hondagneu-Sotelo (2003) discusses the conflicting gender ideologies that Mexican migrant women face in the United States, specifically when discussing immigrants "traditional" social and cultural attitudes to the opposing views that are evident in the United States, namely "liberal" values and attitudes.

Although in the past migration research explored women's experiences solely as a gender variable like education and marital status (thus pretty much a control *variable*), today researchers have moved beyond that to a gendered understanding of the migration experience (Pessar 1999). These studies are attempting to develop a more sophisticated understanding of gender and patriarchy (Pessar 1986, 1988; Espiritu 1997). Other studies focus on another aspect of women immigrants pointing out the significance of class, race, ethnicity, and foreign status which at times may surpass gender in viewing their well-being (Espiritu 1997). Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) advocates for what is known as intersectionality research taking into account the different identities such as race, class, sexual orientation, and gender to be interlocked identities. Similarly, Patricia Hill Collins (2000) also advocates for research taking into account the intersectionality of identities and not viewing gender as an identity that truncates other identities but instead, she argues for the interpretation and research focusing on the merging of identities.

Another identity which should be included is that of being an undocumented immigrant because it has a major impact in the health and life outcomes of immigrants. Much of the literature written on immigration and health focuses on acculturation or integration and its impact on the health of the immigrant population (Hunt, Schneider, and Comer 2005; Rogler, Cortes, and Malgady 1991; Rogler, Gurak, and Santana-Cooney 1987). Acculturation models assume that cultural traits are inherent to members of certain groups and do not view culture as a system that is socially constructed (Hunt et al. 2004). This type of thinking ignores the structural forces or barriers that are set within the United States social structure (Williams, Neighbors, and Jackson 2003). Furthermore, by ignoring the structural barriers imposed on immigrants, this type of thinking supports the blaming of victims for their health outcomes (Viruell-Fuentes 2007). Therefore, the importance of researching the racialized and nativist society in which immigrants enter and how they negotiate their racial/ethnic identities given their social position is critical to examine. More specifically, it is vital to consider how these processes of integration affect immigrant's mental health taking into consideration the barriers they face. This thesis focuses on the relationship between nativism and depression among undocumented Mexican immigrant women. Next, I turn to the literature on mental health and immigration.

**SEMINAL STUDIES EXPLORING PSYCHOPATHOLOGY AND IMMIGRATION**

The first epidemiological study exploring psychopathology and immigration was conducted by Edward Jarvis in 1855. He noticed the rapid increase of immigrants in

Massachusetts and found that the mentally ill people were immigrants. Jarvis framed his

research question in a causal relationship which later stirred critical debates between

policymakers and research scientists – "[E]ither our foreign population is more prone to

insanity or their habits and trials, their experiences and privations … are more

unfavorable to their mental health than to that of the natives" (as quoted by Portes and

Rumbaut 2006:171). Jarvis speculated or hinted to the consequences of stressful life

events as experienced by immigrants. His speculations prefigured by decades the

sociological analysis of marginality (Portes and Rumbaut 2006).

The importance of investigating between class and context was ignored by a

growing interest in migration and mental illness. Instead research focused on the

underlying policy concerns over the public cost of caring for immigrants with mental

illness and the deeper nativist fears about the growing number of immigrants in the

United States (Portes and Rumbaut 2006). There were also major methodological

mistakes in alluding that immigrants were pathologically inferior and more inclined to

mental health illnesses. Some of the methodological mistakes which researchers and

policy makers dismissed were variables such as age and spatial distribution. Researchers

discovered the significance of age in explaining the differences in rates of mental illness

between the native-born and foreign-born. Rates of mental disorder increased from

adolescence to old age and there were very few immigrant children arriving in the

United States. Also, when considering the spatial distribution of immigrants, it turned

out that immigrants settled in the northeastern states where hospitalization of mentally ill

people was more probable to occur than in southeastern states where native whites lived

and hospitalization was less likely to occur.  Ultimately, these sentiments were greatly

fueled by the eugenics movement and xenophobic, racist attitudes arguing against

immigration (Grant 1916; Kamin 1979).  Advocates of these views promoted ideas that

perceived immigrants as being biologically defective and inferior, thus blaming

immigrants for the increase in mental illness in the United States (Portes and Rumbaut

2006).

Although there were empirical findings which suggested that it was not the

intrinsic characteristics of immigrants but rather objective variables such as poverty, age

distribution, and spatial distribution that accounted for differential rates in mental

disorders, it was totally ignored and dismissed by public discourse and most scientific

experts.  They rejected the empirical realities and supported the view that immigrants

had an inferior psychological makeup, especially those of Asian and southeastern

European stock.  Sociological analyses of the traumas of immigrant adaptation into U.S.

society and the complex situation of marginality were also ignored only to support the

wrongful belief that immigrants were intrinsically pathological (Portes and Rumbaut

2006).  Again, it is in these racist views which the first studies on mental health

emerged.  The dismissal of empirical data only demonstrates the powerful, deep, and

wrongful racist beliefs.

It was until post World War II that a shift in the social and psychological

consequences of emigration arose.  Due to the massive numbers of displaced persons in

Europe and elsewhere, and the traumatic conditions of their expatriation, the public and

academic understanding of the subjective world of immigrants shifted (Portes and

Rumbaut 2006). This shifted away from a theoretical interest in selection factors towards a new focus on the effect of environmental stressors and objective social conditions (Portes and Rumbaut 2006). This shift was also triggered by the clinical observations of "combat stress" among U.S. soldiers who had been screened for mental disorders. These scales permitted analyses of more complex mental illnesses such as depression and other psychiatric disorders. It was clearly evident that the fact that such impairments affected "American boys" at war could not be linked back to their intrinsic psychological inferiority or weaknesses. Therefore, this line of research was also adopted to explain the environmental stressors of immigrant's lives.

Additionally, a new methodological approach to studying mental health was the creation of large-scale community surveys based on probability samples of the general population. Community surveys also moved gradually away from the notion of innate psychological shortcomings to focus on contextual and objective factors, particularly on the role of class or socioeconomic differences in mental health and mental disorders (Portes and Rumbaut 2006). Mainly, there are four basic patterns that could summarize how community surveys established a series of robust findings concerning psychological distress and associated disturbances. They are the following: socio-economic status was inversely related to distress; women were more distressed than men; single or unmarried people were more distressed than married people; and the greater the number of undesirable events, the greater the distress (Mirowsky and Ross 1989). Portes and Rumbaut (2006) suggest that these patterns can be subsumed theoretically under the more general concepts of "powerlessness" and "alienation." Furthermore, the inability

to reach one's goals in life and powerlessness to control or affect events – more common among lower-class people, women, and the less socially established – results in greater levels of distress and associated mental disorder. I would also argue the importance of studying the documentation status of immigrants given the stressors and structural barriers in place for immigrants who are undocumented in the United States.

There have been several epidemiological research studies on mental illness in the United States. The Epidemiological Catchment Area Study (ECA) conducted in the 1980s was the first to definitively determine the prevalence of psychiatric problems in the United States. The second large scale study conducted is called the National Comorbidity Study (NCS) and it focused specifically on English-speaking adults between the ages of 18 and 65 and was mostly concerned with the prevalence of co-occurring DSM-III-R psychiatric disorders in the United States (Hersen, Turner and Beidel 2007).

Both the ECA and NCS show differential prevalence rates by gender. For example, in the ECA studies, lifetime prevalence rates of affective disorders for adult women average 6.6% whereas in the NCS, rates are significantly higher at 21.3% (Kessler et al. 1994). The lifetime rates for men on the ECA were 8.2% and 12.7% in the NCS. Although the rates for depression varied between these two studies, there is a consistent theme that should be noted: more women report having depressive episodes than men. This finding is a very common one across the world (Angold et al. 1991; Kessler et al. 1994). In the following section, I discuss some literature pertaining to depression.

**DEPRESSION**

In my research study, I focus on depression because it is the most common diagnosed mental health disorder in younger and older adults (Hersen et al. 2007). Depression also varies by race and ethnicity and it is more prevalent in Latinos than any other racial/ethnic group but even more prevalent in Latinas (Alegria et al. 2007; Salgado de Snyder 1986). Depression can be disabling, causing people to lack the strength to fulfill daily tasks. Depression is also associated with other medical conditions such as anxiety, alcohol and illicit drug use, chronic stress, eating disorders, and the like. Moreover, depressive characteristics are defined in the following ways: "feelings of sadness, feelings of worthlessness, lack of interest in formerly enjoyable pursuits, sleep and appetite disturbances, and at times thoughts of death and dying" (Hersen et al. 2007:286).

With an increase in anti-immigrant sentiment, I argue that this may contribute or play a major role in the mental health of undocumented Mexican immigrant women. To illustrate this, an article called "The State of the Migrant Mental Health 2008" therapists and mental health professionals point out that Latina/os live with fear resulting in insomnia, anxiety, and depression (Frontera NorteSur-U.S.-Mexico Border News Center for Latin American and Border Studies). Therefore, it is urgent to study the relationship between depression and nativism because if depression is prevalent among these women, then they are more susceptible to other health problems like high blood pressure or heart attacks (Jackson-Triche et al. 2000). Additionally, if they are depressed then this can be

detrimental or highly impact their mobility in the United States as well as their overall health, not simply for these women but also for their families well being.

**ETIOLOGY OF DEPRESSION--WHAT CAUSES DEPRESSION?**

People get depressed for different reasons such as the loss of a loved one, divorce, or a tragic/stressful event in their lives. There are several theories used to describe the causes of depression. These include: biological predisposition theories such as temperament, genetic or biochemistry; psychological issues such as personality or personal history and familial environment; and others relate depression to sociocultural factors such as social isolation, racism, discrimination, poverty, and other inequities (Falicov 2003). Moreover, some theorists prefer to use the terms endogenous and exogenous to differentiate between types of depression. Endogenous depression refers to biological causes arising from within the body and exogenous refers to causes coming from outside the body such as environmental stressors (Denmark, Rabinowitz, and Sechzer 2000).

While stressful life events have been linked to the risk for developing depression, it is critical to fully understand the person's coping style, social support groups, and genetic makeup, which all play a role in the impact that stress has on depression (Hersen et al. 2007). Therefore, it is crucial to fully explore the underlying factors that cause people to become depressed and how they deal/cope with it. More specifically, it is vital to further explore Mexican immigrant women's experiences with depression and how they cope with it.

**DEPRESSION: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN**

Depression affects both men and women but it is generally regarded as a woman's disorder or a gendered problem (Falicov 2003). Women appear to be more at risk for developing depression than men. For instance, 7 percent of U.S. women will be diagnosed with depression at sometime in their lives, compared to 2.6 percent of men (Denmark et al. 2000). Although most of the literature is based on white middle-class women, depression is believed to affect women of all races and social classes more than it does men (Stoppard 2000). Women report more emotional symptoms such as crying and feelings of worthlessness (Oliver and Toner 1990). Perhaps women are more likely to be depressed because of endogenous factors such as hormones but they can also be more depressed based on exogenous factors such as gender discrimination in society (Denmark et al. 2000).

Women are twice more likely than men to seek treatment for depression (Falicov 2003). However, it is unclear if women seek mental health services more than men or if mental health professionals are more sensitive and cautious to women's emotions and miss men's emotions in diagnosing depression (Falicov 2003). Moreover, Cochran and Rabinowitz (2000) suggest that men experience mental and emotional distress like depression but they manifest it differently. These manifestations fit social expectations placed on men. For instance, men report more physical symptoms such as lack of sex drive and sleep disorders (Oliver and Toner 1990). Therefore, men cope with depression differently than women. For example, men tend to internalize emotions which can lead to aggressive behavior, even violence, and substance abuse (Fausto-Sterling 1992). This

can also be linked to the high numbers of men diagnosed with alcohol-/drug-related disorders and anti-social personality disorders which outnumber women diagnosed with these disorders (Fisher, Ransom, and Terry 1993).

It is clearly known that women experience more depression than men but further studies need to be completed that focus on why women experience more depression than men. Some explanations to this phenomena are that women are biologically susceptible (i.e. hormones); conflicting sex role expectations; lack of adequate social support networks; lack of control of their environments; and gender roles. The gender roles attached to women such as sex role expectations--mother, caregiver, etc--, demands, interrole conflict, and the intersections of women's experiences of working and family, have been identified as potential factors that stimulate stressful experiences for women (Aneshensel 1986; Aneshensel and Pearlin 1987).

**DEPRESSION AND RACE/ETHNICITY**

Depression varies across racial/ethnic groups. According to the National Comorbidity Survey (NCS) data, African Americans have rates of depression like the White population. Asian Americans have the lowest rates of depression with only 0.8% stating they had experienced major depression and 0.8% experiencing dysthymia (Jackson-Triche et al. 2000). Depression is more prevalent among Latinos but even more prevalent in Latinas (Alegria et al. 2007; Salgado de Snyder 1987). Latina/os were found to have an interesting presentation of prevalence that is dependent on immigration status. However, there are paradoxical research findings between depression rates

among Mexican Americans and Mexican undocumented immigrants in the United States.  The following is a discussion on these paradoxical findings.

## DEPRESSION: MEXICAN IMMIGRANT AND MEXICAN AMERICAN WOMEN

Although Mexican Americans share the same heritage as Mexican nationals, Mexican Americans differ both in how much they have integrated to American culture and how much Mexican culture they retain, leading to discrepancies in exposure and susceptibility to various stressors (Vega et al. 1998).  Additionally, the migration experience, especially for undocumented immigrants may lead immigrants to face additional stress, weaken their social support systems, and influence their coping strategies (Kung, Castaneda, and Lee 2003).

Past health research studies support the finding that Mexican Americans, when compared to their foreign-born counterparts (immigrants), show poorer health (Vega and Rumbaut 1991).  Although mental health data of undocumented Mexican immigrants are limited, research suggests that they have lower rates and lower risks of psychiatric disorders, including depression, than U.S.-born Mexican Americans (Finch, Kolody, and Vega 2000; Vega et al. 1998).  In a study by Vega and colleagues, their findings suggest that Mexican immigrants have better health profiles than Mexican Americans.  Some suggest that this can be a result of selective migration and protective factors of strong family and cultural ties.  Even with the harsh and horrendous migration journeys some immigrants' experience (Sullivan and Rehm 2005), specifically undocumented immigrants, researchers like Escobar (1998) also argue that the unexpected findings may

be explained by a selection bias explained by the idea that the strongest, most resilient people migrate.  Escobar refers to this selection bias as a "migration of the fittest." Other possible explanations for the better mental health profiles of Mexican immigrants include research explanations such as a lower set of expectations about what constitutes "success" in the United States (Escobar et al. 2000).

This challenges research findings in the fields of psychology and psychiatry that show the damaging psychological effects of migration and the positive psychological effects of acculturation (Escobar 1998).  Yet, research suggests that the longer undocumented Mexican immigrants remain in the United States, the more acculturated they become, which increases the risks of negative health outcomes (Zambrana and Carter-Pokras 2001).  Why does this occur?  Zambrana and Carter-Pokras (2001) argue that the decline of protective factors over time, the effects of poverty and the process of integration into the United States leads immigrants to have negative health outcomes.

Vega et al.'s (1998) research support the pattern that Mexican immigrants are better off than Mexican Americans particularly when it comes to mental health outcomes.  This finding could be troubling to understand given that Mexico is a developing country.  Therefore, Mexico residents do not receive the same opportunities that residents of the United States may receive especially poorer Mexican residents. Despite these disadvantages that Mexican immigrants encounter, they are still better off and show a much better mental health profile than Mexican Americans (Vega et al. 1998).  Contrasting these findings, Cuellar, Bastida, and Braccio (2004) suggest that native-born groups are not significantly different from immigrant groups on measure of

depression, health status, life satisfaction, and self-esteem.  In their study they compared the mental health and well-being of older-aged Mexican immigrants with older aged native-born Mexican Americans in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas.  Their findings allude that the emotional and physical health life course of Mexican immigrants in the U.S. is not linear or as one dimensional, meaning from low to high acculturation, as past literature suggests.  Additionally, they found that immigrants experience more stress than native-born Mexican Americans and were strongly influenced by income, gender, age, and acculturation.

However, this paradox of depression rates between Mexican Americans and undocumented Mexican immigrants should be further studied.  Some notable factors that can be attributed to higher rates of depression among Mexican Americans are the low levels of education, low socio-economic status, and racism experienced in the United States.  People of color in the United States are more likely to live in impoverished neighborhoods and have to cope with urban and financial stress (Portes and Rumbaut 2006).  Research has shown that socioeconomic status and exposure to racism have been correlated with depression and other mental health illnesses like anxiety (Olfson et al. 2000).

**COPING WITH DEPRESSION**

It has been documented in the literature on migration, mental health, and mental disorders that the process of migration entails overwhelming life events which although varying widely in kind and severity, impact and test immigrant's emotional resilience (Portes and Rumbaut 2006).  Migration can produce psychological distress even among

the best prepared, most motivated, and even under the most receptive of circumstances. However, among immigrants that demonstrate a positive drive or hardiness also show that overcoming adversity contributes to an increase in self-confidence (Portes and Rumbaut 2006).

Coping in relation to depression among Mexican Americans is understudied (Kung et al. 2003). Older immigrants who migrate to the United States at an older age tend to undertake more individualistic, direct, planned action in coping, while native-born speak with others about their problems (Mena, Padilla, and Maldonado 1987). Personality also plays a significant role in coping strategies. Some researchers find immigrants to have highly motivating psychological resources such as hardiness, which plays into the argument that migration is self-selective (Vega et al. 1998).

Also, immigrant women may cope with depression through a cultural constellation of cognitions such as behavior that has been labeled "fatalistic". These behaviors refer to feelings of resignation such as *"aguantar," "no pensar," "sobreponerse"* (to endure, not to think, to overcome) as ways of coping with negative feelings. Although a fatalistic behavior can be viewed as an indicator of learned helplessness, which often underlie depression, it is also reasonable that when the locus of one's life is beyond their control, having a fatalistic attitude may represent a healthy realism about what can and cannot be changed (Falicov 1999).

