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Becoming Invisible:
Aging and Stratification for Older Immigrants in the United States and Mexico

By

Isabel García Valdivia

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Sociology

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:
Professor Irene Bloemraad, Co-Chair
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ABSTRACT

Becoming Invisible:
Aging and Stratification for Older Immigrants in the United States and Mexico

By

Isabel García Valdivia

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Irene Bloemraad, Co-Chair
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How does immigration status affect older immigrants' late adulthood experiences? And how does the experience of illegality change across the life course? The older Latino immigrant population is the most vulnerable group in the country. Older Latinos have the highest poverty and lowest employment rates and are least likely to have access to Social Security programs. Mexicans are the largest ethnic subgroup of this population. Within this population, undocumented older adults face the biggest challenges without access to Social Security pensions and critical safety net programs. The experience of growing old in the United States as an undocumented (or ever undocumented) immigrant highlights the barriers constructed by immigration laws and the dire consequences of these laws over the life course. In late adulthood, when many undocumented immigrants can no longer work and have little or no access to safety nets, the consequences are more extreme representing a risk to their life and well-being. Older immigrants are left to manage the ailments that come with aging without the support from institutions and safety nets that is important for all aging individuals.

Drawing on 102 semi-structured interviews with older Mexican immigrants over 50-years-old, I shed light on how illegality, the everyday experience of living with undocumented status, has permanent and cumulative consequences across the life course. My findings reveal that older immigrants experience what I call perpetual punishment as their needs, and even their humanity, become invisible to the general public and policymakers. Perpetual punishment is the process in which immigration-related barriers seep into immigrants' day-to-day lives and produce long-term consequences from the cradle to the grave. These are permanent consequences of long-term exclusion from U.S. institutions designed to support individuals throughout their lives, especially in late adulthood. I demonstrate that illegality traps older immigrants in the United States, but for different reasons than in earlier life stages. Older immigrants' resources, health status, and immigration status influence where they live, including who can and cannot return to Mexico. In particular, illegality interferes with older immigrants' ability to lead autonomous lives independently from their families, which is what they desire. Moreover, the experience of illegality shifts as older

immigrants age and over the life course. I provide insight into this shift by tracing how the threat and fear of deportation evolve for older undocumented immigrants.

By highlighting how undocumented status uniquely shapes the burdens of illegality of aging older immigrants, Becoming Invisible offers a sobering account of the far-reaching consequences of our punishing immigration policies. It shines a spotlight on the Mexican men and women at the other end of the life spectrum—people who have lived in the United States for decades. It exposes the ways in which immigration law stratifies the experiences of older immigrants by immigration status and produces cumulative inequality over the life course resulting in perpetual punishment.

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Early in my Ph.D., I was introduced to an old novella, *El principito* (or *The Little Prince* in English) by Antonine de Saint-Exupéry. It is a story about a young boy, the little prince, who lives on a faraway planet where he is responsible for caring for the planet and in particular taking care of his rose. As time passes, the little prince becomes concerned he has wasted his life doing this work and travels to other planets, including Earth, for answers. Within the book's pages, I found many lessons about life including friendship, love, loss, perseverance, and resilience that have applied directly to this academic endeavor, as well as my personal journey. As I complete this dissertation, it only seems fit to highlight an important metaphor from this book. A wise fox on Earth told the little prince: "It's the time you have spent with your rose that makes your rose so important…You are responsible for your rose[1]" (de Saint-Exupéry 2017:117). To the little prince, dedicating his time to his rose made his rose important. In other words, dedicating yourself to something (or someone) makes it important. I have found that dedicating myself to this Ph.D. and dissertation has made every part of this journey important, from building relationships to writing to developing my intellectual vocation even when I had my doubts and met with unexpected surprises. This endeavor is one of my roses; it is my professional rose. While I am responsible for this work and journey, it would not have been possible without the help and support of many who inspired me, taught me, and were patient.

A Ph.D., not to mention a dissertation, is not an individual endeavor but the product of a community and iterative work. I would not have completed this work without the support of my close mentors Irene Bloemraad and Cybelle Fox. Thank you for providing a space where I felt welcomed to grow intellectually and personally. Thank you for our continuous (and numerous) conversations, for reading multiple iterations of memos, chapters, and grant applications, and for believing in me and my work at each step when I had my doubts and reservations. You have been the biggest supporters of this project and its vision. You have also supported my personal growth as an individual. I hope to be able to inspire others as you have inspired me. My committee—G. Cristina Mora, Daniel (Danny) Schneider, and Lisa García Bedolla—also pushed this work further with their feedback on various drafts. I appreciate your close attention and thoughtful advice at all stages of this project.

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[1] Spanish translation: "*Fue el tiempo que pasaste con tu rosa lo que la hizo tan importante…Tu eres responsable por tu rosa."*

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I was also fortunate to receive funding from multiple organizations within and outside of UC Berkeley that supported this research at every step. At UC Berkeley, I received generous support from Berkeley Empirical Legal Studies, the Berkeley Health Initiative of the Americas, the Center for Race and Gender, the Department of Sociology, the Division of Undergraduate Education, the Graduate Assembly, the Graduate Division, the Institute of Governmental Studies, the Institute for Research on Labor and Employment, the Institute for the Study of Societal Issues, and the Othering & Belonging Institute. Outside of UC Berkeley, I am thankful for the support of the National Science Foundation and the UC Santa Barbara Blum Center for Global Poverty Alleviation and Sustainable Development.

Each chapter has benefited from the life stories of my 102 respondents. I hope I have done justice to our conversations and your stories. On a personal level, I also learned so much from my respondents as they shared their wisdom, life lessons, and struggles. They often gave me advice and continuously fed me. To all who shared their stories, I extend my deepest gratitude. To each organization that supported this work, I also thank you for the trust and belief in this project. *¡Muchas gracias!*

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My immediate family—my parents, siblings, nieces, and partner —reminded me that there is a world outside of academia and that life does not stop for writing deadlines. This work is especially dedicated to *mis papis*, Apolonio García and María del Carmen Valdivia, who came with nothing to give us everything. I can only hope to give back everything you have given me while sacrificing your own endeavors and well-being.

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[2] Spanish translation: “*Sólo con el corazón se puede ver bien; lo esencial es invisible para los ojos.”*

Thank you also for supporting my crazy idea of adopting our *perrito loco*, Emilio the Durkeheiman Shih Tzu. He has brought joy and company to our lives. During the writing of our manuscripts, Emilio's puppy energy reminded us that we had to walk and play often. I am excited for our next chapter together.