**SOCIAL CAPITAL**

The contexts of reception have a major impact in the opportunities or lack thereof for immigrants in the host-country. If women are isolated in the receiving society and

do not have social networks to alleviate the pressures and stressors of moving, this could negatively impact their mental health. Research that focuses on social networks and immigrant integration highlight the significant reduction of short-term costs of settlement (Hagan 1998). Moreover, as immigrants settle, their networks in the settling community typically provide social capital in alleviating the stress as well as assisting them in their integration process (Browning and Rodriguez 1985). This line of research supports the notion that immigrants who settle in areas with well-established and supportive networks will usually transition more smoothly as opposed to immigrants who enter the United States without any networks.

According to Portes (1998) social capital places its focus on the positive consequences of sociability. The first analysis of social capital was done by Pierre Bourdieu defining it as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition" (as quoted by Portes 1998:3). Portes (1998) defines social capital as "the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures" (p. 6). In viewing the integration of immigrants and the contexts of reception, namely in this case the societal reception of the co-ethnic community, I find the social capital literature to be beneficial in viewing the assistance (e.g., social networks, social support, etc.) among co-ethnics.

In the segmented assimilation theoretical framework ethnic networks are thought of as social capital which plays a role in the integration process of immigrants and their children. Zhou (1997) poses the questions, "How is it possible to ensure that immigrants

and their offspring maintain their cultural values and work habits and learn the skills for socioeconomic advancement?  What enables immigrant families and their children to withstand the leveling pressures from the inner city?" (p. 995).  She argues that the answer to these questions is indicative to the social relations such as how ethnic families are related to one another and how their children are involved in these networks. Furthermore, Zhou states, "The outcomes of adaptation, therefore, depend on how immigrant children fit in their own ethnic community, or in their local environment if such as ethnic community is absent, and how their ethnic community or the local environment fit in the larger American society" (p. 996).

The integration process of immigrant women is highly conditioned by their ability to reconstruct or recreate social networks in the receiving host community (Rogler 1994).  In addition to social capital and social networks, this process inevitably also ties into reciprocity and exchange among both the receiving community and the immigrant community (Menjívar 2000).  This is oftentimes a challenge for undocumented immigrants as they feel that their immigration and low socioeconomic status limits their ability to meet the obligations expected from them (Menjívar 2000).

In connecting this discussion to the mental health literature, research also indicates that the availability to have social support systems in place or social networks in the host community alleviates some of the challenges placed on immigrants entering an unfamiliar community (Fabrega 1969).  As immigrants leave their social support including family, friends, and loved ones, to migrate to the United States, their "loss" is felt for leaving their personal ties, and research supports that some immigrants

expressing this loss are more likely to experience depression (Vega, Kolody, and Valle 1987). However, there remains a challenge that supports epidemiological findings that psychiatric disorders and distress, including depression, are not significantly higher among Mexican immigrants rates compared to the non-immigrant population (Escobar et al. 2000; Vega et al. 1998). I argue the need to examine undocumented status, nativism, and how these factors affect their integration process and symptoms of depression. When considering the anti-immigrant hysteria of today, undocumented immigrant women are even more vulnerable. Therefore, I stress the significance and importance of this line of research.

**CONCLUSION**

Having connected research literatures pertaining to nativism, segmented assimilation theory, Critical Race Theory, gender, and mental health, I will be able to fill the gap in the literature that addresses the significance of undocumented status and nativism in the integration process of Mexican immigrant women. Again, this study addresses the following research questions: 1) How does nativism affect undocumented Mexican immigrant women's mental health, specifically depression? The broader question that I explore in this study is the following: 2) What is the relationship between integration and depression? More specifically: 3) How does integration and undocumented status affect depression? These research questions are critical in understanding depression among Mexican immigrant women. Moreover, these questions aim to address the relationship between nativism and depression in the United

States.  The next chapter discusses the methodology and research design in aiming to

answer these questions.

**CHAPTER III**

**RESEARCH METHODS**

In this chapter I describe the research design and methods employed to address this thesis objective, which is the following: to explore the relationship between nativism and mental health, specifically depression among undocumented Mexican immigrant women in the context of increasing nativism. To address the relationship between nativism and mental health among undocumented Mexican immigrant women, I employed mixed methods: in-depth interviews, the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression scale (CES-D), and the John Henryism Active Coping scale (JHAC). I conducted face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with 30 Mexican immigrant women in Houston, an immigrant gateway city. In this thesis, I focus on data obtained and analyzed from the qualitative portion of the study. This chapter discusses the characteristics of the sample and the strategies used in collecting data for this study.

My research focuses on viewing nativism and mental health through a critical lens in order to illustrate the exploitative relationship between U.S. dominant society and immigrant communities. My personal background, daughter of Mexican immigrants, and knowledge about this particular community informs my research study and influences the access I have with an understudied population. Moreover, I have the access that is often denied to "outsider" researchers (Baca-Zinn 1979; Madison 2005). Because this thesis study aims to understand the subjective experiences of undocumented Mexican immigrant women and how they make sense of their world as a

vulnerable population, I employed a qualitative component to further examine the relationship between nativism, integration, and depression.

This methodology allowed me to understand the complexities behind living in a nativist society as an undocumented woman and how this affects their well-being. The use of in-depth interviews allowed me the flexibility to explore the intensity and breadth of life experiences both as lived in Mexico and in the United States, without confining my participants to pre-determined response options. Additionally, in-depth interviews complimented the two short scales by attempting to understand the why, how, and the social realities that these women have experienced and overcome. Namely, the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression (CES-D) scale was given to participants to measure symptoms of depression. Lastly, the John Henryism Active Coping (JHAC) scale was also given to participants to measure coping mechanisms and hardiness. The scales are mainly used as a preliminary pilot study for a larger research project and results will not be analyzed in this thesis given the small sample size.

Qualitative research was needed in order to fully explore the subjective experiences of undocumented Mexican immigrant women and the relationship between nativism, integration, and depression in their lives. Due to nativism, anti-immigrant sentiment, increased border militarization and surveillance, racism, and increased raids, I hypothesized that undocumented Mexican immigrant women will show symptoms of depression. The qualitative methodology provided the opportunity to get to the real lived experiences of these women by allowing them to speak in their own words to experiences of nativism, racism, depression, integration, and immigration. Through a

qualitative methodology, I am able to further document these women's lives in their own words.  This study unfolded over a two-year period, beginning in August 2008 and ending in May 2010.  Interviews were conducted in July 2009, September 2009, December 2009, and January 2010.

**POSITIONALITY**

It is necessary for researchers to acknowledge their background and positionality as they carry out their research projects (Lincoln 1995; Parker and Lynn 2002).  Positionality is important because it forces researchers to understand and recognize their own power, privileges, and biases (Madison 2005).  Furthermore, it is vital for researchers to begin our research endeavors by first asking ourselves, who we are.  Madison (2005) states: "The experiences in your life, both past and present, and who you are as a unique individual will lead you to certain questions about the world and certain problems about why things are the way they are" (p. 19).  Lincoln (1995) questions qualitative researchers about discussing criteria for quality interpretive research; specifically she discusses the importance of the positionality of the researcher and the community as a way of judging the research study's capacity to meet validity standards (Parker and Lynn 2002).

The matter of subjectivity has also been extensively discussed in qualitative research inquiry (Parker and Lynn 2002).  Madison (2005) suggests that "subjectivity falls within the domain of positionality, but positionality requires researchers to go beyond understanding themselves subjectively" (p. 9).  Peshkin (1988) provides a definition derived from Webster's dictionary as "the quality of an investigator that

affects the results of observational investigation" (p. 17). Moreover, he argues that subjectivity operates throughout the entire research process and therefore, researchers should state and identify their subjectivities throughout the course of their research. He states, "[O]ne's subjectivity is like a garment that cannot be removed. It is insistently present in both the research and the nonresearch aspects our life" (p. 17). CRT advocates for researchers to consider their positionality and subjectivity in qualitative research (Parker and Lynn 2002).

Being aware of my subjectivity helped me remain focused in accomplishing the end result of this research project. My positionality and subjectivity helped shape my research agenda and I continuously reflected on my personal insights that I bring to the academy and my research project. My personal experiences, as a daughter of Mexican immigrants, allowed me to better study this population. Experiencing first-hand many injustices my parents and family encountered in various social institutions, helped me to better understand these women's experiences. Additionally, growing up in a Houston *barrio* provided me the ability to analyze certain situations that perhaps will be looked over by White or privileged researchers. Therefore, having grown up in a *barrio* allows me the ability to read, live, and analyze data in such a way that other researchers and academicians only develop theories and publish. Having both the academic and street knowledge has worked to my benefit in this research endeavor. Moreover, as a second-generation bilingual and bicultural Mexican American woman, I have the sensitivity and the personal knowledge to explore and understand the nuanced experience undocumented Mexican immigrant women live.

**RESEARCH SITE**

I chose to conduct this study in Houston given that it is the fourth largest city and an urban city with a prominent number of Mexican immigrants. Since the 1970s Houston has served as a city with substantial growth of ethnic/racial populations (Rodriguez 1993; 1999). According to the U.S. Census, 42 percent of the people residing in Houston are of Hispanic origin. Additionally, the U.S. Census predicts 644,867 people to be Mexican-origin residents and 567,211 to be foreign-born with 426,170 from Latin America (U.S. Census Bureau 2006-2008 American Community Survey). Also, as previously mentioned, being that I am a Houstonian I also conducted this research based on my knowledge and connection to the community.

**DATA COLLECTION**

Thirty Mexican immigrant women from different neighborhoods in Houston were asked to participate in face-to-face, in-depth, semi-structured interviews. As a native Houstonian, I relied on family networks and my own knowledge of the communities to facilitate access to my population. Through my established connections I gathered a snowball sample. In addition to snowball sampling, I recruited participants through purposive sampling, a nonrandom method used to recruit participants with specific characteristics in mind. Specifically, using my personal knowledge and family networks, I began recruitment by focusing on ethnic enclaves or *barrios* where many immigrant women reside in the Houston area. Women, who agreed to participate in the study, eventually led me to other interviewees, who in turn, led me to others as well. By using this snowball sampling technique, I was able to expand variability in the sampling

design. In order to get a more complete representation of these women's experiences within the context of adjusting to life in the United States, I also used purposive sampling to recruit participants who had specific characteristics such as women who migrated clandestinely to the United States.

**THE INTERVIEWS**

I chose to conduct individual interviews as the primary method of data collection because of my interest in learning and writing about women's experiences and perspectives on their lives as undocumented Mexican immigrants in the United States. Additionally, most mental health studies are quantitative studies; therefore, this study sociologically examines research questions using a qualitative approach or methodology. I selected face-to-face interviews to gain in-depth information on women's life trajectories and to, thereby, obtaining rich contextual information. Face-to-face interviews also helped in putting the participants at ease and thus facilitated their sharing of experiences. Given the vulnerability of my participants, a qualitative method is most appropriate in locating and getting tough questions answered. Moreover, given the limited amount of studies on the undocumented population, especially quantitative studies, qualitative methodologies provide a research design in which researchers can collect detailed narratives about sensitive topics. The information gathered shed light both on the contexts of individual life histories as well as on the social and cultural contexts of their contemporary life circumstances in Houston.

My interviews lasted between 1 to 4 hours and were conducted at the participants' preference such as homes, restaurants, or at a public library. First,

participants were given an information sheet with a description or scope of the project, length of the interview, guarantee of anonymity, benefits or risks of the study, contact information, etc. (View Appendix A). Once participants agreed to participate, the interview began with demographic questions such as age, time in the U.S., year of migration, marital status, children (born in the U.S. or in Mexico), employment, education, etc. (View Appendix B).

Following the demographic questions, the interview began with an interview guide (view Appendix C) that focused on questions that asked about their migration experience and family relations. Questions were asked about their integration experience in the United States that allowed me to get a sense of anti-immigrant sentiment/nativism or xenophobic attitudes which relate to discrimination/racism and how they handled these situations. Questions were also asked about their views on depression and their coping mechanisms, i.e. support groups or networks they maintain and who they turn to for assistance or guidance when feeling down, i.e. family.

The interview concluded with the opportunity to allow participants to reflect back on any part of the interview or address questions that were not asked in the interview that they believe are pertinent to the study. I also asked about their current feelings related to the economic crisis, immigration reform, and how these issues affect their current lives. In addition, I asked about their future plans such as those of returning to Mexico or plans of staying in the United States. Lastly, participants were asked to complete the Center for Epidemiologic Studies-Depression scale (CES-D) (short version) and the John Henryism Active Coping scale.

The CES-D is the most commonly used measure for depression because it is easily administered (Finch et al. 2000), has high validity and reliability and is easily accessible to the public (Radloff 1977). The CES-D is a self-report 20-item scale that measures depressive symptomatology during the period one-week prior to when the instrument was administered. Responses to each question range from 0-3 and the total scores range from 0-60. The interview ended with the completion of the John Henryism Active Coping (JHAC) scale which measures hardiness or coping mechanisms. The JHAC is a 12-item Likert scale known as the John Henryism Scale for Active Coping (James 1994). These items emphasize mental and physical vigor, a commitment to hard work, and a single-minded determination to succeed. Responses are scored from completely true (score = 5) to completely false (score = 1), with affirmative answers scoring high John Henryism. Total scores can range between 12 (low) to 60 (high). However, this portion of the study is more of a preliminary pilot to a larger project that I may incorporate for my dissertation research study.

Once the interview concluded, participants were given a $20.00 cash incentive for their willingness to participate in my study. Studies have shown that providing incentives to research participants actually improves response rates without compromising the quality of the data or the integrity of the research (Singer et al. 1999). With verbal consent by research participants, the interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Interviews were conducted in Spanish, transcribed verbatim in Spanish, and analyzed in Spanish. Quotes that I have used to elucidate my research findings have been translated to English and then back to Spanish. All research participants agreed to

be recorded and consequently transcribed.

Using both the interviews and measurement scales worked to fully understand the participant's experiences with depression. The importance of having conducted in-depth interviews with participants was to reflect both cultural content and social context of mental health problems that they may have encountered. Interview questions were designed to generate detailed narratives on women's life histories. Therefore, questions were open-ended and semi-structured. By using a semi-structured interview approach, it entailed developing a series of key topics and questions to be covered in all of the interviews. However, the wording and order of the questions followed individual women's preferred narrative style. This approach allowed my participants to speak on the same general topics but provided me the flexibility to probe and expand discussions as necessary, while enabling new themes to emerge. Throughout the entire interview, participants were able to speak openly about their life experiences answering open-ended questions.

**THE SAMPLE**

The sample of this study includes 30 Mexican immigrant women. My participants' ages ranged between 23 and 64. My study was open to all Mexican-origin women, 18 years and older. My sample consists of nineteen women who are currently undocumented, two women who are in limbo or in the process of "fixing" their papers, and nine women who were once undocumented but are now documented via marrying a naturalized U.S. citizen or who were granted residency through amnesty. Also, the forms of entry into the United States varied across my participants. For example, fifteen

women entered the United States clandestinely either crossing the river, the desert, or using false documentation (View Table 1 as Appendix D). The remaining fifteen participants entered the U.S. with some form of permit, mainly tourist visas. It is critical to note that the women who were able to obtain a legal way of entering the U.S. were from border states such as Coahuila, Tamaulipas, and Chihuahua. Out of the women who entered the U.S. with a tourist visa most are now considered undocumented immigrants.

The women who were once undocumented and are now documented, were able to share their experiences retrospectively on what living as an undocumented person meant for them as well as what being documented in the United States means to them. Moreover, my sample provides differences in how these women entered the United States either with legal documentation such as tourist visas from those who entered clandestinely. I also asked questions about their children, I was interested in learning more about mixed status families, or families that have both undocumented and documented family members (View Table 2 as Appendix E).

The interviews tapped into the contexts of reception and the different challenges undocumented women face in their integration process. These differences are vital to note because when researchers write about undocumented immigrants, it is crucial to disentangle the complexities in their experiences and not simply lump undocumented immigrants into one category. Similarly to the contexts of reception in which immigrants find themselves in, distinguishing between modes of entry can also play a role in the integration process and mental health well-being of my participants (Portes

and Rumbaut 2006).

I also asked my respondents questions about what Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) refers to as the typology of family immigration, which describes the migration patterns of women as family stage migration, family unit migration, and/or independent migration (View Table 3 as Appendix F). Family stage migration refers to migration that occurs in phases such as husbands migrating before their wives and children. Family unit migration describes families in which both parents and children migrate concurrently (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). Independent migration refers to women who migrate independently to the United States or who were single at the time of migration. The women who fall into the independent migration typology initiate their migration themselves and in the United States formed their own families by marrying and having children. This is also important and significant in understanding the social networks or support groups women have in the United States. In my sample, there were a total of nine women that fit under the definition of family stage migration, fourteen that fit the family unit migration model, and seven that fit the independent model.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

In analyzing the data obtained from in-depth interviews and fieldnotes, I engaged in a multi-step analytical process that integrated procedures recommended by various authors (Buroway et al. 1991; Fetterman 1998; Glaser and Strauss 1999). I began analysis as the data were being collected by recording, after each interview, my insights on the key emerging themes as well as my personal reflections on the research process. Data collection and analysis were done simultaneously throughout the research process.

Once the interviews were transcribed verbatim, I engaged in a systematic process of analysis with the goal of demarcating a set of common themes and patterns from the women's narratives. I began this systematic process with the first set of interviews that I had conducted and continued until all the interviews were analyzed.

To describe common themes across the interviews, I conducted careful and detailed readings of transcriptions and fieldnotes to gain a better understanding of the range of information contained in the interviews. Through these initial readings, I also developed a coding system (Strauss and Corbin 1998). The coding categories were informed by both the research questions proposed on the onset of the study as well as the careful and detailed readings of the interview transcriptions and fieldnotes. These coding categories were refined or improved as data analysis progressed, including the addition, subtraction, or revision of codes in order to reflect the content of the interviews and fieldnotes. This coding scheme made it possible to conduct a systematic review of the qualitative data and helped me organize them into analytical categories.

By developing a coding scheme, I was able to point out certain clusters that appeared in both transcriptions and fieldnotes more than once. Recurring themes or categorizations are evident in the data because they were shared realities for more than a single participant. Using the coding scheme, I coded all interview transcriptions and fieldnotes by assigning each data segment a code. There were times in which one data segment was related to more than one code so it was assigned multiple codes. Once the major codes were assigned, I re-read and analyzed in more detail the quotes in the major codes and identified sub-themes. Additionally, I paid particular attention to both the

commonalities across interviews as well as those that might have been discussed in more detail in fewer interviews. I continued this process until all data within each theme were interpreted. This process helped me reach an interpretation that reflected both the "macro" level of description as well as the nuances within each theme.

For each code category, I examined data for the different types of migration status separately and then compared the results from one status to the other. Throughout the analytical process, I also wrote memos of the insights derived from each step of data analysis, with documentation from the data illustrating such analytical insights. Memo-writing has been documented and recommended by qualitative researchers given that it assists researchers with data analysis and helps identify and accurately define patterns arising from the data (Charmaz 2001).

I also used a theory-driven approach known as the extended case method to analyze my data. The extended case method technique recognizes that researchers cannot always remain objective and instead it focuses on inter-subjectivity. Moreover, the extended case method as developed by Burawoy and colleagues (1991) offers a methodological technique in order to better examine social relationships. Burawoy reminds researchers that the utilization of existing theory provides the fundamental resource for familiarizing oneself to the field site, identifying the "anomalies," internal oppositions," and "theoretical gaps or silences" that motivate inquiry, only to then be redeveloped or "rebuilt" to explain these matters (Burawoy 1998). Burawoy outlines this process in the following way:

> We begin by trying to lay out as coherently as possible what we expect to find in our site before entry. When our expectations are violated – when we discover what we didn't anticipate – we then turn to existing bodies of academic theory that might cast light on our anomaly… the shortcoming of the theory becomes grounds for a reconstruction that locates the social situation in its historically specific context of determination.

The extended case method technique attempts to elaborate the effects of the "macro" on the "micro." More specifically, it requires researchers to specify a particular feature of the bigger picture or situation that requires explanation in reference to particular forces external to itself (Burawoy et al. 1991). Therefore, researchers decide on what is particularly interesting or surprising in their study, i.e. the anomalies. Researchers that use the extended case method begin by stating what they expect to find in their site before entry. Then if expectations are different from what was predicted, researchers turn to the academic theories that may help to explain the situation. The main focus of the extended case method is that it focuses on what theory fails to explain. Hence, the limitations of the theory serve as grounds for reconstruction.

Through the extended case method technique, I was able to understand already existing theories about my research questions before actually going into the field. Once in the field then I was able to reconstruct those preexisting theories based on my study with Mexican-origin immigrant women. I adopt a similar approach in this thesis given that I am interested in extending the segmented assimilation theoretical framework. Specifically, I am interested in the explanations and experiences of undocumented Mexican immigrant women as they live in a nativist society. In this study, I analyzed undocumented Mexican immigrant women's perceptions of nativism, their integration

process, and how this may relate to depression.  I did this not to develop a general theory about their perceptions and experiences but instead to better theorize how structural barriers enable or constrain the collective views that this group asserts.

This method was also useful in finding anomalies within the data that were inconsistent with the corresponding theoretical lens – in this case segmented assimilation theory.  I am interested in extending the segmented assimilation theoretical framework to consider 1) legal or migration status; 2) further explore the concepts of race, racism, and nativism, as these apply to immigrants and their children; and 3) move beyond simply the identification of segments in which immigrants are integrating into and to incorporate the social injustices these women face in the United States and how this affects their integration process and mental health.

I focus on the contexts of reception, namely undocumented status and a negative societal reception context as seen in the co-ethnic community and nativist sentiment in the host-society, and question how these factors affect the mental health outcomes (depression symptoms) of undocumented Mexican immigrant women.  I am interested in looking beyond what segment my participants fall into but instead question why and how these women are subjugated or oppressed given their documentation status which greatly limits their opportunity for upward social mobility.  The best method of studying this understudied population is via interviews because through this qualitative approach, I am able to get at the detailed experiences of the social realities that undocumented Mexican immigrant women encounter throughout their integration process.

I have to point out that while this research focuses on Mexican immigrant women

from one city and the respondents interviewed were not randomly selected, the methodology employed permits a detailed understanding of how these women describe their experiences living in a nativist society and if and how this relates to depression. Therefore, while these findings may not be identical to the dynamics occurring in other places, they nevertheless provide significant and important insight into the complexities of living as undocumented immigrants dealing with many structural barriers. Regardless of the limitations, this research is timely, not only because this marginalized group of mixed-status immigrants endures discrimination and stress often ranging from individual incidences, to racist organizations, to governmental enforcement policies. Thus, my contribution will be to bring to light the impact these anti-immigrant behaviors have on Mexican mixed-status immigrant women and how this ultimately impacts their integration process and mental health well-being.

In Chapter IV, I present the results from this analytical process, using the words of the women to represent their agency and strength in tackling the challenges inherent in their immigrant journeys and in their integration process as well as how this impacts their mental health well-being. I translated the quotes presented in the following chapter from Spanish to English. All of the names in this thesis have been changed and pseudonyms have been applied in order to ensure anonymity of respondents.

## CHAPTER IV

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

*I feel sadness and fear at the same time, I'm always with that fear that something may happen like if the police stops me or that immigration will be there and I won't be able to make it home or if I'm not with my kids… I'm scared… I'll always be with that fear, sadness, and frustration… you become frustrated because you can't do anything… like you can't fix your papers to be here legally* (Zenaida, undocumented, 23 years old)

*There is a lot of solitude, a lot of loneliness, and a lot of nostalgia being here when you don't have papers, you live an absence, you miss out on many of your family's important life moments, your family from Mexico… if some of your family members from Mexico die, you can't go because you can't come back. There are holidays in which you long to be with them but you have to make the sacrifice*
(Sonia, undocumented, 28 years old)

*Work opportunities are very limited and you have to keep pedaling and pedaling to find something… I think that's why we get depressed and we lock ourselves in thinking we can't, we can't, and we can't, and you fall…*
(Carla, undocumented, 29 years old)

These quotes capture the lived experiences and realities of the undocumented women from my sample. As previously stated, the women in my sample are all foreign-born Mexicans, most of whom are currently undocumented, while a few others are in limbo (undocumented but trying to legalize their status), or documented (but were once undocumented). These findings focus on my respondents' undocumented experiences in the United States. Although a few of the women in my study are now documented, I asked questions retrospectively on their experiences as undocumented immigrants.

My findings reveal three main aspects of the undocumented experience that affect my respondents' mental health. I describe these aspects as factors or barriers that

ultimately exist due to their undocumented status. They are the following: 1) Fear; 2) Family Fragmentation; and 3) Economic Uncertainty. I discuss the relationship between undocumented status and depression specifically describing detailed narratives of these three factors and their association to symptoms of depression among my participants. I end this section with a discussion of the overall salience of undocumented status for my participants and how this status limits their opportunities for successfully integrating into society. Moreover, I show how an undocumented status affects their mental health, specifically depression symptoms.

In addressing the first factor, I found that my respondents shared sentiments of fearing the police, immigration officials, or of being separated from their families due to deportations. They feared being apprehended or questioned by police or immigration officials. This constant fear contributed to feelings such as living in the shadows, imprisoned, secluded, limited, and hidden. These experiences contributed to symptoms of depression particularly because my respondents felt they did not have the security or safety from being deported or separated from their families.

My respondents also described feelings of anguish due to the separation or fragmentation of family, loved ones, and their social support group from Mexico. When speaking about the fragmented transnational families, they expressed distress for not being able to travel back and forth between Mexico and the United States due to their undocumented status. Respondents again expressed feeling limited and secluded for not being able to travel not even within the United States to visit other family members as some have moved to new immigrant destinations.

In addressing the third factor, I found that my respondents reported economic uncertainty. My respondents described the economic limitations and exploitation they or their husband's experienced. They also attributed this economic uncertainty to their undocumented status. They expressed how by being undocumented immigrants, they often had to put up with unfair treatment and exploitation such as being underpaid or not paid at all, being verbally degraded, and being overworked. Respondents expressed that they have to deal with these situations because they are undocumented immigrants and show how this status limits their chances in finding better job opportunities. This economic uncertainty which is related to being undocumented directly affects symptoms of depression as described by my respondents.

These findings have major implications for the mental health of immigrants particularly in examining the ways in which documentation status impacts integration. More specifically, these findings reveal the social significance of undocumented status and how the unequal social structure of the United States prevents the upward integration of these women. These findings show the salience of undocumented status and how the barriers associated with being undocumented in the United States may contribute to symptoms of depression.

This chapter is split into two major sections titled: A) The American Context of Reception among Undocumented Mexican Women; and B) Mexican Immigrant Women's Perceptions of Intra-Ethnic Conflict. These sections provide the major themes I found in my thesis study that address the integration process of my respondents given their undocumented status and how this impacts symptoms of depression. This chapter

ends with a summary of the findings along with recommendations for future research derived from conducting this study.

## THE AMERICAN CONTEXT OF RECEPTION AND DEPRESSION AMONG UNDOCUMENTED MEXICAN WOMEN

Negative contexts of reception, more specifically, one in which undocumented status creates conditions for my respondents to feel or express fear and oppression has an impact on their mental health. My respondents experienced limitations or barriers to upward mobility based on their documentation status, and I show how this may relate to symptoms of depression. There are three major factors or barriers that my respondents described due to being undocumented immigrants: 1) Fear; 2) Family Fragmentation; and 3) Economic Uncertainty. These three factors seem to contribute to symptoms of depression among my participants. Ultimately, being undocumented limits opportunities for Mexican women to successfully integrate into the United States and negatively affects their mental health, specifically by generating symptoms of depression.

The contexts of reception greatly matter in determining the integration process of immigrants. The U.S. contexts of reception shape the structure of opportunities or the structural barriers for immigrant groups. "Contexts of reception" is a fairly used concept that refers to a group of factors affecting an immigrant group's mode of incorporation into the host society (Portes and Rumbaut 2006). The most relevant contexts of reception are defined by "1) the policies of the receiving government; 2) the conditions of the host labor market; and 3) the characteristics of their own ethnic communities" (Portes and Rumbaut 2006:92-93). My thesis focuses on two aspects of the contexts of

reception, namely immigration policy (undocumented status) and the nativist societal reception of the co-ethnic community. I argue that given my respondent's undocumented status, they are a group that is even more marginalized and therefore face structural barriers in their integration process in the United States.

Past studies using segmented assimilation theory have focused on the "success stories" of authorized immigrants who were sought out by the United States government or who were welcomed and eligible for governmental assistance. These immigrants were greatly affected and due to the positive contexts of reception, they were able to integrate with the assistance of governmental policies. Such studies have focused on the success of Korean, Cuban, Chinese, and other groups who have been able to reach economic parity with Whites in the United States (Portes and Bach 1985; Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Zhou 1997). My thesis adds to the gap in the literature which specifically focuses on Mexican undocumented women and the structural barriers they face living in the United States based on their undocumented status. Specifically, my thesis focuses on an immigrant group that is highly oppressed and vulnerable especially in the current anti-immigrant climate. I focus on a marginalized group that lacks "legal" documentation status which limits their integration process and affects their mental health outcomes.

Governments and their policies play a major role in who comes and how they will integrate into the United States. Especially, for documented or authorized immigration, the government has control of who they seek and want in the United States. Undocumented immigration occurs when the government does not provide opportunities

for all people to enter the United States. Historically, immigration policies and laws have been restrictive, exclusionary, and racist in nature (Johnson 1998; Ngai 2004). Given these restrictive policies, not all people who desire to enter the United States "legally" have the option to do so, therefore, opting out for entering the United States clandestinely. Government policies are important and represent the outcomes of integration by determining the resources available such as economic opportunities, legal status, and governmental assistance (Portes and Rumbaut 2006). However, the undocumented persons face structural barriers which limit their opportunities for upward mobility.

**LIVING AS AN UNDOCUMENTED MEXICAN IMMIGRANT WOMAN**

In centering on the governmental policies, I focus on reporting the experiences of undocumented Mexican immigrant women. Given that some of my respondents are currently documented or in limbo waiting to "fix" their papers, I asked them to retrospectively describe their feelings of what it was like living as an undocumented person in the United States. Ana, an undocumented immigrant from Nuevo León answered the following:

> *you feel like you are wasting your time being here and without getting anywhere, like even though you are doing well, like you are succeeding and getting somewhere, it may not be what you anticipated, you didn't anticipate that there will be so many barriers to get to where you want to be, so sometimes you confine yourself and I'm telling you it's all based on not having papers, you can't go out, you can't enjoy, you can't travel, for example, you can't go to Miami to visit Disneyworld with your kids because you're scared to be picked up and sent back to your country* (Ana, undocumented, 30 years old)

Ana's quote depicts the frustration of what undocumented immigrants deal with on a daily basis. Through her quote one senses the desperation and frustration she feels

being in the United States, a place in which many immigrants believe is the land of

opportunity but once in the United States, they realize it is not the beautiful portrait that

is painted in the minds of many immigrants who migrate.  This is particularly true for

undocumented immigrants who do not receive governmental support in their integration

process.  Ana describes the barriers she faces and relates these barriers to being an

undocumented immigrant.  Her quote depicts an urgency expressed by many of my

participants as they described what living as an undocumented immigrant entails.

My findings show that undocumented women lived their lives with many

structural barriers due to their undocumented status.  These barriers greatly limited or

placed handicaps to opportunities in moving up the social ladder.  My respondents

reported different factors associated with depression and undocumented status.  Again,

these factors include: 1) Fear; 2) Family Fragmentation; and 3) Economic Uncertainty.

Respondents reported living their lives in constant fear of being apprehended by

immigration or police officials and being deported.  Participants also discussed the

inability to travel to visit family and loved ones in Mexico.  They spoke repeatedly about

the confinement of not visiting their families due to not being able to enter the United

States legally.  They also spoke about traveling within the state or the country for the

fear of being stopped, detained, and deported.  My respondents also described the

limited opportunities for job opportunities or exploitative work conditions for

themselves or their husbands.

These three factors were common themes that emerged from my data.  There

were times in which more than one theme was described when answering the same

question.  There were also times in which the same themes would emerge more than once throughout the interview.  Overall, I found that undocumented status was prevalent and salient in how they conceptualized the barriers they faced in integrating to society in the United States.  They related these barriers to feelings of depression.  Therefore, I found that undocumented status contributed to the three factors described above and that these factors also contributed to depressive symptoms as felt by my respondents.  Before delving into these three factors, I provide one narrative on how my respondents conceptualized depression.

**DEPRESSION AS CONCEPTUALIZED BY MY PARTICIPANTS**

Depression is a serious mental illness that should be treated and research should be conducted looking at the relationship between contexts of reception, namely being undocumented, and how this status sets barriers for women.  Scholarly research should focus on how undocumented immigrants of color enter a racialized society and how due to this racialized society they will be exposed to discrimination based on the color of their skin and social standing such as being Mexican, women, and undocumented.  In making these research connections, I found that my respondents reported feeling depressed due to the limitations imposed on them given their undocumented status in the United States.  When I asked respondents how they defined depression and if they have ever felt depressed living in the United States, Melissa, an undocumented immigrant from the state of Nuevo León stated the following:

*[Depression] is a harmful sickness. One thinks that it is not bad, but depression can even kill you. It takes a toll on you because it's a mental condition. It depresses you to the point where you don't eat. There's a lot of depression among undocumented immigrants. One can get depressed easily… I have felt depressed… You feel like crying all the time. You feel like everything is in vain. Why struggle so much, either way everything will stay there. Either way we will all die sooner or later without taking anything to our graves. When you are depressed ugly thoughts go through your head.* (Melissa, undocumented, 38 years old)

Melissa entered the United States with her husband and children with a tourist visa but they overstayed their visas, becoming undocumented immigrants. In the above quote, Melissa discusses how depression is a dangerous illness that can lead to death or to suicidal thoughts. She described how she has felt depressed in the past putting emphasis on her undocumented status. The ways in which Melissa describes how she feels as if everything she does is in vain and how everyone dies without taking anything to their graves is similar to learned helplessness and fatalistic attitudes. Several of my respondents reported feeling depressed based on the barriers that they faced given their undocumented status.

Most of my respondent's conceptualized depression as a mood mental health disorder mainly reporting feeling depressed due to external factors. They attributed these factors to be present given their undocumented status. They expressed their depression as an external locus of control or in other words having external factors such as documentation status impacting or limiting their opportunities in the United States. Contrary to these findings, a few people spoke about depression as an internal locus of control, referring to depression as a negative manner of thinking about life. In this internal locus of control, a few respondents viewed depression to be "all in their head"

and therefore, not a "real" mental health disorder.  This is an area for future research

which takes into account the ways in which immigrants view or conceptualize

depression and how this can lead to not seeking treatment.

**Fear**

Living with constant fear is a daily reality for undocumented immigrants.

Respondents spoke about a fear of being apprehended by immigration or police officials,

they described feeling closed in, limited, or imprisoned.  They described the raids, mass

deportations, road blocks in immigrant communities, and the militarization of the border

enforced by the U.S. government.  For example, Liliana, a 28 years old woman that

migrated to the United States with a tourist visa, overstayed it and was then considered

an undocumented immigrant but obtained legal residency via marrying a third-

generation Mexican American, provides an example of living with fear.  When I asked

her to describe retrospectively how she felt when she was undocumented she stated the

following:

> *You don't go to many places, like to other states because you think you'll get
> stopped.  In other words, you stay in the same circle, doing the same thing. It's
> sadder, you feel like you're in prison but bigger because you drive to go buy
> groceries, you take the kids to school and you bring them back but you continue
> to feel like you don't belong here* (Liliana, documented, 36 years old)

Liliana describes retrospectively what it was like living as an undocumented immigrant.