It has been a privilege to be surrounded and supported by so many during this journey. *¡Mil gracias!*

CHAPTER 1
Introduction

The older Latino[1] immigrant population is the most vulnerable group in the country. Older Latinos have the highest poverty rate and lowest employment rate and are least likely to have access to Social Security programs (and when they do, their average benefits are the lowest) (Carr 2018). Mexicans are the largest ethnic subgroup. Within this population, undocumented older adults face the biggest challenges without access to Social Security pensions and other important safety net programs. Older undocumented immigrants have grown from representing 17 percent of the undocumented population in 2010 to 24 percent in 2019. The aging of the undocumented population is partly due to the lack of immigration reform. The last large-scale legalization program—the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA)—was in 1986. It is also a function of changing migration patterns. For the past decade, more Mexican immigrants have returned to Mexico from the United States than have migrated here. Sociologically, we know little about the experiences and consequences of being undocumented (or ever undocumented) as they relate specifically to aging immigrants despite calls from several scholars (Flores Morales 2021; Freidenberg 2006; Rodriguez, Paredes, and Hagan 2017; Torres and Young 2016). In this dissertation, I draw on interview data with documented and undocumented Mexican immigrants in the United States and return migrants in Mexico to show how immigration status shapes and stratifies the aging experience and the consequences of illegality. I ask, "How does immigration status affect older immigrants' late adulthood experiences? And how does the experience of illegality change across the life course?"

The Stories of Two Older Immigrants
I arrived at a local community gathering where I waited to have coffee with 69-year-old documented Camila Santana.[2] Like many older adults I encountered during my fieldwork, Camila was a striver. She sought to maintain her autonomy and independence as she negotiated meeting her basic needs, including housing, and family relationships. She was also formerly undocumented. As a young adult, she had crossed the border with her young son, looking for a job to provide for their well-being. They adjusted their status under the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, which granted a pathway to legal permanent residency for select immigrants who arrived in the United States before 1982 or those who worked in agriculture. Camila had worked in agricultural fields before moving on to more service-based occupations, including childcare (informal and formal), cleaning private homes, hotel housekeeping, and factory work.

The strenuous (often repetitive) physical work took a toll on her body, and at 52 years old she was forced to leave the labor force after developing carpal tunnel syndrome in

[1] I use the terms "Latino," "Latina", and the plural, "Latinos," instead of Latinx or Latine because my respondents identified with this term or their ethnic identity, Mexican.
[2] All names are pseudonyms, and some personal details are intentionally kept vague or changed to protect the identities of the respondents. The age and immigration status of the respondents is included the first time they are included in the manuscript.

both hands, making her disabled. Camila was devasted by her inability to work, the invasive hand surgeries, and the loss of use of her hands due to the constant pain. Her modest savings at the time would be insufficient to cover her living costs for future years. Her primary source of income became payouts from Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) until she became eligible for Social Security (SS) benefits. Like other older adults, her medical costs were covered by Medicare and the Medicaid program (called Medi-Cal in California) for low-income residents. After numerous bad experiences renting rooms in the homes of extended family members, Camila secured her own apartment with federal housing assistance. She was able to hire someone to help complete household tasks using state-funded in-home services. While she used to dream of returning permanently to Mexico, she no longer does. She now views her future as anchored in the United States.

A few weeks after meeting Camila, I was sitting in a small office of a local organization with 70-year-old undocumented Ursula Peña. Ursula had migrated to the United States with her daughters to join her husband. They entered the United States without being inspected by a U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) officer. Thus, they had little to no opportunity to adjust their immigration status under the current immigration law. Ursula and her husband eventually separated (though never divorced), but he continued to be financially responsible for her rent payment until his death. Beyond the emotional trauma his sudden unexpected death caused, it left Ursula unprotected and solely reliant on her street food vending business for income to pay for her housing and necessities. Her adult daughters offered informal family support, but Ursula did not want to depend on them entirely. She tried to maintain her autonomy and independence for as long as possible.

Ursula talked about being less afraid of being deported at this age because she no longer fit the “typical undocumented immigrant profile,” and the consequences were not the same now that her children were adults and able to take care of themselves. She was more concerned with making ends meet without access to traditional safety nets for older adults like SS survivor spouse benefits.

Ursula’s lack of immigration status and her age-related physical ailments created a catch-22 situation where she could not access this critical source of income for widowed spouses. Even though her husband had worked with his Social Security number (SSN) card and completed the minimum work credits required to qualify for an SS pension, the Social Security Administration (SSA) would not release the surviving spouse benefits to her if she could not produce an SSN card of her own. They suggested Ursula return with evidence of an employment authorization document to obtain an SSN card or return to Mexico and apply from abroad. The latter option was enticing; however, one of the conditions of receiving surviving spouse benefits from abroad is that the recipient must travel back to the United States to sign paperwork every six months. Ursula would have left to live in Mexico in a heartbeat if it weren’t for this travel requirement. She did not have a legal mode of entry, and she doubted that the USCIS would approve a visitor visa for her to travel back and forth with her history of living in the United States as an undocumented immigrant for over 30 years. With limited other options to make an

income, she instead chose to continue working as a street vendor selling tamales and other ethnic staples to pay for her rent and living costs. She is effectively trapped in the United States without many viable options.

The stories of Camila and Ursula illustrate how illegality shapes the divergent experiences of Mexican immigrants who came to the United States as undocumented immigrants in young adulthood. Having found a path to legalization, Camila's immigration status afforded her more options and autonomy when deciding how and where to live in her later years. In contrast, Ursula's experience of illegality and its consequences constrained her choices and trapped her in the United States without access to the traditional safety nets available to documented immigrants and nonimmigrants and without the ability to return to her hometown in Mexico. These women's stories paint a sobering picture of the far-reaching consequences of our punishing immigration policies throughout the life course and how immigration law creates inequality by facilitating opportunities for some while blocking them for others.

IMMIGRANT ILLEGALITY OVER THE LIFE COURSE

Recent immigration scholarship has examined a wide range of consequences of migrant illegality and how it is experienced in earlier life stages, including childhood (Dreby 2015), youth/young adulthood (Abrego 2008), and working age (Chavez 2013b).