She describes feelings of isolation and seclusion for not being able to live worry-free.

She relates her experiences of living in the United States as an undocumented immigrant

to living in a prison describing how she must remain within the same circle, such as

going to buy groceries and taking her children to and from school.  She also describes

feeling as if she is not wanted in the United States. Later in her interview, she vocalized the existence and presence of anti-immigrant views particularly against Mexican immigrants.

Liliana's description along with other respondents' similar sentiments reminds me of a song titled *"La Jaula de Oro"* by *Los Tigeres del Norte* (The Tigers of the North). *Los Tigeres del Norte,* a norteño genre group represents the voice of the working-class communities in Mexico and of Latina/o immigrants in the United States (Ragland 2009). "*La Jaula de Oro*" is about an undocumented Mexican immigrant man who has been in the United States for 10 years. In this song, the United States is portrayed as a great but confining nation, a "golden cage." This metaphor relates to feeling confined in a golden cage which remains a prison particularly for the undocumented population. This song is a personification of the ways in which my respondents described what it meant to live in the United States as an undocumented immigrant.

*La Jaula de Oro* is a song that best captures the experiences of Mexican immigrants and what it means to be undocumented in the United States, raising a family in a place that is glorified as the land of opportunity. This song deals with many issues that the undocumented population faces such as raising a family in a place that is glorified as the land of opportunity. It also touches on the barriers or limitations undocumented immigrants endure such as living continuously with fear. This song even touches on issues related to integration such as what some 1.5 and second-generation children encounter. For example, growing up confused and hyper-assimilating to the

United States customs, i.e. not wanting to speak Spanish to their parents, feelings of rejecting their Mexican identity, etc. are among the themes which this song exemplifies. *Los Tigeres del Norte's* songs have a sociological meaning.

Going further in describing the intensity of constant fear among immigrants is Deyanira from Nuevo León, she states, *"you're fearful, you feel scared like if the police stop you, like lately even the police officers can ask for people's social security."* I have to mention that my interviews were conducted before the Senate Bill 1070 was passed in Arizona. SB 1070 makes it a state crime to be in Arizona without federal authorization. Moreover, this law also makes it a crime to assist or help undocumented immigrants. This is an unjust law that threatens to agitate anti-immigrant sentiments and also violates the constitutional rights of human beings.

However, legislation such as section 287(g) of the Immigration and Nationality Act had already been in existence in some states and was a hot topic in Houston. Since July 20, 2008, the Harris County Sheriff's Office has agreed to enforce the 287(g) program in Houston (http://www.ice.gov/partners/287g/Section287_g.htm). Section 287(g) allows local law enforcement officials to question the immigration status of the community working in conjunction with Immigration Customs Enforcement agencies. The implications of legislative policies such as these are discomforting for the Latina/o community especially for the undocumented population.

Legislation like these demonstrates intolerance and racism. Furthermore, legislations like these will only increase and legitimize racial profiling. It is evident that those that appear to be of Latina/o descent will unavoidably be stopped and questioned

for their citizenship or residency status.  As reminiscent in Deyanira's quote, the fear of
being apprehended by local law enforcement is fierce, this will lead to augmented
tension and distrust between the undocumented immigrant community and law
enforcement.

The fear of being stopped and questioned by police or immigration officials was
a major theme.  My respondents continuously reported feeling fear from police and
immigration officials who have conducted raids, road blocks, and deportations in the
Houston area.  Zenaida, an undocumented immigrant from Guanajuato, stated that living
as an undocumented immigrant is living *"with fear, fear that they'll get you in a road
block, for instance that they'll be outside the apartment complex asking for your papers,
for your social security, one feels like you are always hiding, like you always live with
fear of going anywhere."*  Zenaida actually lived through that experience when she was
driving to her apartment.  She described the logistics and location of the road block:

> *… There were about 4 cop cars on the corner… I was coming through here and
> the police was right here (as she drew me the logistics of the situation) and then
> the cars came this way and the cops signaled them to go over where they were at,
> another car and I were signaled to keep going… yes, I have been so close to
> those road blocks and yes I am extremely scared because I don't have a license, I
> only have my consulate ID card… I was so scared and frightened because I had
> my 3 children with me, I felt so scared and said I will never drive through that
> route, I will never go through there anymore because there are too many cops*
> (Zenaida, undocumented, 23 years old)

This fear of being stopped by police officers was prevalent and definitely
expressed numerous times by my participants.  Therefore, we see how legislation like
the 287(g) will only heighten tension between the local police enforcement officials and
the undocumented population.  This has major implications such as that of the

underreporting of crimes. These legislations may prevent undocumented immigrants to calling police officials for the fear of being deported. For example, Zenaida had been a victim of domestic violence and she shared with me that she never reported her husband even though he had hit her numerous times before. She went on to tell me that she believes her neighbor called law enforcement officials and that she never sought help from them due to the fear of being deported. Her husband had been deported to Mexico three weeks prior to the date we conducted the interview. Zenaida was struggling in deciding what would be the best outcome for her and her children given her undocumented status, being a single mother, and having only limited family support in the United States. Given these circumstances, she was contemplating returning to Mexico. This is only one example of plenty more that show how restrictive policies can heighten fear among the undocumented population and the local police.

Going along with the sentiment of being fearful of having their undocumented status discovered, Daniela states the following:

> *you feel secure [with papers] but since I don't have papers you have to put up with things because the least thing you want is to be noticed, you don't want this country to find out that you are here, you don't want anyone to find out it's like they say we live in the shadows, we live in the shadows so that no one, not police officers, not immigration, not the government, not anyone should know that we do not have papers* (Daniela, undocumented, 31 years old)

Again the theme of feeling isolated and constrained reappears. Daniela makes the comparison to living in the shadows or in confinement. She describes living life the least possible way of being noticed given the fear of having their migration undocumented status disclosed. She also makes a connection of having to put up with certain things for the fear of being found out. This type of seclusion could lead to worse

problems particularly if they are victims of crime. Eugenia, an undocumented

immigrant from the state of Coahuila also described being undocumented as living in the

shadows. She states the following:

> *Living in the shadows is living with fear… living in like they say in the shadows and darkness… It means you cannot live freely… you can't even go out freely to the stores, to run errands, because you are always fearful that they will deport you* (Eugenia, 39 years old)

Again, we see how prevalent the fear of being deported is and what it means to

live in the United States as an undocumented person. This constant fear has been

intensified especially in the post 9/11 enforcement era. What it means to be an

undocumented immigrant now, in a negative, anti-immigrant context of reception has

major implications for all undocumented immigrants. These implications relate to their

mental health and overall health in the United States. Additionally, these implications

play a major role in the integration process of immigrants and their children. These

feelings of constant hiding and fear can have detrimental health consequences. Living

with constant fear and internalizing social injustices without being able to speak up or

challenge them is similar to the concept of racial battle fatigue which can have severe

health impacts (Smith, Allen, and Danley 2007).

William Smith and colleagues (2007) introduce the concept of "racial battle

fatigue." It addresses "the physiological and psychological strain exacted on racially

marginalized groups and the amount of energy lost dedicated to coping with racial

microaggressions and racism" (Smith et al. 2007:555). People of color continue to face

discrimination and find ways to cope and survive in such an environment. Moreover,

these types of feelings as described in the above quotes impact the ways in which

immigrants integrate into U.S. society. These quotes show the fear which undocumented immigrants face daily, a fear of being deported and what the consequences would mean if they were deported. Given that many of my respondents had mixed-status families (i.e., they have U.S.-born children as well as undocumented children), deportation signifies the possibility of family fragmentation.

### Family Fragmentation

Many undocumented immigrants live transnational lives, leaving their families, friends, and social support behind. The fragmentation of the family often causes undocumented immigrants to express agony being alone in a foreign country, or so far away from home. Melissa expresses this sentiment in her discussion of why undocumented immigrants experience depression:

> *For the simple fact of being far. For the simple fact of not being able to visit your family in Mexico. One goes through a lot of things here. You go through hard times here. Sometimes you just cry and cry. You get depressed without wanting to do anything. People go through these kinds of things. You can get sick and you can even die from depression.* (Melissa, undocumented, 38 years old)

Melissa talked about being far away from her family and not having their support. The limitation of being able to travel to Mexico due to her undocumented status contributes to feelings of depression. Social support is critical for all groups, it decreases symptoms of depression and through social capital and support immigrants may have better ways of integrating to the United States society.

As respondents spoke about the fragmentation of families or the separation between them and their family and loves ones, they described the inability of being able to travel to and from Mexico given their documentation status. This limitation of

traveling was not only expressed as traveling to Mexico but also within the United States to visit with other family members in other states. In the following quote Ana describes the sadness she feels for not being able to visit her family in Mexico:

> *anger for not qualifying to be in this country legally, sadness for not being able to travel to my country, of not being able to visit my family, not all of my family could come visit me and it gives you depression, depression kicks in sometimes because you ask yourself is it really worth it* (Ana, undocumented, 30 years old)

Through this excerpt, Ana describes the anger she feels for not being able to be visit her family due to her undocumented status. She describes how there are times she becomes depressed and questions if it is worth putting up with all the challenges living in the United States. Ana believes that the barriers and limitations she has come across in the United States have been due to her undocumented status because she feels confined and is well aware of the barriers for the undocumented population. Similarly, Melissa stated the following in answering what depressed her the most as an undocumented immigrant:

> *I have a lot of family in Mexico that I have not seen since I've been here. My husband also has his family there and he has not been able to see them either… I believe that's what depresses you the most. Just thinking what if they get sick and if you have to leave. It's that constant thinking and you are always praying to God to take care of our families and to take care of us too, in order to calm us down a bit. That affects you a lot. The constant thinking… our parents are elderly… and thinking what if they get sick. What if you have to leave… and that depresses you.* (Melissa, undocumented, 38 years old)

Again the fragmentation of families is evident in the previous quote. Families can last many years without seeing each other physically, face-to-face, given their undocumented status. Melissa speaks about the ways in which she copes with the anxiety of not being able to visit her elderly parents. This is a common reality among undocumented

immigrants not being able to visit their families in Mexico given their status. Many go

many years without seeing each other. This is a constant worry and strain for them that

directly affect their mental health and symptoms of depression.

### Economic Uncertainty

Economic uncertainty has always existed for undocumented immigrants.

However, today it is even more prevalent given the immigrant backlash accompanied by

the economic downturn or harsh economic times. These tough times put additional

strains on immigrants given that they already face unfair barriers. Respondents reported

that being undocumented contributed to economic uncertainty in the forms of job

opportunities and exploitation of their labor. Respondents described instances in which

they were not paid for their labor, were underpaid, or were mistreated verbally while at

work. Many women described the limitations imposed on them or their husband's job

opportunity outcomes given their undocumented status. For instance, Daniela, an

undocumented immigrant from Nuevo León stated:

> *When I got here I got really depressed but I didn't seek out any help and then it worsened and worsened until about 3 years ago or 4 years ago, it hit me again very hard to the degree that I didn't even carry myself the same way, I didn't even want to talk, eat, I couldn't sleep, I had to go to the doctor and there I got medication for depression. I felt that I was going to have an attack, I couldn't breathe from all the panic... it was depression, well that's what they told me because my husband was not working, depression because I wanted to go back to Mexico and just thinking how everything here is based on money, if you don't have money you are a nobody, the depression really kicked in.* (Daniela, undocumented, 31 years old).

Daniela's quote not only shows the economic uncertainty theme but it also illustrates the

family fragmentation theme. Her quote also shows the importance of getting treated for

depression at an early stage rather than later. This shows how depression if left

untreated can get worse as time progresses.  She describes several depressive symptoms

such as loss of appetite, loss of social activities, and insomnia.  She also describes

somatic symptoms such as not being able to breathe from the panic she was feeling.  She

attributes these feelings to her husband's unemployment and for wanting to return to

Mexico.  She makes another point in stating that the United States is a country based on

economic power where those with money are rewarded and those without are considered

"nobody's."

This next quote by Ana offers an interesting extension to Daniela's quote.  Ana

described how during the housing and economic crisis her family lost their house.  As I

interviewed Ana she discussed a situation which her family experienced in relation to

losing their house.  She stated the following about it:

> *there are many opportunities here more so than in Mexico… I'm devastated with the situation we are going through, we bought a house and we had to lose it, those are things that get you depressed because those situations are not dependent on you… losing our house was very depressing, we were paying it for 3 years, a new house and then because we didn't have any papers we couldn't refinance it… in those 3 years, not even once did we make a late payment, always on time… that's why I say that it's not on you, it's all based on being undocumented, my husband continued working hard, with a lot of drive and desire but that was not sufficient… and now we are here (referring to her present home, a trailer), it was very difficult for me (her eyes get teary) because being here in the United States means being away from your country and it's a sacrifice* (Ana, undocumented, 30 years old)

This quote demonstrates the economic uncertainty which many undocumented

immigrants struggle with on a daily basis.  She acknowledges the opportunities the

United States has compared to Mexico.  In her interview she described how due to being

undocumented, she and her husband could not refinance the house; therefore, they had to

lose it.  This experience has been depressing for her entire family.  As she described this

situation she contributes it to being undocumented. Therefore, one can have the drive, desire, and motivation to work hard, but if you are undocumented even this positive attitude may only get you so far. These frustrations only illustrate how critical immigration reform is for many immigrant communities.

Respondents also reported on the limitations of job opportunities available for undocumented immigrants especially during tough economic hard times. Sandra stated the following:

> *When the time comes to search for a job and one and another do not hire them [undocumented immigrants], like during this time that's really [economically] bad. I've seen, in this job, the faces of depression and desolation that the undocumented immigrants make when they come here and say "are you hiring even if it's cleaning the building" and in every person that has come, I'll put myself in their shoes, each person that comes through, I've felt their pain because I remember how I used to go around asking for jobs when I didn't have papers. I have friends that tell me about it too, "I've already looked all down the highway until the other freeway, and nothing." And depression kicks in for those people that they even ask for job without a desire"* (Sandra, documented, 33 years old)

Sandra describes how undocumented immigrants would go to her ice cream service job seeking employment. Although Sandra is now documented she empathizes with the undocumented immigrant population because she was once undocumented and clearly understands their difficult circumstances. I also had respondents that reported the exploitation they or their husbands experienced at work. They did not feel that they could stand up to these injustices due to their undocumented status. For example, Daniela states the following about her husband:

*My husband would work and they would not pay him. Well, since he didn't have papers or anything. One week they wouldn't pay him or he would work an entire week for $100... The United States is a trap, it's a double-edged weapon, it wasn't the American Dream that we thought was there just by crossing the border* (Daniela, undocumented, 31 years old).

Daniela's quote shows the exploitation and marginalization that many undocumented immigrants experience in the United States. She describes the exploitation her husband endured at work, such as not being paid or being under paid for his labor. This is a very common experience among many undocumented immigrant workers. Given their undocumented status they felt they were not able to stand up for their rights. Daniela makes another comment in the above quote describing the United States as a double-edged weapon and not the American dream she bought into before migrating to the United States. She described the United States as a trap where people make it sound like it is the land of opportunity and that if one works hard they can achieve their dreams. She discussed in her interview that the American dream ideal is not the case for undocumented immigrants due to the limitations they face. This theme came up several times and women described that although one may have the desire or *"ganas"* to achieve, they were faced with structural barriers due to their undocumented status that limited their opportunities.

Respondents also reported how their undocumented status affects their job opportunity outcomes. Not only did they feel limited in their job options but they also stated how due to their undocumented status they were not able to move up within their jobs. While most of my respondents were housewives, many spoke about their husbands jobs and how due to their husband's undocumented status, these men were not able to

move up even if they had the capacity. They also talked about the exploitation and mistreatment that some undocumented immigrants experience such as that of not being paid, being over-worked, and being humiliated, etc. The following quote by Ana states the following:

> *I think that being undocumented puts a lot of barriers for my goals and it's frustrating, it's frustrating that not having papers does not permit you to go out and enjoy yourself, to educate yourself, to work, the simple fact of going to school, working, and going out to enjoy yourself are things that for me are extremely important that are indicative of my mental health. I believe that directly negatively impacts my mental health, in other words it's not good not having documents… having documents is the foundation of getting ahead in this country, there are [Mexican Americans] with documents, that were born here and are not interested not even in the most minimal way to get ahead in life but in my case, getting ahead is very important* (Ana, undocumented, 30 years old).

Ana speaks about the limitations or barriers she and her husband face due to being undocumented. She states that going out, work, and education are indicative of living a healthy life. She describes how being undocumented limits her opportunities to live a stress-free life and in the United States having documents is the foundation of getting ahead. She also makes comments about people who were born in the United States and who do not take advantage of their citizenship to get ahead in life.

This quote provides insight in transitioning to the second section of this chapter dealing with intra-ethnic conflict. In Ana's interview she expressed a view that was also felt by many of my respondents, mainly the issue of citizenship among U.S.-born Mexican Americans and the wastefulness of the opportunities and advantages by being citizens and by the English language attainment. These views that undocumented immigrants have towards Mexican Americans will be further examined in the following

section.  Before moving on to the next section, I summarize the findings of this first

section.

These findings show the importance of viewing undocumented status among the

contexts of reception and how being an undocumented immigrant in the United States

has negative repercussions on the integration process.   These findings show the social

realities in which undocumented immigrants learn to survive in their everyday lives.

Therefore, in analyzing their social position as described by Portes and Rumbaut (2006),

Mexican immigrant groups and their children are more likely to downward assimilate

living in a secondary society--one commonly composed of drugs, violence, and low

socio economic status.  I have shown how and why my participants are faced with

structural barriers which limit their life outcomes.  Regardless, of the desire, drive, or

"*ganas,*" my participants showed that they are faced with barriers such as undocumented

status which greatly limits their upward mobility.  This huge impediment definitely plays

a major role in their integration process and mental health well-being or lack thereof.