Research on children has predominantly focused on the effects of parents' undocumented immigration status on both citizen and undocumented minor children. Scholars have found that parents' undocumented status often reduces cognitive development (Ha, Ybarra, and Johnson 2017; Hainmueller et al. 2017); limits children's access to education (Bean, Brown, and Bachmeier 2015); reduces overall academic performance (Brabeck, Lykes, and Hunter 2014); decreases access to institutional resources, like checking/savings accounts, credit, and drivers' licenses (Yoshikawa, Godfrey, and Rivera 2008); increases fears of parental deportation (Dreby 2012); and limits access to programs for which children are eligible, including social support (e.g., available networks) and home/child care services (Yoshikawa 2011). Children share their parents' economic instability, limited opportunities, and inability to build social/cultural capital, a phenomenon which Enriquez (2015) terms *multigenerational punishment*. Others have focused on how the mixed status of some families shapes power dynamics between family members and children's home environment, including inequality between siblings or spouses with distinct immigration statuses (Dreby 2015). Thus, it is well-documented that immigrant parents' undocumented status negatively affects their children's integration.

Scholars have also documented that immigration status affects youth and young adults who remain undocumented with limited or no pathways to regularization. For example, it affects how undocumented youth make claims (Abrego 2011) and their access to institutions of higher education (Abrego 2006), as well as college completion (Terriquez 2015). In addition, it limits access to the labor market for young professionals (Abrego and Gonzales 2010), constrains their everyday activities (Gonzales and Chavez 2012), and negatively affects their mental health (Gonzales, Suárez-Orozco, and Dedios-

Sanguineti 2013). While in K-12 education, youth are legally incorporated under *Plyer vs. Doe* until they grow up and age out and must "learn to be illegal" (Gonzales 2011). In particular, Gonzales (2016) argues that lacking an immigration status impacts the whole process of transition into adulthood—e.g., access to driver's licenses, higher education, and work opportunities. President Obama's 2012 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program granted qualified youth some relief from the effects of their undocumented status by shielding them from deportation and providing renewable work permits and temporary Social Security numbers (Gonzales, Terriquez, and Ruszczyk 2014). Yet these measures constitute temporary protection and not a permanent legal status, and they may be terminated by the executive branch or the court system. Consequently, the cumulative effects of being undocumented continue to disadvantage youth when it comes to early social mobility.

In adulthood, research suggests, immigrants' undocumented status has enduring effects on two dominant life spheres: family and work (Menjívar and Abrego 2012). For example, Enriquez's (2020) study on undocumented young adults found that immigration status and immigration policies shape the course of family formation, from dating decisions to marriage timing to parenting experiences, with a particular focus on its influence on romantic relationships. For parents, deportation and detention disrupt their ability to fulfill their parental responsibilities (Abrego and Menjívar 2011; Wessler 2011). Their upward socioeconomic mobility is also constrained because they lack a formal employment authorization document and Social Security number (Chavez 2013a) and consequently often engage in low-wage employment (Hall, Greenman, and Farkas 2010), hold risker jobs (Hall and Greenman 2015; Loh and Richardson 2004; Orrenius and Zavodny 2009), and are less likely to own a home (McConnell 2013). The consequences of being undocumented continue to accumulate and compound in adulthood.

While we know much about the consequences of illegality on the children of immigrants, undocumented youth, young adults, and working-age adults, we know less about how immigration status affects immigrants in late adulthood. Calls for careful empirical research on this group have emerged (Flores Morales 2021). The few studies that exist focus disproportionately on undocumented immigrants' access to healthcare and on their health status (Ro, Van Hook, and Walsemann 2022; Torres and Young 2016) or on their poor retirement prospects (Torres, Munoz, and Becerril 2016).

These studies demonstrate that undocumented older immigrants are doubly burdened with limited access to healthcare and worsening health status. They do not qualify for either Medicare, which provides coverage for individuals 65 and older (or disabled individuals), or federally-funded Medicaid, which provides coverage for low-income individuals (Balakrishnan and Jordan 2019). Federally funded programs only cover emergency treatment, and state/local policies vary widely (California Department of Health Care Services 2017). For example, one study on undocumented older immigrants' access to health care found that they do not have access to health-care services or the ability to pay out of pocket for an extended period, to treat chronic illnesses, for example (Ayón 2019). Past research on immigrants' general use of health-

care services throughout their life course finds it is low, often due to lack of health insurance (Ortega et al. 2007).

Meanwhile, emerging studies on immigrant health have found that immigration status matters for long-term health. For immigrants and nonimmigrants alike, health status is expected to deteriorate with the rise of chronic diseases, cognitive disorders, physical injuries, and changes in bodily functions. Undocumented immigrants' exposure to unfavorable social conditions, including hazardous occupations and lack of preventive care, suggests their health conditions may be worse. One specific study on undocumented older immigrants found that lack of legal status had adverse effects on physical and mental health (Rodriguez et al. 2017). Other research on immigrants suggests that incorporation experiences (Gubernskaya, Bean, and Van Hook 2013), legal status, race, socioeconomic status (Williams 2005), and education (Lantz et al. 1998) influence health in later life. In addition, Zoya Gubernskaya and colleagues (2013) found that immigrants who migrated as children and young adults and were subsequently naturalized were healthier as older adults (mediated by education) than immigrants who were not naturalized and relocated to the United States in middle or older age. Thus, citizenship status (i.e., naturalization) and age at migration are critical for later-life health. In short, immigration status has a critical role in each of the earlier life course stages and its importance varies according to the age-specific milestones. Therefore, I argue that immigration incorporation cannot be fully understood without paying attention to illegality over the life course, including late adulthood.

LIFE-COURSE AND AGING STRATIFICATION FOR LATINOS

While the migration literature generally ignores the experiences of older immigrants, the literature on the life course and aging typically ignores immigrants and the significance of immigration status for stratification in old age.

The literature on this topic tends to focus on those who migrate in later life (Borjas 2009; Carr and Tienda 2013; Treas 2008). Immigrants who migrate later in life are different because they often do not grow old in the United States and actively interact with institutions compared to my respondents. Despite the mainstream association of migration with working-age immigrants seeking upward mobility for themselves and their children, older adult immigrants also migrate, albeit for different reasons; this migration can be permanent or temporary (circular), and these migrants are frequently not eligible for old-age assistance as a result of having spent most of their lives in their home countries. They often migrate to reunite with family and perform domestic home duties or provide childcare for immigrant adult children and grandchildren (Treas 2009). According to Carr and Tienda (2013), there has been an increase in the number/proportion of family-sponsored older adult (50 years and older) immigrants. Yet not all older adults are sponsored for U.S. permanent residency or live permanently in the U.S.; some hold other legal statuses (e.g., temporary visas) and live transnational lives. Treas (2008) found that transnational older adults use a variety of strategies (e.g., becoming naturalized citizens, traveling back and forth on visitor visas) to maintain their legal categories (i.e., temporary visitors, permanent U.S. residents, or naturalized U.S. citizens). Those who decide to migrate "permanently" at a later age may find it

adversely affects their economic well-being. O'Neil and Tienda (2015) identify a strong association between late migration, lower personal income, and lower Medicare/Medicaid and Social Security usage rates. This hints at how important it is for immigrants to be integrated and incorporated in earlier adulthood to have opportunities to contribute to the U.S. welfare system.

There is another literature which examines older Latino adults, both immigrants and U.S. born. Across the board, this literature finds that older Latinos are disadvantaged in terms of socioeconomic status, with higher poverty levels and lower retirement savings compared to other racial and ethnic groups in the United States (Hazuda and Espinoza 2012). Torrez (1997a) found that Latinas are socioeconomically disadvantaged throughout their lives, and even more in late adulthood. One of every five Latino who are householders lives below the poverty line (Carr 2018). Meanwhile, Latinos have substantially lower retirement savings, and four out of five Latino households have less than $10,000 in retirement savings compared to one in two white households (Brown and Oakley 2018). Low-income Latino older adults with access to pensions spend more time working beyond retirement age to increase financial benefits (e.g., Social Security pensions, savings) due to lower rates of savings and investment (Angel and Angel 2015). In sum, older Latino immigrants often have a challenging aging experience that is influenced by earlier life-course events.

Proponents of age stratification theory agree that late adulthood life stages are experienced differently—or stratified—depending on a person's gender, race, and class (Calasanti and Slevin 2001; Carr 2012). This point is emphasized by many studies on nonimmigrant aging, especially in health-related outcomes (Abramson 2016; Carr 2012; Fennell et al. 2012; Link and Phelan 1995; Olshansky et al. 2012). The two main theories used to analyze inequality are cumulative advantage and disadvantage (CAD) theory and cumulative inequality (CI) theory. According to the former, "cumulative advantage/disadvantage can be defined as the systematic tendency for interindividual divergence in a given characteristic (e.g., money, health, or status) with the passage of time" (Dannefer 2003:S327). The latter theory combines CAD theory and life course theory to assert "that *social systems* generate inequality, which manifests over the life course via demographic and developmental processes, and that personal trajectories are shaped by the accumulation of risk, available resources, perceived trajectories, and human agency" (Ferraro and Shippee 2009:334). It emphasizes that inequality is structurally generated and not the result of individual choices or actions.

This study contributes to these literatures by arguing that immigration status further acts as a stratifying social category for the largest minority aging ethnic group, namely Mexican immigrants. Specifically, I find that immigration status as constructed by the law (social system) generates inequality throughout the life course that is cumulatively visible in immigrants' late adulthood and results in *perpetual punishment* for the undocumented. This study adds to CI theory by showing how inequalities generated by the lack of a legal immigration status accumulate over the life course. Immigrants' aging and stratification experiences cannot be fully understood without paying attention to illegality.

ARGUMENT

Building on the work of scholars of immigrant illegality over the life course and of aging, my research elucidates how illegality, the day-to-day experience of living with undocumented (or ever undocumented) status, changes with aging and its consequences. All of the older immigrants in this study were dealing with challenges of aging that are typical of low-income and lower-middle-class Latinos, including health issues, family relationships, changes in daily routines, deciding where to retire, loss of income from work, and ongoing nativism, among others. However, I find that immigration status stratifies their experience of old age in significant ways while the experience of illegality itself changes across the life course as this population becomes invisible in dominant discourses in immigration reform and academia.

First, illegality traps older immigrants in the United States (see Chapter 2). Although existing literature has addressed this phenomenon, the reasons for it are different in late adulthood. Second, illegality interferes with older immigrants' ability to lead the autonomous and independent lives they desire (See Chapter 3). Illegality continues to shape all aspects of their lives but now in different and sometimes intense ways. Third, the experience of illegality itself shifts as people age and over the life course (see Chapter 4). For example, the fear of deportation declines, but new concerns over adult children emerge.

My findings reveal that undocumented immigrants (including those formerly undocumented to a lesser extent) are not aging into exclusion since they have always been excluded; rather, they are enduring what I call *perpetual punishment* or the consequences of long-term exclusion from U.S. institutions designed to support individuals throughout their lives, especially in late adulthood. I define perpetual punishment as the process in which immigration-related barriers seep into immigrants' day-to-day lives and produce long-term consequences that can be considered a kind of punishment. The term further reflects how illegality influences the lives of immigrants across the life course from the cradle to the grave thus giving the punishment its perpetual character. I argue that immigration policies cultivate the conditions for perpetual punishment across the life course, especially for those who remain undocumented in late adulthood.[3]

By looking at older immigrants' experiences, we can see how constraints and opportunities shift over the life course and as immigrants adapt to some features of illegality (e.g., deportability) even as other consequences are magnified (e.g., the growing importance of and need for safety nets and health care). The needs of older immigrants are largely invisible in dominant discourses on immigration reform, changes to safety net policies, academic circles, mainstream media, and among their relationships with families and communities when they no longer work themselves out of situations. This suggests that those *without* access to formal retirement pensions or savings, like undocumented immigrants, will remain perpetually in the workforce. I

[3] I build on Heidy Sarabia's (2012) concept of "perpetual illegality" or when immigrants "are unable to adjust status and will never be part of U.S. society" (53).

highlight how immigration status and aging lead to distinct constraints and limited opportunities for a growing population that has been disenfranchised by increasingly punitive immigration laws. Undocumented immigrants—and to a lesser extent those who were ever undocumented—have few opportunities to escape this punishment, even in one of the most accommodating areas of the country, the San Francisco Bay Area. Looking at older immigrants' late adulthood experiences helps magnify how immigration status influences the *perpetual punishment* of immigrants' lives.

DATA, METHODS, AND CASE SELECTION

To understand how immigration status impacts aging, I draw on 102 semi-structured interviews with older Mexican immigrants over 50 years old.[4] I describe my site selection, recruitment methods, and interview sample below. In addition to conducting one-to-one interviews with each respondent, I also took extensive fieldnotes of our pre- and post-interview conversations and any interactions beyond the interview location. For example, I talked to some respondents over coffee at their homes or local coffee shops, was invited to dinner at their homes where I enjoyed deliciously prepared traditional Mexican food (e.g., *tamales, pozole, carnitas*), and was present for family conversations and, interactions with nonprofits and religious institutions. I also served as a translator at times, including interpreting at their local Social Security Administration (SSA) office, among other interactions. The analysis is also informed by participant observation, even though the bulk of the dissertation focuses on in-depth semi-structured interviews.