Instead of simply looking at what segment these women fall into, these quotes show how

these women are subjugated and oppressed.  These findings also show how salient

undocumented status is in that it even truncates positive buffers that Mexican

immigrants have such as their drive and desire to get ahead.  These positive buffers may

be truncated by undocumented status and an anti-immigrant climate which condones

exclusionary policies.

These are critical findings because I also found that among the documented

women in my sample, they spoke more openly about systemic or institutional racism and

injustices. They were able to focus on the systemic social problems such as systemic racism. This shows how undocumented women view their documentation status as more salient than their racial/ethnic identity. This is an important finding that contributes to the importance and further research on undocumented immigration. Specifically, scholarly research needs to address documentation status given that it is an important characteristic for the integration process, adaptation, and mental health outcomes of immigrants. I argue for an extension and critical analysis of undocumented versus documented status in the segmented assimilation theoretical framework. This is even more important for immigrants of color who are already facing discrimination based on being a person of color but this is exacerbated by being undocumented. These women's lives are restricted, comparatively speaking to other people of color, as a result of their immigration status. Moreover, it is also critical to view the racialization process immigrants experience in the United States.

**MEXICAN IMMIGRANT WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF INTRA-ETHNIC CONFLICT**

In this section, I focus on the second aspect of the contexts of reception, namely the negative societal reception among the co-ethnic community. My findings revealed perceptions of intra-ethnic as described by Mexican immigrant women about the ways in which Mexican Americans did not support their integration process. I use quotes from the interviews to demonstrate how my participants reported feeling discrimination by Mexican American people. They described this as discrimination by their "own" people or as *"mi propia raza, mi propia gente."* First, I provide a brief introduction of what

intra-ethnic conflict entails and how it pertains to the immigration literature. Next, I provide quotes depicting the experiences as reported by my participants of intra-ethnic conflict. Specifically, I discuss how my respondents stated Mexican Americans are more discriminatory towards them. I discuss possible factors that may be associated or influencing intra-ethnic conflict namely: 1) Assumptions and Expectations of Reciprocity; 2) Competition and the Crab Mentality Metaphor; and 3) Separation or Distancing. I end this section by discussing the broader impacts of intra-ethnic conflict given the demographic changes of the United States.

Extensive literature has been written on the importance of social networks, social support, ethnic cohesiveness, and co-ethnic support and how these forms of support influence or facilitate the integration process of newly arrived immigrants (Portes 1998; Portes and Bach 1985; Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Massey 1986; Zhou 1997). Likewise, the mental health literature supports research findings that demonstrate the importance and significance of having strong social support systems (especially familial support) in place especially in times when people are experiencing symptoms of depression (Fabrega 1969; Vega et al. 1987; Vega et al. 1991). Given the significance of strong ethnic ties, social support groups, and ethnic cohesiveness and their attribution to serve as buffers to depression, it is critical to further explore this area. I explore how social context, specifically a lack of co-ethnic support and cohesiveness, influences or contributes to symptoms of depression among my respondents.

The social context of the host community is critical in understanding immigrants' community relationships and resources they will be exposed to in the host community.

Tight ethnic communities can assist in the integration process with several resources and social capital (Portes 1998; Zhou and Bankston 1994). In addition to race and socioeconomic status of immigrants, social capital is equally important in facilitating the integration process. The social capital entrenched in the family and ethnic community can assist with the integration process into the new host community (Hagan 1998; Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Zhou 1997). According to Portes (1998), social capital can be described as "the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures" (p. 6). Research findings suggest that immigrant children from strong families (especially two-parent households) or from families connected with tight social networks show better psychological conditions, stronger educational aspirations, and higher academic achievement records (Portes 1995; Portes and Schauffler 1994; Rumbaut 1994; 1996; Suarez-Orozco 1989; Zhou and Bankston 1994; Zhou 1997).

Group solidarity among members of racial and ethnic minorities, such as Mexican immigrant groups and Mexican Americans, can be beneficial in confronting, challenging, and alleviating racism and other structural barriers imposed on them by society (Ochoa 2004). Research focusing on second-generation Mexican Americans show that the networks of social relations such as how individual families are related to one another in the ethnic community and how immigrant children are involved in these networks are essential to explore for the family's integration. The networks of social relations involve shared obligations, social supports, and social controls. These networks of social relations explain the entrepreneurship of Korean Americans

specifically in understanding how they are able to obtain low-interest loans requesting little collateral from other Korean Americans to start a business (Zhou 1997). Similarly, this explains how Chinese American students receive approval and support in after-school Chinese language classes (Zhou 1997). On the contrary, social control prevails when members within their own racial/ethnic group receive disapproval or even exclusion from co-ethnics (Zhou 1997). Therefore, the integration process highly depends on how strong or weak immigrants' ethnic communities are and how they fit in the larger United States society, namely how they are viewed by the dominant group.

Contrary to the beliefs of classical assimilation theorists, ethnic identity and perseveration plays a positive role in immigrants and their children's integration process (Portes and Rumbaut 2006). Strong, supportive, co-ethnic ties also play a positive role in their integration process. The perception of intra-ethnic conflict is a common theme among my respondents regardless of immigration status. Although the relationships between intra-ethnic conflict and depression symptoms are not as clear-cut as that between legal status and depression, my evidence suggests that Mexican immigrants are preoccupied with and concerned about the lack of ethnic cohesion between Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants. Because the common concern is expressed again and again by Mexican immigrant women, it is reasonable to conclude that the perception of intra-ethnic conflict influences their mental health. As previously stated, social support, social networks, and social capital are critical in the integration process of immigrants. Given that my findings reveal perceptions of intra-ethnic conflict, it is vital

to explore where and how intra-ethnic conflict is created and re-created among Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrant groups.

Intra-ethnic conflict should be further studied considering how it plays a role in the mental health outcomes and integration process of Mexican-origin women. Segmented assimilation theorists advocate and understand the significance of social capital immigrants and their families bring with them. However, in attempting to understand where and how intra-ethnic conflict occurs, segmented assimilation theory does not allow me to critically answer how or where intra-ethnic conflict stems from. Therefore I turn to the critical race theory literature.

A major shortcoming in the immigration literature is that it does not critically analyze race and racism or does not explain how these experiences impact the integration process of immigrants (Romero 2008). In particular, segmented assimilation theory fails to analyze the racialization process of Mexican immigrants. The segmented assimilation theoretical framework does not allow me to critically explain the situations which cause conflict among U.S.-born and Mexican immigrant women. Moreover, segmented assimilation theory does not take into account the complexities and heterogeneity among Mexican American and Mexican immigrant groups. These are some major shortcomings of the segmented assimilation theoretical framework.

I bring in literature from Latina/o critical race studies as well as the work of Joe Feagin in order to fill this gap in the segmented assimilation theoretical framework. Using a critical race framework I show how a racist society may contribute to the antagonism between Mexican origin groups as they attempt to integrate into the United

States, by socializing these groups to adopt and reproduce the dominant society's racist social structure.

This finding of perceptions of intra-ethnic conflict can be contributing or exacerbating symptoms of depression at a more indirect level. Specifically, my respondents reported feelings of discrimination by their "own" people, an expression they described as *"mi propia raza, mi propia gente"* or "my own race, my own people." In analyzing their experiences, I found three possible contributions to explain my respondents' perceptions of intra-ethnic conflict. They are: 1) assumptions and expectations of reciprocity; 2) competition and the crab mentality metaphor; and 3) separation or distancing between Mexican American (U.S.-born) and Mexican immigrants (foreign-born).

In addressing the first factor, I found that my respondents had assumptions or expectations, prior to migrating, of reciprocity between Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants. Moreover, they felt that Mexican Americans would treat them equally given that they share Mexican ancestry. When these expectations were unmet, my respondents were even more upset given the shared ancestry than if another racial/ethnic group discriminated against them. Respondent's spoke of instances in which they felt Mexican Americans should be more likely to help them such as when going to institutions like schools, hospitals, or other institutions, specifically, when they needed someone to translate for them. They spoke about sharing the same history and culture and showed how it was even more upsetting that the discrimination would come

from "our own people," "*mi propia gente.*" These expectations/assumptions of reciprocity were not upheld according to my respondents' responses.

In addressing the second factor, I found that my respondents described a "crabs in a bucket" mentality. I attribute these thoughts to influencing intra-ethnic conflict. This type of individualistic attitude such as that expressed in the crab mentality metaphor stems from racial ideologies that only fan and intensifies competitiveness among both U.S.-born Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants. The crab mentality metaphor refers to a mentality in which people of a particular group do not support each other as one moves up the social ladder and instead attempt to bring that person down, similar to crabs in a bucket.

Both these factors as reported by my participants show how they perceived co-ethnic conflict among Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants. In addition, the third factor shows how immigrants' express the idea that U.S.-born Mexicans' distance themselves from immigrants through their discourse, especially undocumented immigrants. As Joe Feagin (2006) suggests, racism may play a role in this distancing process. Because of long-standing racial ideologies that are embedded in American institutions, U.S.-born Mexicans may act in ways to express sentiments that attempt to distinguish themselves from their more racialized foreign-born counterparts (Gutierrez 1995; Menchaca 1995; Ochoa 2004).

The demographics of the United States have changed drastically and Latina/os are the fastest growing ethnic/racial minority (Sáenz 2004). These socio-demographic realities have caused some to refer to this situation as a Latinoization of America

(Applewhite and Torres 2004). Among these Latina/o groups, Mexicans are the largest group that contributes to these demographic changes. Ample research has been conducted examining how immigration has contributed to intergroup conflict. For example, the conflict between African Americans and Latinos has been well documented (Johnson 1998; Mindiola, Niemann, and Rodriguez 2002; Rodriguez 1996). Other research has focused on explaining the experiences of Mexican Americans as compared to African Americans and Whites (Johnson and Oliver 1989; Hagan and Rodriguez 1992). This traditional Black-White paradigm of race relations has not been effective in examining the differences in nativity or legal status among the Mexican-origin population (Ochoa 2004).

Perhaps the reasoning behind the research limitations on Mexican American and Mexican immigrant groups is because the United States has recently acknowledged the distinction between U.S. residents of Mexican descent and Mexican immigrants (Gutierrez 1995). While intergroup conflict has received scholarly attention, intragroup conflict between immigrants from Mexico and the U.S.-born Mexican American community has generally gone ignored (Gutierrez 1995; Johnson 1998; Menchaca 1995; Ochoa 2004). Tension and competition between these two groups is nearly unavoidable given the unequal distribution of legal rights, specifically the mixed documentation status of groups. In considering the tensions between both groups, it is critical to examine how negative contexts of reception impact their treatment and integration in the United States.

The three major findings namely: 1) Assumptions and expectations of Reciprocity; 2) Competition and the Crab Mentality Metaphor; and 3) Separation or Distancing all demonstrate intra-ethnic conflict as perceived by the women in my sample.  I provide quotes from the interviews to elucidate these three factors and how they could be contributing or exacerbating to feelings of despair, frustration, and depressive symptoms.  In viewing this conflict at a more macro level, I turn to the critical race literature to allow me to explain where, how, and why this conflict could be occurring.

**"MY OWN PEOPLE DISCRIMINATE AGAINST ME"**

My respondents perceived Mexican Americans to be more discriminatory against them.  They expressed this as my own people discriminate against me.  Out of the 30 interviews I conducted, they all perceived Mexican Americans to be more discriminatory against them than any other racial/ethnic group.  This was expressed in several social contexts such as in their children's schools, in governmental agencies, in the doctor visits, in the stores, or in their jobs or husbands place of employment.  For instance, Doña Dolores, shares the following with me:

> *It's all within your same race, in our own Hispanic race, and they are the ones that discriminate the most against those that do not have papers… You see this everywhere.  Even within the police, even Hispanic police officers, you prefer that an American or African American will come.  A Japanese or Chinese or whatever to come.  But oh man those Hispanics.  It's very rare like 1 in 100 that you'll be treated fairly by a Hispanic officer.  One that knows how to respect your rights.  Are they angry that we are in the United States?* (Doña Dolores, documented, 64 years old)

This theme of believing that discrimination came from within their racial/ethnic group was prevalent throughout my interviews.  I found my respondents expressed

instances in which they felt tension existed between U.S.-born Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants.  In the above quote, Doña Dolores describes how she feels Hispanics discriminate more towards undocumented immigrants.  Doña Dolores, a documented immigrant from San Luis Potosí, offered an example that is different from those offered by undocumented immigrants in the previous section.  Specifically, in the previous section I showed quotes from undocumented immigrant women who live with fear of being stopped or questioned by police officials.  Given that Doña Dolores is documented, she does not relate that fear towards police officers and instead focuses on discrimination by Hispanic officers against Hispanics.  She makes the comments of preferring to encounter an African American, Japanese, Chinese, or White officer over encountering a Hispanic officer.  She emphasizes this sentiment further by describing that 1 in 100 Hispanic officers treat other Hispanics well, making her point that it is unusual and highly unlikely to find a Hispanic officer that will treat Hispanics correctly.

Zenaida also expressed views on intra-ethnic conflict.  She recounts her experience working as a *domestica* for a cleaning crew in a suburb of Houston.  She described the situation in which she along with many other women with similar backgrounds such as low socioeconomic status and undocumented immigrant status, endured discrimination, humiliation, and exploitation by the owner of the cleaning company, a Mexican American woman.  She describes working in nice homes in the suburbs, mainly White-owned homes, working from 6 AM until 6 PM, Monday through Friday, making $280 every 2 weeks.  The situation gets worse as she narrates how the owner of the company constantly screamed at them.  She recounts that if they broke

anything from the house they were cleaning; it would be taken out of their checks automatically.  What is worse is that the owner would keep the "broken" items and sell them in garage sales; she was even known to sell them among her employees.  Zenaida recalls several women getting off from work and heading home in tears because of the pressure and denigrating ways their boss spoke to them.  The employees tolerated this negative work environment given their economic pressures.  She recalls:

> *... many women wanted to tell her something but the majority of the women who worked there were women that came from broken families or single headed households, are undocumented, or are in a really bad economic situations and so they continue going putting up with it* (Zenaida, undocumented, 23 years old)
> As we continued our conversation, Zenaida spoke about the exploitation she

endured working for a Mexican American woman and how she did not last there very long due to the discrimination.  She described other women's situation and justified the reasons in which they never confronted their boss.  Mainly, their economic need and undocumented status kept them working in those conditions without confronting their boss.  This is an example of an exploitative experience in which a U.S.-born Mexican American abused verbally, emotionally, and overworked women who were in dire need to make money even if it was not much and in the toughest conditions.  Zenaida was startled about how a Mexican American woman with family that comes from Monterrey, Nuevo León could be so abusive to their own people.

These experiences show how my respondents perceived discrimination to be occurring from their own people meaning from Mexican-origin, namely Mexican American people.  They often described how they did not expect to be discriminated by their own people.  They often expressed feelings of frustration and sadness to see how

some Mexican American people they have encountered discriminate against them. Although they did not make the direct link to depression, I argue that intra-ethnic conflict can also be detrimental to their mental health; specifically it may be associated with depression at a more indirect level.

### Assumptions and Expectations of Reciprocity

In addition to the frustration and sadness my respondents reported due to their perceptions of Mexican Americans discriminating against them, they also shared their assumptions or expectations of reciprocity between Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrant groups. Prior to migrating to the United States, they assumed Mexican Americans would support Mexican immigrants. Some of their expectations prior to migrating to the United States were among believing there would be tight, knit, ethnic enclaves of Mexicans. They assumed Mexican Americans would assist them in their integration process. When their expectations were not fulfilled, this contributed to feelings of alienation and marginalization. The majority of my respondents settled in Mexican American communities or in communities of color where African American and Mexicans-origin people reside. Anti-immigrant sentiment and nativism may be contributing to the conflict among Mexican-origin groups. This leads to reciprocal hostility and may weaken collective solidarity.

Similar to Zenaida's startled position in trying to find answers to why Mexican American women would mistreat Mexican immigrant women, I found other women sharing the same sentiment. My respondents' social capital described by virtue of their membership specifically the sharing of Mexican ancestry, they expected or assumed

Mexican Americans would treat them fairly and extend assistance in their integration

process. When their expectations of reciprocity were not met, Mexican immigrant

women often expressed feelings of surprise, sadness, and loss of hope which all

contribute to symptoms of depression. For instance, Sonia shares this sentiment:

> *Why are they [Mexican Americans] like that? They should be the ones to help us more because perhaps they came the same way or they've also suffered a bit… I mean they are my own people and when it's someone that's from our own race… If a Hispanic treats you unjustly, of course it's going to hurt and upset you more than if they were African American… it hurts you more when it's your own people, a Hispanic, one that's from here. Why? Because you tell yourself, look we are from the same place, Mexico"* (Sonia, undocumented, 28 years old)

In Sonia's quote, she also questions why Mexican Americans discriminate

against Mexican immigrants and ultimately why Mexican Americans do not help

Mexican immigrants. She described how as co-ethnics, they should be solidified given

their shared ancestry. She also describes that when Hispanics discriminate against you,

it is more upsetting than if African Americans discriminate against them. Her quote

speaks to the assumptions and expectations of reciprocity. She assumed and expected

Mexican Americans to treat her justly given their racial/ethnic background or as she

described it "my own people." These expectations of reciprocity and assistance rather

than conflict among both groups were prevalent in my research. Daniela also shares

these sentiments of conflict within the same racial/ethnic group. She states the

following:

> *…because within our own Mexican people, we… we are harsher with each other (nos damos en la madre) nobody is a good person, it's rare for someone to help you out… In Mexico they [family or friends that live in the United States] show off that here in the United States, you can sweep with dollars and it's a lie, you get here and it's not true...* (Daniela, undocumented, 31 years old)

Daniela also shows this notion of a lack of reciprocity. She describes how Mexican-origin people are harsher with each other and do not assist each other. This lack of reciprocity Daniela experienced deals with a lack of support among co-ethnic Mexicans. Overall, these quotes show how these women perceived Mexican Americans as not supporting them in their integration process in their communities. These experiences challenged their assumptions or expectations of Mexican American people and affected the reciprocity between these groups which contributed to conflict. One reason that these women perceived conflict between Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants is due to the competitiveness for resources and status as well as the crab mentality metaphor.