East Bay of San Francisco, California

All interviews in the United States were conducted in the eastern part of the San Francisco Bay Area, California (East Bay), and for this study, I draw mainly from these conversations. I chose California as my research site because it is a traditional immigrant-receiving state and thus has a substantial older Mexican immigrant population. The state has the largest immigrant population and is also home to the largest undocumented population, including 846,000 undocumented immigrants over the age of 50 (Pew Hispanic Center 2018). Conditions in California also represent a best-case scenario for aging outcomes of older immigrants. The state has one of the most pro-immigrant social benefits systems compared to other states and federal laws (National Immigration Law Center 2017).[5]

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[4] According to the U.S. Social Security Administration, individuals reach the administrative full retirement age at 67 if they were born after 1960 (early retirement can start at 62, but Social Security benefits will be less). I considered limiting my sample population to this administrative benchmark (or even 65). However, I decided to start at 50 years old because we can expect that undocumented workers, due to their lack of immigration status, (1) may have worked in strenuous and labor-intensive jobs that may have deteriorated their health conditions well before reaching "retirement age," (2) may return to their home countries while they are still non-disabled, and (3) are ineligible for Social Security benefits; thus the administrative "retirement age" is irrelevant to their everyday experiences. In addition, large scale collection of data on older adults by scholars on aging and retirement like the U.S. Health and Retirement Survey (HRS) and the Mexican Health and Aging Study (MHAS) begin surveying individuals at 50 years old.

[5] For example, in January 2020 under Senate Bill (SB) 104, it was one of the first states to expand full-scope Medi-Cal[5] to low-income young adults under the age of 26 regardless of citizenship or immigration if all Medi-Cal eligibility and income limits are met. Under Assembly Bill (AB) 133, Medi-Cal eligibility will

More specifically, the East Bay was chosen as a field site because it has a long history of Mexican migration stemming from the so-called Bracero Program for guest workers (1940s–1960s). While not a formally defined region, it has usually been thought of as the region on the eastern shores of the San Francisco Bay and traditionally recognized to include Alameda and Contra Costa counties. In 2020 it had an estimated population of 2.8 million making it the most populous subregion of the San Francisco Bay Area. With approximately 440,000 residents, Oakland is the largest city in the East Bay (U.S. Census Bureau 2022). Within the San Francisco Metro area—which includes Alameda and Contra Costa counties—an estimated 255,000 undocumented immigrants, or about 24 percent of the undocumented population, are over 45 years old (Center for Migration Studies 2022).

In addition, local governments and non-governmental organizations in the East Bay are predominantly immigrant-friendly. Alameda County is one of the few counties in the state that provides uninsured county residents with affordable healthcare regardless of immigration status through the Health Program of Alameda County (HeathPAC) and has the largest senior center for Spanish-speaking community members.[6] This is important given the changing and often increasing health and support needs of older immigrants.

Respondent recruitment (East Bay). Older immigrants, especially undocumented ones, are a difficult-to-reach population. They are less accessible than younger migrants or children of immigrants; thus, I conducted snowball sampling to recruit all participants. Immigrants' fear of exposure to immigration authorities—regardless of immigration status—is a clear barrier to recruitment. Such fears were heightened as I conducted the interviews during a period where U.S. federal-level anti-immigrant policies and rules were being proposed and implemented (e.g., travel bans, changes in asylum policies, changes to the application of the "public charge" rule, etc.) that increased barriers to future immigration and heightened enforcement for current immigrants. Potential respondents expressed fear and concerns about being targeted if they participated; thus, I often had to create trust by getting community leaders to support my research and participating in everyday events such as attending Catholic mass and volunteering with community organizations as an interpreter and facilitator for different events (e.g., filling out paperwork, helping with technology). I had to be visibly present in areas with older adults and gain the trust of family members or community members that vouched for me. My credentials as a Ph.D. candidate at UC Berkeley helped me since many recognized the school. On a personal level, being the daughter of immigrants from Mexico helped me too because I could connect with respondents

expand full-scope coverage to individuals 50 years and older, regardless of citizenship or immigration status, starting May 1, 2022.

[6] This research was conducted before the extension of statewide health care coverage—specifically state-funded full-scope Medi-Cal (state Medicaid) or AB133—for low-income Californians 50 and older, regardless of immigration status, starting May 1, 2022. This law will benefit 235,000 California residents (Office of the Governor Gavin Newsom 2021).

over some shared experiences. They grew to trust me and wanted to talk. Some even followed up with calls and text messages to check in on my progress in school.

In keeping with the sampling strategy, several "snowballs" were initiated using local community organizations, churches, social media, and my social networks. For the U.S. sample, I contacted local community organizations and churches which allowed me to make announcements and give out flyers at their events. I also recruited some respondents directly (in person) through my social networks. This was the most effective recruitment strategy because face-to-face contact increased trust. Most of the interviews were conducted in person and in Spanish. However, given the global COVID-19 pandemic, I transitioned to over-the-phone interviews for the last interviews because most of my older adult respondents did not use Zoom and preferred to talk over the phone. They were given a monetary token after completing the interviews. I selected participants along two lines of comparison—immigration status and gender—as they constituted key lines of difference. In the initial wave, I aimed for equal numbers of men and women within the documented and undocumented groups. For those whose status had changed while living in the United States., I also recorded their legal trajectories. To protect the confidentiality of all respondents, all names used in this manuscript are pseudonyms.

Interviews averaged about 1.25 hours (ranging from 45 minutes to 3 hours).[7] They took place at the participant's preferred location—often homes, community centers, public libraries, coffee shops, local corner markets, parked vehicles, and benches at public parks—or over the phone. Only respondents who had lived in the U.S. for more than five years consecutively and migrated before age 45 were included.[8] Each participant was interviewed separately, and all interviews were conducted in Spanish. Interviews had open and closed-ended questions on migration history, family life, work history, access to support, thoughts on immigration, return migration, and future plans, and concluded with demographic questions—including age, years in the United States, number of children, etc.