**Competition and Crab Mentality Metaphor**

My respondents spoke about instances in which they experienced their own people not working together for a common goal. They described this phenomenon as everlasting across different contexts i.e. work, church, or in the community. This description was referred to the crab mentality metaphor meaning when one person is doing well, the other people could not stand it and instead of supporting the person doing well, they attempt to bring that person down. This crab mentality stems from intra-ethnic conflict in which these groups are viewed as competition. Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants are in direct conflict and competition with each other as evident in the labor market. Perhaps Mexican Americans feel they are in competition for limited resources such as jobs and other opportunities. This competition contributes to conflict among co-ethnics contributing to a lack of ethnic cohesion which may

ultimately affect the mental health outcomes such as depression symptoms of Mexican immigrants. The following quote by Deyanira describes an example of the crab mentality metaphor:

> It's Mexicans against Mexicans, instead of helping each other, we are like crabs [in a bucket]. When we see one going up, we pull them, come down here. We don't want our own Mexicans to better themselves. On the other hand, the Chinese, the Chinese they support each other. They are always supporting themselves… the Hindus, they support themselves as a racial group. To give it your all so you can better yourself. And the Mexicans, we are envious, too egoists in this aspect. You see that one is bettering themselves and they can't even find what to do to pull them down (Deyanira, in limbo, 41 years old)

Deyanira speaks about the conflict among Mexicans against Mexicans regardless of citizenship or if they are U.S.-born, she describes it as experiences that exist within all Mexicans. She names other ethnic/racial groups like the Chinese and Hindus contrasting their experiences to the crab mentality metaphor which she describes as Mexicans adopting. In describing the Chinese and Hindus, she states how they support each other implying they have strong social capital and support. She describes the "crab mentality metaphor" as a mentality that is perpetuated by an envious and egoistic attitude of wanting to be better than all others.

Deyanira's quote shows how she buys into an ideology that supports a cultural deficiency argument. Specifically, that it is within the Mexican culture that does not allow this group to excel and succeed. A "crab in a bucket" mentality causes conflict among co-ethnics and may contribute to a distancing or separation between groups. This type of mentality limits opportunities of group cohesiveness. Moreover, this type of mentality contributes to intra-ethnic conflict further limiting the social capital that each group brings with them. Again, a lack of strong co-ethnic networks may contribute to

symptoms of depression among my respondents especially if they buy into the "crab in a bucket" mentality.

### Separation and Distancing

A separation or distancing among U.S.-born Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants may be another contributor to intra-ethnic conflict. For instance, some U.S.-born Mexican Americans may attempt to distance or separate themselves from being labeled or identified as a Mexican immigrant. Especially, in an era of anti-immigrant sentiment and nativism which for some people the label or identity of Mexican immigrant is often associated with an "undocumented" status regardless of citizenship. This type of separation and distancing among these groups will further put them apart, therefore, increasing intra-ethnic conflict. Co-ethnic conflict can be detrimental for immigrants and their children in integrating to the United States. This type of separation and distancing may only exacerbate feelings of depression among my respondents because it will limit their social networks.

Zenaida recalls another experience dealing with another Mexican American woman discriminating against her. This incident can be explained as a distancing or separating among the Mexican American woman and Zenaida. Again, as previously stated, Zenaida has been the victim of domestic violence and her husband has been deported to Mexico. In a desperate economic situation in which she was living, Zenaida sought assistance from the Health and Human Service office. She described the situation:

*I went to the Health and Human Services office to apply for food stamps… I was there from 8 in the morning until 1 PM and they never helped me, I was just waiting, so I left pretty upset… as I was walking towards my car with my children… a woman that works there, she was Hispanic, was leaving in her car, she stops and screams out "hey, fucking bitch, are you tired of sitting your ass down?!" I was shocked… I kept walking wondering if she was speaking to me, then she screams again, "Yes, I'm talking to you!!" I turn around and she tells me "Fucking disgraceful, wetback, bitch, what the fuck are you doing here, get the fuck out of here, go back to your country… leave with your bastard kids to Mexico, stupid wetback!!* (Zenaida, undocumented, 23 years old)

Zenaida went on to describe how this employee should not have screamed at her in that manner given that she was a customer in dire need. Zenaida continued her way putting her children in the car and left the place crying regretting that she did not complain about the situation. She described how situations like these make her think twice about returning to Mexico. Situations like these were common among my respondents. Some described racial epithets in which are highly motivated by racism and nativist ideologies. In this experience, we see how Mexican Americans are also buying into an anti-immigrant ideology of viewing immigrants as foreign. In this example, we also see the racial and derogatory vocabulary that is often used by some anti-immigrant Mexican American groups.

The next quote by Ana also describes an experience in which distancing or separation could be taking place, specifically retelling her experience with a Mexican American Border Patrol agent, Ana states the following:

*when we were coming back from Mexico, we were detained for over 3 hours, they were interrogating us, they didn't physically mistreat us… but psychologically, it was very difficult, till this day, I still have nightmares because they would tell us, "if this is not your country then why did you come here if you know you were not supposed to work…" and it was even a Hispanic woman, her parents were Mexican, you ask yourself, how is it that another person like you that her parents also, most likely came as undocumented immigrants to work and*

*progress in this country, how is it possible for them to mistreat us in that form… I still have nightmares, I dream that I'm in between the United States and Mexico and I'm telling myself why did I go back if my children are in the United States* (Ana, undocumented, 30 years old)

Ana's experience with a border patrol agent continues to impact her life today. Given that Ana entered the United States with a tourist visa, she returned to Mexico because her mother was very ill. She was detained by the border patrol and her tourist visa was denied. This meant that she could not enter the United States with documentation. Her children were in the United States so she had to re-enter clandestinely. She describes the experience as psychologically traumatic. What perplexed her the most was that the Border Patrol agent was Mexican American. This Mexican American agent also told her some nativist comments such as questioning why Ana came to a country that is not hers. These sentiments of viewing this country as belonging to a certain group are rooted in nativist thinking where one group feels they are native and view the other group as foreign. These comments also show a distancing or separation among the Mexican American woman and Ana's immigrant status. Another example of separation or distancing is the following as described by Melissa:

> *They [U.S.-born Mexican Americans] always feel they are more, they are embarrassed of Mexico. Like you see their color, you see their parents are from Mexico and maybe they were born here, right but they still have roots in Mexico and they are embarrassed… Where do they come from? Where do we come from? They forget their roots, their culture to adopt this one… I teach my son that was born here, you are Mexican American you are not American* (Melissa, undocumented, 38 years old)

Melissa shares a common perception among my participants, specifically stating Mexican Americans view themselves as being better than immigrants. My respondents believed that Mexican Americans are embarrassed of having Mexican ancestry and that

they lose their culture to adopt the United States culture. This type of distancing and

separation among both Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants could be attributed

to a racialization process in which Mexican Americans may feel they are superior to

immigrant groups and therefore, distance or separate themselves from being labeled or

identified as Mexican immigrants. The following quote shows another example in

which there is a separation or distancing between Mexican American (U.S.-born) and

Mexican immigrant (Mexican born), Clara states:

> *Sometimes it's even within your own race, another Latina/o will tell you, like one
> time they caught me crossing over, the second time. All big time Latino, the
> border patrol officer. "No speak Spanish." Why are you ashamed of your
> culture? If you are dark-skinned and with dark hair. I don't know... they come
> from the same place and it's like they are stepping all over their fellow country
> women/men. The gringo (White person), well probably Whites have another
> culture or it's true we are not from here. They are from here, but one comes as
> an immigrant searching for a better future for our kids* (Clara, undocumented, 30
> years old)

Clara also describes a situation in which she was apprehended by a Latino Border

Patrol agent who said he did not speak Spanish. She asks herself why he was ashamed

of his culture and then attributed his dark phenotype and dark hair to being Latino. She

also describes how it is a sort of slap in the face for Mexicans given that they come from

the same place. Clara describes a Latino border patrol agent that does not speak Spanish

and she related his inability to speaking Spanish as a form of distancing or

embarrassment towards the Mexican culture. This is another theme which came up in

my interviews.

In this quote, we also saw how she attributed being Latino to his dark skin and

dark hair and thought that especially since he looked Latino, he should be able to speak

the Spanish language.  In other words, she also viewed him racially based on the color of his skin and attributed him to have certain characteristics given that he "looked" Latino. As she discusses Whites attitudes, she agrees with their ideologies and does not challenge them.  Specifically, she states that they have a different culture and sees them as native to the United States.  Clara internalizes these anti-immigrant views and believes that Whites are native to the United States, therefore, not challenging them at all.

Looking back in history particularly in the ways in which the United States Census categorized and taught census takers, up until the 1980s, to categorize Mexican Americans as "white" unless their phenotype were dark-skin or resembled indigenous features, is an example of how government agencies racialized people of color (O'Brien 2008).  Today, people remain placing categories or racial labels on Mexican-origin peoples, particularly if they resemble dark-skin pigmentation or indigenous features. Therefore, skin tone and physical features remain to be prevalent markers for Mexican-origin people to receive access to privileges in ways that have not been similar to African Americans (O'Brien 2008).  Similarly, in my interviews, I found how European features such as light skin or color eyes determine access to privilege.

Research supports findings that Latinos and Asian Americans feel more favorable towards Whites than African Americans (Murguia and Foreman 2003).  This is evident in examining the higher intermarriage rates with both Latina/os and Asian Americans with Whites than with African Americans (O'Brien 2008).  The favoring of Whites and not challenging them are perhaps contributed by misconceptions that Whites

are native to the United States.  These views are highly embedded in many of my

participants' conceptions of Whites.  Furthermore, these views are internalized and

accepted by my respondents.  This form of false consciousness was common among my

participants.

Another form of distancing or separation that resonated among my respondents

was that of the perception of Mexican Americans not wanting to speak Spanish to them.

My respondents claimed the Mexican Americans they encountered spoke Spanish.  The

language barrier came up again and again and my respondents attributed not wanting to

speak Spanish as being ashamed of their culture, not willing to help immigrants, or as a

form differentiating themselves from an immigrant group.

### *Language*

Many of my participants reported interactions with Latina/o, Hispanics, or

Mexican Americans who did not want to speak Spanish.  My participants claimed that

the people they encountered did indeed speak Spanish because they heard them speaking

it previously but refused to speak it to them.  These women described how angry and

frustrated they become with their "own people" who do not want to speak Spanish.

Many immigrants do not understand the reasons in which some Latina/o,

Hispanic, or Mexican Americans do not speak the Spanish language.  For instance, in

previous generations, Spanish was a language reprimanded therefore, previous

generations bought into an ideology that speaking Spanish would not help their children

integrate well into U.S. society.  This contributed to parents not teaching their children

Spanish.  These parents also did not want their children to experience the discrimination

they felt while growing up. Therefore, due to nativist and racist ideals there has been a dying out of the Spanish language.

Anti-immigrant sentiment has also been expressed in terms of language. For instance, the English Only movement is entrenched with anti-immigrant views specially targeting Latina/o immigrants (Huber et al. 2008). Legislations like Proposition 227 and the debate on English as a second language are highly debatable topics by conservatives and anti-immigrant groups. These types of anti-immigrant policies stem from fear or threat that the United States will be a nation divided linguistically (Huber et al. 2008). My respondents attributed Mexican Americans not being proud of their heritage given that they did not speak Spanish. Many claimed that the Mexican Americans they encountered did indeed speak Spanish but did not do so when speaking directly to them. The following quotes show this sentiment:

> *they crash too much, from the traditions, the culture. The Chicano hardly likes the Hispanic. Like he/she carries Hispanic in the blood but they are ashamed of them because they don't even want to speak Spanish* (Deyanira, in limbo, 41 years old)
> *medical help is difficult to obtain because of the language and all of the paper work. There's a lot of discrimination and one day I went to the clinic and heard a Hispanic worker who spoke Spanish. And when I went up to her for help, she told me that she didn't know Spanish. I was so infuriated that I confronted her and told her how was it possible that she doesn't know the language when she understood what I was saying. I heard her speak Spanish clearly and she didn't want to talk to me in Spanish, this angered me so much… They think they are better than others, and they are the ones who discriminate the most. Even in school, where for example, there was a secretary that spoke Spanish, but she spoke it with such anger as if she did not want to speak to me in Spanish* (Milagros, undocumented, 28 years old)

The division or distancing among the Mexican-origin group perpetuates the status quo and a racist ideology which is highly institutionalized and systemic in the

United States.   Instead of fighting or competing for resources, both Mexican American and Mexican Americans should join forces in resisting racist and nativist ideologies that plague the social institutions of the United States.  Through these quotes and experiences, I am able to show how nativist or racist perceptions does not recognize or differentiate between Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants.  To the dominant society an immigrant is seen as a foreigner and a foreigner is a foreigner in their eyes. This imposed identity on people that "look" as if they could be considered "foreign" are discriminated regardless of their undocumented status or citizenship.

Given my findings, I argue that racism and immigration status may contribute to competition and hostility among both groups ultimately putting them against each other. The dominant society or the White stakeholders, ultimately expose an anti-immigrant or anti-Mexican era partly by perpetuating racist ideologies such as granting superior status to the English language and White Americans (Ochoa 2004).  The United States policies and racist ideologies have overtly divided the Mexican-origin population.

In attempting to disentangle where intra-ethnic conflict may be stemming from I argue that there could be a separation or distancing between Mexican American (U.S.-born) and Mexican immigrant (Foreign-born) people.  For instance, there is a divide in that some Mexican Americans do not want to be associated with an immigrant identity given the stigma attached to being Mexican.  There are several ways in which I could describe this including Joe Feagin's white racial framework, which Mexican Americans and even immigrant groups adopt as part of their integration process (Feagin and Cobas 2008).

**THE WHITE RACIAL FRAME TO EXPLAIN INTRA-ETHNIC CONFLICT**

In attempting to integrate to the United States customs immigrants adopt a racist ideology. This is evident in the ways my respondents perceive Mexican Americans to discriminate against them and also in the ways they speak about African Americans. A big part of the United States society is that of racism, exploitation, and elitism. The same American dream ideology is one based on meritocracy and white supremacy ideals (Feagin 2000). These myths are masked by white supremacy and the American Dream myth is advertised as a reality in which rewards those that work hard and "assimilate" to white culture (Huber et al. 2008). Through my quotes, I have shown how the United States places many structural barriers for undocumented women and that the American Dream ideology is a myth which is not attainable for immigrants of color, particularly the undocumented population.

Joe Feagin and Jose Cobas (2008) state: "Scholars who focus on immigrant adaptation have generally neglected a very important component of the U.S. assimilation process: the dominant white group's racial frame, that is, its everyday racial "common sense." This dominant frame is important because it is the receptacle containing the dominant society's deep assumptions, its *Weltanschauung*" (p. 40). Feagin's theoretical framework of the White Racial Frame can assist me in explaining how and why intra-ethnic conflict may be stemming from among the Mexican-origin community. Whites as well as other people of color were socialized to operate out of a White Racial Frame (Feagin 2006). Specifically, the White Racial Frame is "an organized set of racialized ideas, stereotypes, emotions, and inclinations to discriminate" (Feagin 2006:25).

Furthermore, this White racial frame includes negative stereotypes, images, and metaphors involving African Americans and other people of color along with positive or superior views of Whites (Feagin 2006).

Many of my respondents also used the term American equating it to White. This is extremely common among my participants and other immigrants I met throughout my time in the field. Why does this occur? Why is it that even the term American is automatically attributed to White people? Huber and colleagues (2008), argue that this is contributed by a racist nativist sentiment. They argue that the legacy of white supremacy informs racialized perceptions of a white American identity. Going further, racist nativism as defined by Huber et al. is "the assigning of values to real or imagined differences, in order to justify the superiority of the native, who is perceived to be white, over that of the non-native, who is perceived to be People and Immigrants of Color, and thereby defend the right of whites, or the natives, to dominance" (p. 43). Whites are perceived as native while people including immigrants of color are viewed as non-native.

Huber and colleagues also discuss another point that attributes to the grand views of the United States. These are views and perceptions that Mexican immigrant people have in regards to the United States such as believing in the American Dream or that working hard can lead to upward socioeconomic mobility. This ideal is perpetuated by other immigrants that return to Mexico in nice vehicles, with nice clothes, and with money. When these immigrants speak of "*El Norte*" they share views that the United States is the land of opportunity, that one can make a lot of money, etc. However, they

do not speak about the racism, discrimination or other injustices they go through while living away. For most of my respondents that were from rural and impoverished areas in Mexico, they expressed a love/hate relationship for the United States. Comparatively speaking they felt that the United States has given them so much in terms of getting ahead economically. This frame of thinking blinds them to challenge racism, discrimination, or any other injustice.