Respondent characteristics (East Bay). Of the 61 respondents interviewed in the East Bay, the majority (43) were undocumented upon their first arrival in the U.S.; 12 entered with a visa and overstayed, while six reported having legal permanent resident status.[9] The initial interviews took place between spring 2019 and spring 2022.[10] their immigration statuses had changed: 29 were naturalized citizens, 12 were legal

[7] The extended 3-hour interviews were pilot interviews with a longer questionnaire that was shortened after the fourth interview. Subsequent interviews ranged from 45 to 120 minutes.
[8] All respondents were required to have migrated *before* age 45 because it takes at least 5 years or more to settle in a new place, and administrative barriers (e.g., citizenship tests, access to government safety nets) require at least five years of residency.
[9] Given the changing dynamics in circular migration patterns in the past, some reported their documentation at arrival as when they moved to live more permanently in the United States and not the first time they entered the country.
[10] Data collection was interrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic in spring-summer 2020.

permanent residents, and 20 remained undocumented.[11] I was interested in the incorporation patterns of older adult immigrants, especially the intersection with immigration status. The interviews broadly covered how their immigration status affected their aging process, including their work, thoughts on retirement, social networks, financial stability, and health. The mean age of respondents was 62, and on average, they had been in the United States for 31 years. Detailed summary demographic characteristics of respondents can be found in Table 1.

I then added a sample of older adults who had returned to Mexico to show how illegality influences immigrants' decisions to remain in or leave the United States because there is an assumption in the immigration literature that undocumented immigrants eventually return to die in their home countries when they are gravely ill, also known as the salmon bias effect (Riosmena, Wong, and Palloni 2013). In what follows, I briefly describe these binational interviews (see Appendix B: Figure 1 to see the binational research design comparison levels).

Los Altos Area, Jalisco, Mexico

The western Mexican state of Jalisco was chosen because of its history as a traditional migrant-sending state dating back to the Bracero Program (Fitzgerald 2009); thus, we would expect that there would be a large older return migrant population.[12] Recent estimates show that in 2015, 1 in 10 return migrants returned to the state of Jalisco (Masferrer 2021). Within the state, returnees are concentrated in Guadalajara (and surrounding metropolitan areas Zapopan, San Pedro Tlaquepaque, and Tonalá), Lagos de Moreno, Tepatitlan de Morelos, and Puerto Vallarta. Jalisco is also home to the highest number of return migrants between 40 and 64 and 65 and older. In 2010, 22 percent of the returning population was over 40 years old, and in 2015 it was 46.6 percent (Masferrer 2021:137). Return migrants often returned to their place of origin or surrounding areas in their home country. The San Francisco Bay Area, including the East Bay, was one of the U.S. destinations for Jalisco migrants.

My Mexico-based interviews were conducted in Jalisco, specifically in one of the largest municipalities in the Los Altos de Jalisco (or the "Highlands of Jalisco") area. I will call it Los Altos in this manuscript to protect the participants' geographic location. The municipality's population is approximately 150,000 residents with slightly over 90,000 residents living within the city limits.[13] The rest live in smaller towns and ranches surrounding the city but are considered part of the municipality. The area is currently known for being the largest producer of eggs and milk in Mexico, the largest pork producer in Jalisco, and a major tequila producer.

[11] Two respondents are classified as legal permanent residents, but they were undocumented until recently.

[12] Other traditional migrant-sending states include Durango, Zacatecas, San Luis Potosí, Nayarit, Aguascalientes, Guanajuato, Colima, and Michoacán.

[13] This data was obtained from the DataMéxico Beta, a joint data visualization effort between the Mexican Ministry of Economy (SE) and Datawheel (Secretaría de Economía (SE) 2022). To maintain confidentiality, I do not cite the name of the specific municipality.

Respondent recruitment (Los Altos). The interviews in Los Altos were conducted before the start of the pandemic. I mainly gained access via my connections with locals. One vital source of support was my connection with the local tortilla distributor. I created other relationships through my Berkeley affiliation over a summer of fieldwork. I would wake up at 5 a.m. to help distribute tortillas to the *abbarotes* (small grocery stores). This was how I learned where the older immigrant returnees gathered and spent their time. Many male return migrants gathered at specific locations for morning coffee and chats or spent time in the plaza areas. The tortilla distributor also vouched for me as a trusted individual. This was important as some community members feared that I could be part of the U.S. government investigating their private lives. Surprisingly, I met with more distrust from potential participants in Mexico, both documented and undocumented, than I had while conducting research in the United States. By chance, I also met a vital gatekeeper, an area leader who asked me about my research and background and who had also lived in the larger San Francisco Bay area in his young adulthood. He helped me gain the community's trust by sharing my research with others and encouraging eligible people to participate. Respondents came to trust me only after someone they trusted vouched for me or they learned of my association with UC Berkeley. Since most return migrants had lived in California, they knew the school and its strong reputation. To maintain trust and access in the field, I frequently wore clothing with Berkeley's logo and was often recognized as the "Berkeley student" while in the field. I followed a similar approach to compensation as in the United States.

Respondent characteristics (Los Altos). Of the 41 return migrant respondents from Los Altos, 24 were documented and 17 were undocumented when they lived in the United States. Their mean age was 68 years old, and most had spent 31 years in the United States. before returning. A detailed summary of their demographic characteristics can be found in Table 1. Additional details about project design and positionality are available in Appendix A. More participant demographics are summarized in Appendix B (Tables 2 and 3).

Overall Analytic Strategies

All interviews were digitally recorded for accuracy and transcribed verbatim, and full transcripts were analyzed using inductive and deductive coding techniques in the data analysis software ATLAS.ti (Mac Version 8.4.4). After each interview, I also took notes, which I referred to throughout the analysis. I used Detering and Waters' (2018) three-step coding process or "flexible coding method." First, I indexed the interview transcripts by coding large portions (usually multiple sentences or paragraphs) of the transcripts to the subsection content of the interview protocol, or "parent codes." Second, I used the index/parent codes to focus on the subsections (or concepts) to apply analytic codes and look for disconfirming evidence. Analytical codes, or "child codes," focused on themes for a single paper or chapter and often corresponded to shorter sections of the transcript (e.g., 1-2 sentence[s]). Third, I used the software tools and participant attributes, or demographic information, to test for validity and refine the emerging findings.

Table 1: Summary Demographics for Older Adult Mexicans in the United States and Mexican Returnees

Description	U.S. Sample	Mexico Sample
N	61	41
Age at time of interview		
Mean Age	62	68
50–64 years	34	15
65 and over	27	26
Gender		
Female	37	16
Male	24	25
Current Legal Status		
Documented	41	24
Undocumented	20*	17
Documentation Status on Arrival		
Without Papers	43	30
Visa	12	4
Legal Permanent Resident	6	7
Marital Status		
Single	5	1
Married	25	32
Separated	6	1
Divorced	6	3
Widow	14	4
Partnered	4	
Mean Number of Children	3.6	5.4
Mean Years in the United States	31	31
Location		
Los Altos (city)		22
Los Altos surroundings		19

* Two respondents are classified as documented (legal permanent residents), but they were undocumented until recently.

Broader Political Context

Most of the interviews were conducted in the spring and summer of 2019 before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, although a few were conducted during the pandemic between the fall of 2020 and the spring of 2022. Thus, most interviews were conducted

while Republican President Donald Trump was still in office with a small number conducted after the election in November when Democrat President Joe Biden defeated him. Respondents' responses reflect a wave of anti-immigrant rhetoric at the federal level and a more welcoming state (California) and local (the East Bay) context. Although the federal level rhetoric overshadowed the lives of my respondents, the local political context had a more immediate impact on their daily lives.

Many respondents voiced disagreement with the nativist rhetoric emanating from the federal level; however, many also described having experienced nativism and discrimination before (although not as bluntly). Many respondents, independent of their immigration status, felt that the United States was not welcoming to immigrants, especially undocumented individuals, regardless of who was president. Fifty-eight-year-old undocumented Elias Aguayo shared his opinion: "The laws in the U.S. are anti-Mexican, especially with this president [Trump]. However, they have always been anti-Mexican." Similarly, 55-year-old undocumented Tadeo Jiménez remembered telling his partner, "Don't think that because he [Trump] is president, immigration agents will be chasing people down the street. Since I arrived in this country, there have been good and bad laws and good, so-so, and bad presidents, too." Most of my older immigrant respondents had been living in the United States for decades. Thus, they had experienced an array of pro-and anti-immigrant attitudes, rhetoric, and policies. But while they were not surprised to have an anti-immigrant presidential administration, they did find it odd to see the head of state act capriciously and "not like a president."

In Mexico, many older returnees held views of the U.S. federal government similar to those of their peers who remained in the United States. The anti-immigrant rhetoric traveled across borders through social media and U.S. connections. However, many of them were naturalized U.S. citizens who had elected to leave the United States. (and return selectively) to enjoy a better quality of life in Mexico. Thus, while the federal-level anti-immigrant rhetoric did surface in my conversations with older adults, my respondents almost always redirected the conversations to immigrants' resilience and hard work. These findings bring nuance to our understanding of how immigration status impacts the late adulthood experiences of older Mexican immigrants and the consequences of illegality, and are critical for the work of academics, policymakers, and service practitioners to show how exclusion from full participation in U.S. society at any stage of life creates a vulnerable immigrant community that has fewer resources to weather the challenges that arise in old age for both those who remain and those who return to their country of origin.

CHAPTER ORGANIZATION

Becoming Invisible: Aging and Stratification for Older Immigrants in the United States and Mexico shines a spotlight on the Mexican immigrant men and women at the other end of the life spectrum—people who have lived in the United States for decades and are now in their late adulthood. I trace how the everyday lives of older adults are impacted by immigration policies to show how these policies shape aging experiences, the consequences of illegality, and how the experience of illegality changes across the life course. In each chapter, I focus on the barriers raised by immigration status and

how the cumulative effect and timing of these barriers throughout the life course cannot fully reverse the effects of not having an immigration status in their formative early life stages. I show how immigration laws and policies have permanent consequences for aging adults and their families or what I call *perpetual punishment*. Older immigrants become invisible in dominant mainstream discussions, policy, and academic circles while being perpetually punished by immigration law.

Chapter 2 demonstrates how illegality traps older immigrants in the United States. We know from previous literature that this is true of all undocumented immigrants because border enforcement has increased the cost of circular migration (Massey and Pren 2012b, 2012a). But some of the reasons are different in the case of older adults. The physical costs of getting across the border get higher as a person ages, and most importantly, many crucial resources for old age are not portable. All of my respondents considered factors like resources (portable and nonportable), health status, family ties, safety, and legal/bureaucratic concerns when reflecting on whether to remain in the United States. or return to Mexico. I argue that healthy, documented older adults with portable resources have a greater capacity to return than poor and sick documented immigrants and undocumented immigrants who face specific vulnerabilities across their life course related to their immigration status. This makes returning to Mexico difficult for these individuals, and even doing so permanently is hard. The government safety net in Mexico is weaker and the cost of health care is higher for the uninsured. Many migrants have not returned in over decades and have little first-hand experience of how their communities in Mexico have changed. Moreover, older immigrant adults cannot afford to be separated from their family, not so much because they might miss them but because they depend on them to get through old age (as Chapter 3 will show). This makes returning to Mexico virtually impossible, and undocumented older adults are thus "locked in" to the United States for the entirety of their lives, enduring perpetual punishment.

Chapter 3 explores how illegality interferes with older immigrants' ability to lead the autonomous life they desire, independent from their family. Contrary to what we find in the familism literature, all older immigrant respondents, independent of their immigration status, wanted to maintain physical and financial autonomy in late adulthood. I look at how immigration status affects older immigrants' ability to realize their desires and its consequences for old age and relationships. I argue that undocumented older immigrants' ability to achieve their ideal of autonomy and independence is disproportionally deterred (nearly impossible) because they are excluded from federal contributory resources like Social Security pensions, disability, spousal benefits, and other safety nets that help the general older population. Consequently, this can strain relationships with family members. Thus, as immigrants age, Illegality continues to shape all aspects of their lives, albeit in different, and in some respects more intense, ways (e.g., having to work longer, depending on family more). All of this at the expense of their bodies and relationships. This analysis reveals how enduring consequences and perpetual punishment emerge over the life course as older immigrants try to reconcile financial barriers and limited access to resources for older populations with their desire

to remain autonomous and independent and maintain relationships with their family members.

Chapter 4 focuses on how the experience of illegality changes over the life course, particularly as immigrants enter old age, and as older immigrants age. It provides new insight into how undocumented migrants experience the threat and fear of deportation over the life course. Whereas undocumented youth have to "learn to be illegal," older immigrants have decades of experience being "illegal." I argue that visibility and fear of deportation are also a function of where one is in the life course. As Mexican migrants age, they become less visible to authorities and therefore less susceptible to and fearful of deportation. This is a function of bodily changes associated with aging and of the fact that they are no longer engaged in activities that make one visible or vulnerable, such as going to work. I also show that the longer migrants live in the United States., the less vulnerable they feel. For example, many older migrants embrace the "good immigrant" narrative and believe their adherence to the law will protect them from deportation. At the same time, older migrants still fear the deportation regime, and their illegality remains salient, although in new ways. While older undocumented immigrants are less visible and feel less vulnerable to deportation themselves, their concern shifts to their undocumented adult children who are entering the stage of life when they become prime targets for immigration officials. Moreover, whereas they used to be concerned about how their own deportation would affect their young children, they now worry about the consequences for themselves if their adult children were to be deported. This transition is significant because older immigrants often depend on the support of their children to weather old age. They continue to endure precarity at a time in their life when they begin to need more from their adult children and are thus forced to lead these interdependent lives with their families (see Chapter 3).