In a color blind racist society where notions that race is no longer significant, that racism has ended, and that the United States is a diverse society where all people get along regardless of color, is completely a false statement (Bonilla-Silva 2001). Neoconservative scholars argue that racism is no longer significant or a social problem, therefore, place blame on racial minorities for the social problems that remain significant in the United States. They advocate that polices and politics of the 1960s are the cause of blacks lack of "personal responsibility" and their "welfare mentality" (Bonilla-Silva 2001). In other words they place the blame on Blacks for the social ills and problems. These sentiments are also adopted by immigrant groups. For example, Daniela buys into this ideology placing the blame on African Americans and therefore contributing to racism:

> *Well, I thought that Black people were nice given that they were slaves and mistreated but now they are spoiled too much and they do not want to work, they don't want to do anything, they want everything given to them in a silver platter for what their ancestors lived, there aren't even anymore bones from their ancestors and they are still charging* (Daniela, undocumented, 31 years old)

Through Daniela's quote, one is able to see how she adopted a white racial frame on viewing African Americans. Similarly my respondents had parallel views towards

U.S.-born Mexican Americans, specifically in also placing the blame on Mexican

Americans for not "taking advantage" of their citizenship and all the rights they have in

the United States. These notions are masked under the American Dream ideology which

within itself is a racist ideology promoting meritocracy and individualism. Advocates of

the American Dream are only masking racism in their views solely placing all emphasis

of success on one's own destiny and hard work. This is clearly not the case especially in

my data, we clearly see the significance of undocumented status as well as race. Sharing

this view is Alicia, she describes the following:

> *Many [U.S.-born Mexican Americans] don't see or they are stingy or they don't know how to appreciate what their parents have done for them, there are a lot, and I've met plenty of them. Plenty of young women that were born here and they are drug addicts or alcoholics, and they don't care about getting an education and I'm always asking myself, why if they have everything to keep them in school pursuing a higher education, why are you going to go down a different path, if you have everything here that will let you succeed, the government helps you so much, you like a U.S.-born citizen, they help you a lot, you can get a good job with your papers, that's what good jobs always ask for or to at least be a resident, for you to have a good social security, why go down the wrong path, in other words why choose the wrong/bad and not take the good path, because the good path is available for you* (Alicia, undocumented, 23 years old)

Alicia also adopts a white racial frame in viewing Mexican Americans. Further

research should consider how immigrants learn or adopt racist ideologies prior to

migrating. This view of Mexican Americans not taking full advantage of their

citizenship also contributes to the conflict among both groups. Mexican immigrants

falsely place the blame on Mexican Americans without understanding how white

supremacy has wrongfully excluded both African Americans and Mexican Americans

from many social institutions, therefore contributing to the social inequality that still

permeates our society (Feagin 2006). It is evident that my respondents do not fully recognize or understand the historical experiences of people of color. This only contributes to an ignorance of race/ethnic relations in the United States and implodes intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic conflict. The next quote also shows how immigrants of color adopt a white racial frame in stereotyping African Americans and Mexican Americans, Milagros retells her experience:

> *I work in a hotel as a housekeeper. The owners are Middle Eastern and they deny services to some Hispanics and Blacks because they would stereotype them based on how they were dressed –like baggy pants- and they would even lie and tell them that there were not any rooms left. They think they are selling drugs or prostituting women. They talk real bad about Mexicans, since they are the main ones occupying most of the rooms right now, but without them, I would not have my job right now. The owners still talk bad about the Mexicans, and what angers me even more is that they know I'm Mexican, but they don't care. Right in front of me, they talk about how Mexicans are nasty and dirty, but without Mexicans, we would be out of the job* (Milagros, undocumented, 28 years old)

In Milagros quote, it is evident the ways in which immigrants of color, in this case Middle Eastern immigrants also adopt a white racial frame. They stereotype African Americans and Mexican immigrants. Milagros expressed how there were times service was denied to African Americans. Moreover, she explains the ways in which her boss expressed anti-immigrant and racist views of Mexicans overtly in Milagros face. He clearly knows she is Mexican and undocumented and therefore believes he could take advantage of the situation by being overtly racist without fearing any repercussions. Milagros tolerates these humiliations and injustices because of the economic need and does not challenge them because of her undocumented status.

**CONCLUSION**

The significance of the demographic realities and the ways in which people homogenize all Latina/os need to be addressed and further studied (Gutierrez 1995; Ochoa 2004). Tensions between Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans are embedded in social status, class, and racism (Johnson 1998). Given my findings on the perceptions of Mexican immigrant women's views on the conflict they experienced with Mexican Americans, I argue for further research to be conducted investigating the experiences of Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants in their own terms. Instead of framing the debate around whether the experiences of Mexican Americans and immigrants are more like those encountered by Whites or by African Americans. This type of binary framing tends to prevent an analysis of the heterogeneity among Mexican-origin communities. Moving away from the traditional Black/White binary paradigm of race relations is extremely crucial and timely especially due to the demographic changes of the United States (Ochoa 2004).

This chapter represents the major themes that emerged from the data I collected through 30 interviews with Mexican immigrant women. These findings suggest that undocumented status is salient among my participants and this status creates barriers for their upward mobility ultimately contributing to depressive symptoms. Regardless of the positive attitude or outlook on life, the drive to achieve, the desire to want something better, the hard working attributes my respondents resembled; they are faced with an ultimate major barrier, namely their undocumented status that greatly limits their opportunities to move up the social ladder. Being an undocumented immigrant

particularly in a time in which anti-immigrant sentiments are ubiquitous has major effects on their mental health.

Coupled with the perceptions of my respondents that Mexican Americans were more discriminatory towards them, therefore limiting ethnic ties and support also has serious implications which deserve further consideration. The implications of the perceived conflict deserve scholarly attention especially in times in which Latina/os are projected to be the largest ethnic/racial group in the United States. This conflict is fanned by anti-immigrant sentiments, nativism, and racist ideologies that continue to plague this society.

# CHAPTER V

# CONCLUSION

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

I examine the relationship between contexts of reception, namely how immigrant status (undocumented status) affects symptoms of depression, and how a nativist societal reception impacts the integration process and symptoms of depression of Mexican immigrant women. The questions I address in this thesis are the following: 1) How does nativism affect undocumented Mexican immigrant women's mental health, specifically depression? More broadly I explore: 2) The relationship between integration and depression with a specific focus on: 3) How does integration and undocumented status affect depression? These questions framed my qualitative research study of 30 interviews with Mexican immigrant women in Houston.

My findings reveal that depressive symptoms are common among my respondents, as undocumented status seems to affect depression. Being undocumented is salient in Mexican immigrant women's everyday lives—as it contributes to feelings of fear, family fragmentation, and economic uncertainties. These three factors contribute to symptoms of depression as described by my participants. They describe their undocumented status as placing many barriers on them, contributing to major limitations leading to depression. They attribute feeling depressed to being undocumented and often describe that undocumented status puts barriers on people regardless of the desires to achieve. Undocumented immigrants stumble upon many road blocks due to their

status. My findings highlight the salience of "undocumented" status and how this can set barriers and impediments in the integration process.

My participants additionally express perceptions of intra-ethnic conflict among Mexican American and Mexican immigrants. They describe experiences in which they perceived Mexican Americans to engage in discriminatory behavior towards them, more than other racial/ethnic groups. In understanding this major finding I was able to use the contexts of reception, specifically viewing the societal reception such as the strength of the ethnic community and anti-immigrant sentiment within the host society. Given that this perception of conflict among co-ethnics was a reoccurring theme, and is associated oftentimes with anger, confusion, and anxiety, I argue that perhaps this also indirectly affects depressive symptoms of my participants. Additionally, I suggest that a perceived lack of community and reciprocity in social capital and support may increase depression symptoms.

In attempting to grasp where intra-ethnic conflict may be stemming from, I turn to the critical race literature to better assist me in analyzing my findings. LatCrit allows me a critical lens to view my findings in a way that focuses on the societal problems that plague communities of color, in this case, Mexican immigrant women. LatCrit allows researchers to explain the societal ills in relation to the communities they study giving voice to marginalized communities, and show how dominant groups maintain privilege and power in the stratification system of the United States. Similarly LatCrit provides me with areas to explore in my future research. Additionally, in my future studies I suggest an extension of the segmented assimilation theoretical framework. I propose to

explore the heterogeneity of groups such as, Mexican immigrants and Mexican American citizens.

My thesis shows that being undocumented is associated with exploitative conditions and barriers to socioeconomic integration, regardless of Mexican immigrant women's desires for upward integration, and poses a challenge to segmented assimilation theory. I would argue for a re-focus on the immigration and segmented assimilation theoretical literature. Specifically, in addressing the social ills that contribute to a system of inequality where currently undocumented Mexican immigrants are targeted. I encourage scholars to focus on the unequal and racist society which immigrants enter and on how undocumented immigrants are not provided with the necessary resources to successfully integrate into society. Therefore, by failing to consider the larger social factors that impact people's lives differently depending on their social locations – their structurally unequal position in society based on their undocumented status, along with their race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, etc., discourse holds people of color responsible for their positions in society and reinforces prevailing ideas of individualism and meritocracy (Romero 2008). It is imperative to focus on the structural factors and ideological processes that have and continue to limit the opportunities for groups of color in the United States.

The downward assimilation pattern of segmented assimilation suggests that immigrant minorities who fail to establish ethnic community enclaves, or who fail to build strong ethnic solidarity, are exposed to the influences of poor, disadvantaged minority groups who predominately live in inner city and urban areas (Portes and Zhou

1993).  Although Portes and Rumbaut (2006) acknowledge race as a defining factor in being a victim of discrimination, they do not fully critique this concept and how it affects the integration process of immigrants and the second generation.  They do not place focus on the barriers undocumented Mexican immigrants face and how the racialization process affects their integration and their mental health outcomes. Therefore, placing blame on immigrants and not addressing the racist, exploitative, and unjust environment immigrants enter.  The fundamental pessimistic inference that immigrants of color who indentify with communities of color, such as Mexican Americans in the U.S., therefore, making them probable to "downward assimilate" or destined to fail simply strengthens racist stereotypes (Romero 2008).  Therefore, merging both literatures allows for the creation of knowledge that extends the segmented assimilation theoretical framework to include critical realities that exist among understudied, vulnerable, and oppressed groups such as undocumented Mexican immigrant women.  Through my research, I find the urgency and necessity to further explore the negative context of reception in which immigrants enter, the intra-ethnic conflict that is stimulated by an anti-immigrant context of reception, and racist ideologies among Mexican immigrants and Mexican American groups.

Furthermore, segmented assimilation theory does not fully explore the racial hierarchy in which immigrants enter and how this affects their integration processes.  In my future research I intend to critically disentangle the complexities that exist within the Mexican American and Mexican immigrant communities and how these are entrenched and perpetuated by racist ideologies and structural oppression.  Specifically, I intend to

extend my Master thesis to also interview U.S.-born Mexican American women in order to get at the micro-level everyday attitudes they adopt. I am interested in further exploring the intra-ethnic literature and how a nativist society impacts U.S.-born Mexican Americans views towards Mexican immigrants. I am interested in connecting both U.S.-born Mexican American and Mexican immigrant views within a larger anti-immigrant context in order to see how the macro or nativist context of reception affects the attitudes and actions of these women.

**RESEARCH LIMITATIONS**

Limitations in this study are the absence of the voices and experiences of the Mexican American community. I interviewed 30 Mexican immigrant women. Therefore, it is evident that my findings solely suggest the perceptions of Mexican immigrant women about how Mexican Americans view them. In order to explore this conflict more critically my dissertation study will include a comparative aspect with Mexican American women. Additionally, given the snowball sampling technique, I have an overrepresentation of respondents from states like, Chihuahua and Nuevo León. Therefore, I would like to conduct future studies with women from other states in Mexico.

Another major limitation is the generalization of my project. Because my project is exploratory and qualitative, my findings may not represent what other women may be experiencing in another community. However, the detailed data and actual narratives that I was able to obtain via in-depth interviews, adds substantive value to the research.

It provides a voice to a silenced community and contributes to the literature on the experiences of the undocumented population that is oftentimes hard to reach.

**FUTURE RESEARCH AND BROADER IMPLICATIONS**

My research is timely especially in the current anti-immigrant era. My findings reveal a sense of urgency in addressing the needs of a marginalized community. Given the current nationwide hate and anti-immigrant hysteria, especially in Arizona, documentation status remains salient. However, in Arizona even documented immigrants and U.S.-born Mexican Americans could be racially profiled and harassed. I am not implying that racial profiling does not occur in other states, but given Senate Bill 1070, 287(g), and other draconian, anti-immigrant legislations, racial profiling is even more prevalent and transparent. Moreover, in this hostile environment, perceptions or imposed views of being undocumented are evident.

Another area which I intend to conduct future research is on imposed identity. For instance, in my sample, some documented women spoke about the imposed identity of being undocumented (i.e. how others perceive them to be undocumented just because of the color of their skin or their accent when speaking English) and how becoming "documented" does not even matter. The documented women from my sample disclosed several benefits of being documented. They are the following: 1) being able to visit their family in Mexico such as their parents, especially their mothers; 2) being able to drive and move around freely without having to be on the lookout for ICE or police, in other words the fear of being deported is relieved and feel a sense of security; and 3)

better opportunities for jobs and educational attainment for themselves and their children.

This importance of investigating the perceived identity of immigrants by other groups deserves consideration. This may also be contributing to the intra-ethnic conflict among Mexican origin groups, given that perhaps Mexican Americans will distance themselves even further from immigrant groups given they do not want to be perceived to be "undocumented" (Ochoa 2004). Also, this perception of who is documented or undocumented, similar to the rhetoric on who is "American" and who is not "American" stems from a nativist and racist ideology (Gutierrez 1995; Huber et al. 2008; Johnson 1998; Ochoa 2004). For instance, in the following quote by Doña Rita, a documented immigrant from San Luis Potosí, reveals an example of the concept of imposed identity. In Doña Rita's interview, she described the racism and injustice that her husband, Rubén, experienced at work. Her husband was once undocumented but was able to obtain documentation through amnesty. Doña Rita describes the experience she and her family faced as they were financing their first home. She recalls the experience and describes how they obtained assistance through a community center. Doña Rita described how they were missing a check stub from her husband's employer. The woman from the community center that was assisting them called Rubén's boss. Doña Rita described what the boss told the woman:

> *"Oh, so we Americans are giving Rubén a house?" and the woman from the center responded, "No, Americans are not giving him a house, he will be buying it but we need a check stub to proceed with the process." The boss replied, "I didn't know that we have to help those illegal wetbacks." And then when my husband went to speak to his boss, she didn't want to give him the check stub…* (Doña Rita, documented, 52 years old)

This experience is quite powerful because it shows undocumented status perpetuates a nativist or racist ideology. However, the imposed identity or mere hatred that some people have towards Mexicans is clearly shown in what Doña Rita's husband has experienced. Although he is a documented Mexican immigrant, the animosity and hatred towards undocumented immigrants was displayed by his racist boss's actions. Doña Rita further explained how her husband had to beg his boss for a copy of the check stub. His boss hesitated to give it to him but finally accepted. After that incident, his boss began to significantly reduce his work hours and even made him work on the weekends. Doña Rita explained that on top of this racist experience, her husband's truck and only transportation malfunctioned. Rubén had to borrow cars from friends in order to get to work, and when he asked his boss for a weekend off so that he could work on his truck, she (the boss) hesitated threatening she would fire him if he did not report to work. Rubén therefore continued to borrow cars to get to work, but when he begged her once more to give him a weekend off, she fired him. The following quote shows what the boss told Rubén:

> *"Fucking wetbacks, you are not worth a shit, you always want the government to help you."… And she told him she was not paying him anything. And then my husband told her, you are going to pay me. She said, "Do whatever you want, I'm not paying you anything, don't think this is Mexico." And my husband told her, "No, this is the United States and you are going to pay me."* (Doña Rita, documented, 52 years old)

Doña Rita explained that her oldest daughter wrote a letter to the Better Business Bureau and only then they finally received the $611 pay check. These quotes clearly demonstrate and perpetuate racist stereotypes and views some people have about Mexican immigrants such as using governmental resources. Additionally, through these

quotes, I am able to see how these types of racist and nativist attitudes are rooted in white supremacy ideologies making assumptions and ownership of the label or definition of American. When a person speaks about Americans they are usually referring to Whites, however, regardless of racial/ethnic makeup anyone could be an American.

Moreover, these quotes show the hypocritical racist and nativist ideologies. For instance, this life experience shows how exploitative and racist Rubén's former boss treated him. On a broader level, these types of experiences are common grounds in the lives of many undocumented immigrants (Perea 1997). Their employers exploit their labor paying them low wages and to top that off degrade them verbally and emotionally. Although some of these employers are clearly anti-immigrant, they hire undocumented immigrants and exploit them (Chavez 1997; Perea 1997). This shows the greed and individualism that pushes people to exploit people of color for their own personal gain, either it is economic gain and even social class gain (Chavez 1997). This situation is very important because we see how prevalent anti-immigrant, nativist, and racist views allow some people to impose views based on phenotype, way of dressing, or speaking, etc. This is extremely critical particularly in this present time when being or appearing Mexican has many negative connotations. These types of attitudes encourage intra-ethnic conflict because it puts these two groups against each other.

These quotes show the significance and timeliness in merging the race and immigration literature because it demonstrates how imposed identity matters for the treatment of U.S.-born Mexican Americans as well as naturalized U.S. residents and citizens. Imposed identity on people that are perceived to be undocumented are treated

and classified with undocumented immigrants regardless of how they identify themselves or how they see themselves even if they consider themselves to be well integrated into American culture. Going further, this type of imposed identity demonstrates how Mexicans are racialized based on who is foreign and native to the United States regardless of citizenship status. Similarly, to the searches, seizures, and deportations of the 1950s under Operation Wetback (Acuña 2000), I argue that today, there is a climate where all people of Mexican descent are suspected of being undocumented. This anti-immigrant or nativist climate is evident in our broken and exclusionary policies such as the most recent Senate Bill 1070.

The popular discourse on race/ethnicity of previous times was framed in terms of culture and with an emphasis on assimilation. Instead of justifying and attributing the structural inequality of the Mexican-origin population to perceived biological inferiority, this assimilationist approach has focused on presumed cultural deficiencies of Mexican Americans (Omi and Winant 1994). However, an imposed identity rejects this assumption because people are thought of and labeled as undocumented immigrants. Previous views and advocates of assimilation ideologies reinforced a racial/ethnic hierarchy in which white or light skin, the English language, European ancestry, and Anglo cultural practices, values, and norms are perceived as superior to dark skin, values, and norms (Huber et al. 2008; Johnson 1998; Ochoa 2004).

**POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

Given the salience of undocumented status and its implications on the symptoms of depression among the Mexican immigrant women in my sample, I argue for structural

changes. Specifically, my thesis reveals the lived experiences and limitations these women endure in their everyday lives as undocumented immigrants. They are faced with barriers not solely because of their Mexican identity but additionally because they are undocumented, which puts them at a lower disadvantage.

The long-term effects of the constant pressure of living as an undocumented immigrant in an era of anti-immigrant sentiment prevail daily and are likely to contribute to intra-ethnic conflict among Mexican-origin groups. This will more than likely have detrimental effects in the mental and physical health of the undocumented population. Not only will this be attributed to individuals who are undocumented but will also negatively affect their children and families integration process into the host community. For instance, when viewing the seclusion or fear parents have due to being undocumented immigrants, their children will also be limited in their integration process.

The anti-immigrant movement also stems from racist ideologies and racist thinking. As seen in exclusionary policies which aim at the so called "enforcement" of immigration policies masked under ideals such as patriotism and security. I argue for a path to legalization so that undocumented immigrants can emerge from the shadows and live with security. However, I also argue for policies that aim at alleviating some of the injustices in which the Mexican-origin community continues to endure. And advocate a movement that moves away from blaming the victim to critically analyzing how and why Mexican-origin people are still very much underprivileged and underrepresented in social institutions aiming for upward mobility, such as education.

In addition to a legalization process for immigrants, I believe health literacy is also an important factor in educating and informing a silenced community about mental health and health disparities. Access and information should be given to all people who reside in the United States regardless of color/race/or documentation status. In addition to health literacy, the Latina/o population lacks health insurance, health care coverage such as Medicaid and Medicare governmental programs. This is particularly true for the undocumented population. The lack of health coverage has serious damaging costs for their health. This combined with the low socioeconomic status of many undocumented immigrants gravely impacts the opportunities for screening, early detection, diagnosis, and treatment. Given the major disadvantages that the Mexican undocumented population faces, some which have been described in this thesis, it is necessary and imperative to pass immigration reform and provide services to a marginalized group.

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APPENDIX A


**INFORMATION SHEET**


**Nativism and Depression among Mexican Immigrant Women in the United States**


**Introduction**

You have been asked to participate in a research study investigating nativism and anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States. You were selected to participate in this research study because you are a Mexican immigrant woman that lives in the Houston area. The purpose of this study is to understand how and to what extent anti-immigrant sentiment affects mental health, particularly depression.


**What will I be asked to do?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked questions about your experiences in the United States and your personal background by an interviewer. The interview will be audio recorded and will last about one hour, and then the interview will be transcribed into word documents. You have the right to decide not to be audio recorded. Audio recordings are helpful because it allows the researcher to capture the participants' words exactly as they are stated. If you do not want to be recorded that is perfectly fine and the interview will proceed. Additionally, you will be asked to complete a survey/scale that measures depression and another one that measures coping styles.


**What are the risks involved in this study?**

The risks associated with this study are minimal. However, there will be sensitive topics discussed throughout the interview, like depression, migration experience, racism, and discrimination experiences in the United States.


**What are the possible benefits of this study?**

You will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study; however, this study can lead to policy implementation or suggestions for programs that can address the needs of Mexican immigrant women. Also, your participation and stories will help better address some of the current issues with anti-immigrant sentiment.


**Do I have to participate?**

No. Your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without your current or future relations with Texas A&M University being affected.


**Who will know about my participation in this research study?**

This study is anonymous. You will be given a different name. The records of this study will be kept private. No information linking you to the study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. If you decide to participate, you are able to refuse to answer any of the

questions that may make you uncomfortable. You can withdraw at anytime without your relations with the university being affected.

If you choose to participate in this study, you have the right to choose to be audio recorded. The audio recordings and transcriptions will be stored securely and only San Juanita García and Dr. Rogelio Sáenz will have access to the records. Any recordings will be kept for 5 years and then erased.

**Whom do I contact with questions about the research?**
You can contact San Juanita García at 832-641-1418, sanjuanita@neo.tamu.edu, or Dr. Rogelio Sáenz at 979-845-5133, rsaenz@tamu.edu, with any questions or concerns.

**Whom do I contact about my rights as a research participant?**
This research study has been reviewed by the Human Subjects' Protection Program and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact these offices at (979)458-4067 or irb@tamu.edu.

**Participation**
Please be sure you have read the above information, asked questions and received answers to your satisfaction. If you would like to be in the study, then the interviewer will schedule a time and place to meet. Once you are ready for the interview to start you will be asked demographic questions, then the actual interview will begin and it will end with the completion of two surveys/scales.

**APPENDIX B**

**DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS**

Interview #: _____
Date: _____
Name (Pseudonym): _____
Location of Interview: _____
Recorded (Yes) or (No):_____
Time: _____

1.  How old are you?: _____        Date of Birth: _____

2.  What is your marital status? Are you:
    Single……………………1
    Married…………………..2
    Divorced…………………3
    Widowed…………………4
    Never Married…………...5
    Cohabiting……………….6

3.  In what state were you born? _____

4.  What year did you migrate to the United States?
    Year_____

5.  What year did you move to Houston, Texas?
    Year_____

6.  What country was your mother born? _____

7.  What country was your father born? _____

8.  Do you have children?
    Yes…….1        If yes, how many children do you have and
    No..……2        where were they born? _____

9.  How many years of school have you completed?
    0  1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17+

10. How many years of school have you completed in the United States?

    0   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17+

11. Do you speak English?   If so, how well do you speak it? _____

          Yes…….1

          No..……2

12. Do you work?       If so, where do you work? _____

          Si……….1

          No………2

\* If Married then I ask about husbands demographic questions such as employment, country of origin, years in the US, primary language spoken, education, etc.

Employment: _____

Education in Mexico (Years): _____

Education in the US (Years): _____

Years in the US: _____

Year person emigrated: _____

Place he went when he first migrated: _____

Language Spoken Most Often: _____

Thank you very much this concludes the demographic portion of the interview. Now we will begin the actual interview questions. Do you have any questions before we go any further? If not, then we are ready to begin. Thank you again for agreeing to participate.

## APPENDIX C

## INTERVIEW GUIDE

**FAMILY RELATIONS**
1. What were your family's reactions to you coming over? (i.e. were they supportive, etc.)
2. Please describe what family means to you.
3. How do you communicate with your family now? Please explain how often you communicate with them?
4. How often do you or your family visit each other?
5. What do you enjoy the most about your family?
6. What do you least like about your family?
7. Who do you speak to about your problems?
8. How does your role as a Mexican woman impact your influences in family duties?

**MIGRATION EXPERIENCE**
9. What motivated you to migrate to the United States?
10. How did you prepare in your migration process to the United States?
11. How was the actual process of coming over? For instance, can you talk to me about the day you decided you were migrating and how you planned the move?
12. Was the actual migration experience something you anticipated, please explain?
13. Did you migrate with family or friends?
14. How do you feel about having migrated to the United States as a woman? For instance, do you feel it's more difficult, please explain?

**INTEGRATION**
15. How would you describe the culture in Mexico?
16. How would you describe the culture in the United States?
17. What would you say are the biggest differences/similarities between Mexican and American cultures?
18. When you first arrived in the United States, how did you find your first place you lived? (If they work then ask about how they found their job)
19. Please describe the neighborhood you live in and how it makes you feel? If they work, then ask: Please describe your job environment and how it makes you feel?
20. How does your role as a Mexican woman impact your influences in adjusting to the United States culture?

**ANTI-IMMIGRANT SENTIMENT/NATIVSM/RACISM/DISCRIMINATION IN US**

21. When you think of immigration, what automatically comes to your mind?
22. Can you please describe your feelings on what it is like to live in the United States as an undocumented person? (This depends if the respondent is undocumented, if not then ask about how they feel as a Mexican immigrant living in the United States).
23. What have you found to be the most challenging and how do you handle these challenges?
24. How do you feel about the deportations and raids taking place by ICE?
25. Have you, a personal friend, or family member ever experienced first-hand confrontations with ICE and if so please explain the situation?
26. What do you think about people that are overtly anti-immigrants, for example Border Watch or the Minute Men?
27. Have you felt discrimination or racism in the United States, if so please describe your experiences and how they affected you?

**DEPRESSION**

28. Do you have any worries living in the United States, and if so what are your biggest worries?
29. What do you know about depression?
30. Have you ever felt depressed; if so please describe your symptoms or feelings? What mainly depresses you?
31. Have you ever sought help for depression from a mental health professional? If so, please explain that experience. If not, why not?
32. How do you think depression is viewed in Mexico?
33. How do you think depression is viewed in the United States?

**CONCLUSION- CURRENT FEELINGS… IMMIGRATION REFORM, ECONOMY, ETC.**

34. How do you feel currently with the economic crisis in Mexico and in the United States?
35. How do you feel currently about immigration reform even though it has not been resolved?
36. Do you have any questions/concerns/suggestions regarding the study or anything I left out that you wish me to include?

Thank you, this concludes our interview portion of the study. Now we will complete the two short scales. Are you ready to begin?

**APPENDIX D**

**Table 1 Respondents' Age, Form of Entry, Migration Status, and Years in U.S.**

| Name | Age | Form of Entry | Migration Status | Years in U.S. |
|------|-----|---------------|------------------|---------------|
| *Milagros* | 28 | Tourist Visa | Undocumented | 2 |
| *Cristina* | 27 | Clandestinely | Documented | 10 |
| *Beatriz* | 32 | Clandestinely | In Limbo | 10 |
| *Zenaida* | 23 | Clandestinely | Undocumented | 3 |
| *Sandra* | 33 | Clandestinely | Documented | 12 |
| *Lucia* | 52 | Clandestinely | Documented | 32 |
| *Denise* | 33 | Tourist Visa | Undocumented | 5 |
| *Liliana* | 36 | Tourist Visa | Documented | 14 |
| *Melissa* | 38 | Tourist Visa | Undocumented | 14 |
| *Doña Josefina* | 57 | Clandestinely | Documented | 34 |
| *Doña Rita* | 52 | Clandestinely | Documented | 30 |
| *Daniela* | 31 | Tourist Visa | Undocumented | 10 |
| *Deyanira* | 41 | Tourist Visa | In Limbo | 10 |
| *Doña Gladys* | 60 | Clandestinely | Documented | 36 |
| *Doña Dolores* | 64 | Clandestinely | Documented | 34 |
| *Alicia* | 23 | Clandestinely | Undocumented | 8 |
| *Ana* | 30 | Tourist Visa | Undocumented | 8 |
| *Sonia* | 28 | Tourist Visa | Undocumented | 4 |
| *Mónica* | 46 | Tourist Visa | Undocumented | 15 |
| *Reyna* | 50 | Tourist Visa | Undocumented | 8 |
| *Manuela* | 49 | Tourist Visa | Undocumented | 8 |
| *Perla* | 46 | Tourist Visa | Undocumented | 5 |
| *Bianca* | 45 | Tourist Visa | Undocumented | 15 |
| *Gabriela* | 55 | Clandestinely | Documented | 26 |
| *Linda* | 40 | Clandestinely | Undocumented | 15 |
| *Evelyn* | 43 | Clandestinely | Undocumented | 20 |
| *Carla* | 29 | Clandestinely | Undocumented | 12 |
| *Eugenia* | 39 | Tourist Visa | Undocumented | 18 |
| *Fabiola* | 24 | Clandestinely | Undocumented | 8 |
| *Xóchitl* | 38 | Tourist Visa | Undocumented | 9 |

**APPENDIX E**

**Table 2 Respondents' Marital Status, Children, and Years of Education**

| Name | Marital Status | No. of Children | Children Born in U.S. | Years of Education |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Milagros* | Married | 1 Male | Pregnant | 11 years |
| *Cristina* | Married | 1 Female; 1 Male | 1 Female; 1 Male | 6 years |
| *Beatriz* | Married | 1 Female; 2 Male | 1 Female; 1 Male | 12 years |
| *Zenaida* | Married | 2 Female; 1 Male | 2 Female | 9 years |
| *Sandra* | Married | 1 Female; 1 Male | 1 Male | 11 years |
| *Lucia* | Married | 3 Male | 3 Males | 6 years |
| *Denise* | Married | 2 Male; 1 Female | 2 male; 1 female | 15 years |
| *Liliana* | Married | 1 Male | 1 Male | 10 years |
| *Melissa* | Married | 2 Female; 1 Male | 1 Male | 9 years |
| *Doña Josefina* | Married | 1 Female; 3 Male | 1 Female; 1 Male | 4 years |
| *Doña Rita* | Married | 3 Female; 1 Male | 3 Female; 1 Male | 3 years |
| *Daniela* | Married | 2 Male; 1 Female | 1 Male; 1 Female | 9 years |
| *Deyanira* | Married | 3 Male | N/A | 9 years |
| *Doña Gladys* | Married | 1 Female; 2 Male | 1 Female; 2 Male | 6 years |
| *Doña Dolores* | Widowed | 2 Male; 4 Female | 1 Male; 2 Female | 0 years |
| *Alicia* | Single | 1 Male | 1 Male | 12 years |
| *Ana* | Married | 1 Female; 1 Male | 1 Female | 12 years |
| *Sonia* | Married | 1 Female; 2 Male | 1 Male | 9 years |
| *Mónica* | Married | 1 Female; 2 Male | 1 Male | 6 years |
| *Reyna* | Married | 2 Female; 1 Male | N/A | 9 years |
| *Manuela* | Married | 1 Female; 3 Male | N/A | 9 years |
| *Perla* | Married | 1 Female; 2 Male | N/A | 9 years |
| *Bianca* | Married | 3 Females | N/A | 6 years |
| *Gabriela* | Married | 1 Female; 2 Male | 1 Female | 6 years |
| *Linda* | Single | 2 Female; 2 Male | 1 Female | 9 years |
| *Evelyn* | Married | 1 Male | N/A | 1 year |
| *Carla* | Married | 2 Female; 1 Male | 2 Female; 1 Male | 9 years |
| *Eugenia* | Married | 1 Female; 1 Male | N/A | 9 years |
| *Fabiola* | Single | 0 | N/A | 9 years |
| *Xóchitl* | Married | 1 Male | 1 Male | 9 years |

**Note: N/A means their children were not born in the United States**

**APPENDIX F**

**Table 3 Respondents' Place of Birth, Type of Family Migration, and Occupation**

| Name | Place of Birth | Type of Family Migration | Occupation |
|------|---------------|--------------------------|------------|
| *Milagros* | Coahuila | Family Unit Migration | Housekeeper in Hotel |
| *Cristina* | Guanajuato | Family Stage Migration | Unemployed- Housewife |
| *Beatriz* | Zacatecas | Family Stage Migration | Unemployed- Housewife |
| *Zenaida* | Guanajuato | Family Unit Migration | Unemployed- Housewife |
| *Sandra* | Michoacán | Independent | Ice Cream Maker |
| *Lucia* | San Luis Potosí | Independent | Domestica |
| *Denise* | Tamaulipas | Family Stage Migration | Unemployed- Housewife |
| *Liliana* | Nuevo León | Family Stage Migration | Unemployed- Housewife |
| *Melissa* | Nuevo León | Family Unit Migration | Unemployed- Housewife |
| *Doña Josefina* | Nuevo León | Family Stage Migration | Unemployed- Housewife |
| *Doña Rita* | San Luis Potosí | Family Stage Migration | Unemployed- Housewife |
| *Daniela* | Nuevo León | Family Unit Migration | Self-employed-sells food |
| *Deyanira* | Nuevo León | Family Unit Migration | Sales |
| *Doña Gladys* | Tamaulipas | Independent | Unemployed- Housewife |
| *Doña Dolores* | San Luis Potosí | Family Stage Migration | Unemployed- Housewife |
| *Alicia* | Zacatecas | Independent | Cashier |
| *Ana* | Nuevo León | Independent | Unemployed- Housewife |
| *Sonia* | Coahuila | Family Unit Migration | Unemployed- Housewife |
| *Mónica* | Chihuahua | Family Unit Migration | Unemployed- Housewife |
| *Reyna* | Chihuahua | Family Stage Migration | Fast Food Restaurant |
| *Manuela* | Chihuahua | Family Unit Migration | Unemployed- Housewife |
| *Perla* | Chihuahua | Family Unit Migration | Unemployed- Housewife |
| *Bianca* | Chihuahua | Family Unit Migration | Domestica |
| *Gabriela* | Zacatecas | Family Stage Migration | Self-employed-sells tacos |
| *Linda* | Querétaro | Independent | Sales |
| *Evelyn* | Michoacán | Family Unit Migration | Domestica |
| *Carla* | Nayarit | Family Unit Migration | Domestica |
| *Eugenia* | Chihuahua | Family Unit Migration | Unemployed- Housewife |
| *Fabiola* | Zacatecas | Independent | Cashier |
| *Xóchitl* | Nuevo León | Family Unit Migration | Unemployed- Housewife |

**VITA**

San Juanita García received her Bachelor of Arts degree double majoring in Criminal Justice and Spanish with a minor in Sociology from Sam Houston State University in August 2007. She entered the Sociology Department graduate program at Texas A&M University in August 2007. Her research interests include Latina/o sociology, immigration, race and ethnic relations, sociology of mental health, social psychology, and deviance. San Juanita is also an American Sociological Association Minority Fellowship Program Fellow, an American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education Graduate Fellow, an Enhancing Diversity in Graduate Education in the Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences (EDGE-SBE) Fellow, a recipient of the Grow Your Own Scholarship Program, a recipient of the Hispanic Scholarship Fund-KLASS Time, and a recipient of the Texas Association of Chicanos in Higher Education fellowship. San Juanita also works for the Texas Center for the Advancement of Literacy and Learning (TCALL) as a Graduate Assistant. She also serves as the Director of Scholarships, a national position for Kappa Delta Chi Sorority, Inc. a Latina founded sorority dedicated to community service.

Ms. García can be reached at Texas A&M University, The Department of Sociology, Mail stop – 4351, College Station, TX 77843-4351. Her e-mail is sanjuanita2010@gmail.com.