I conclude by situating my findings in a larger context. The United States is experiencing demographic aging of the population with an increasing number of ethnic minority and immigrant older adults, and immigration policies have become more punitive and less humanitarian. This work finds that punitive immigration laws are counterproductive and, to an extent, ageist because they make it more difficult for immigrants to live their day-to-day lives and prepare for late adulthood when they will not have the same ability to work, and their health status may decline. Laws are made with the assumption that immigrants will somehow stay the same forever: young and able-bodied. Thus, as they grow older with immigration-related restrictions and barriers, immigrants become invisible in certain spheres and mainstream discourses that could change their futures. It becomes more challenging for them to maintain their autonomy and find a way around these barriers. Barriers that were already present earlier in the life course are exacerbated by the natural aging of the physical body that structures the lives of older immigrants and their family members. Families, including citizens, will carry the entire burden of these punitive immigration laws. In this way, older immigrants and their families experience *perpetual punishment.*

CHAPTER 2

Aging in Places: How Immigration Status Influences Where Older Immigrants Live in Late Adulthood

When 66-year-old documented Pedro Gallardo was injured at work in his mid-50s and became disabled, this event triggered his return to Mexico—for short periods at first and gradually for longer and longer stays. At 13 years old, Pedro migrated to the San Francisco Bay area with his siblings. He later married Míriam Gallardo—now 60 years old and documented—from the same hometown, and she emigrated to the United States to be with him. Although Pedro was undocumented upon his arrival in the United States, he quickly adjusted his status and later sponsored his wife's immigration application. Míriam took care of their household and children while Pedro worked as a sanitation engineer for the local waste management company for most of his working years. They bought a house in the San Francisco Bay Area before the increase in property values made such purchases virtually impossible for blue-collar workers. They also invested in property in Mexico. Now, they live in Mexico for most of the year, traveling to the United States 2–3 times per year to visit their adult children and grandchildren. When I asked him why he had returned to Mexico, Pedro mentioned his good health, access to multiple portable resources, and flexibility to travel back and forth to visit his family.

Pedro's experience contrasts with that of 63-year-old Emanuel Fonseca. Emanuel had remained single, undocumented, and childless, and found himself "locked" in the United States. Emanuel had migrated without papers, first arriving in the United States in the early 1980s and then returned to Mexico before reentering the United States again in the 1990s to stay more permanently to work. During his first trip to the United States, he had applied for a Social Security number (SSN) card and was granted one in his name. He worked for over 20 years with his SSN in a large bakery factory before being laid off after he sued his employer for work-related injuries (worker's compensation). He used a motorized scooter to move around due to injuries to his back and leg and has access to primary health care through a local county-level program. For most of his life, he had rented an apartment in the United States, be had also bought a property back in Mexico. After he became disabled and his income decreased, he was forced to move into his brother's garage. Emanuel paid him a reduced monthly rent with his state-funded worker's compensation payments and then with his worker's compensation settlement funds. At the time of our interview, these funds were running low. Emanuel was frustrated that he could not access the money he had contributed to Social Security (SS) because he lacked a current employment authorization document. When I asked him if he planned to return to Mexico, he was quick to dismiss the idea, citing a number of obstacles: his poor physical health, income insecurity coupled with fears of limited work opportunities in Mexico (given his age), the potential loss of his crucial local formal social support, and his inability to come back to the United States. At his age, returning to Mexico would be a permanent decision for Emanuel. For a host of reasons, undocumented immigrants are often trapped in their country of migration for the duration of their lives.

In U.S. migration studies, the presumption has long been that migrants come to stay and settle in the United States (Alba and Nee 2003; Gordon 1964; Portes and Zhou 1993), but a robust subset of scholarship has underscored the substantial number of migrants who intend to return to their home country—regardless of whether they actualize this plan (Jones-Correa 1998)—or return posthumously through postmortem repatriation (Félix 2011). This is especially salient for Mexican immigrants living in the United States, given the geographic proximity of the two countries and their transnational investments—including maintaining ties, property ownership, and remittances in Mexico (Fitzgerald 2009).

Meanwhile, research on "aging in place"—or the desire to stay in one's own home as one gets older (NIH National Institute on Aging 2017)—has found that most older adults in the United States would prefer to age at home (Torres 2018; Vasunilashorn et al. 2011). A small subset of this research has highlighted that many older people are on fixed incomes, and poor older migrants often struggle to stay in their neighborhoods as they grow older (Freidenberg 2006). Nevertheless, the research on aging in place seldom considers the situation of foreign-born residents, who might have the option to return to their homelands and live transnational lives.

This chapter focuses on older Mexican immigrants' decisions regarding where to age and explores how immigration status[14] shapes their decision to "age in place," return to Mexico or some combination of the two. Previous research on Mexican return migration has shown that most returnees are between 18 and 49 years old and are mostly men. They return for various reasons, including economic recessions (e.g., unemployment), entrepreneurial endeavors, homesickness, and reuniting with family (Hazán 2014). Using representative survey data of older return migrants in Mexico, Alma Vega and Karen Hirschman (2019) show that economic reasons are less important in older adulthood than in earlier younger adulthood. Instead, older migrants are more likely to return because they find it "difficult to be in the U.S." or "miss family."[15] These findings begin to shed light on how age and life course factors shape reasons for return. Still, we know less about the differences in experiences between those who stay and those who return. Extending my focus to include the experiences of older immigrant adults and examine how illegality shapes their decisions about where to age allows me to directly explore how immigration status enables or constrains such decisions.

Regardless of immigration status, older immigrants consider similar factors, like resources, health, family ties, safety concerns, and incorporation into life in the United States, when making these decisions. However, both health and legal status influence the final decision to return. I argue that healthy, documented older immigrants with

[14] Immigration status and legal status in this manuscript both refer to immigration documentation status—e.g., undocumented, legal permanent resident, or naturalized citizen.

[15] In their study, economics is operationalized as "It was difficult to remain in the U.S." and "Insufficient earnings." Meanwhile, missing family means "You missed family" and difficult to be in the U.S. includes "It was difficult to remain in the U.S." and "It was too expensive to remain in the U.S." Respondents could cite more than one reason but were asked to select one main reason, and the "other" option was more widely cited.

portable resources have a greater capacity[16] to return to Mexico permanently or live transnational lives. Poor and sick documented, older immigrants are less able to move, even with a legal immigration status, because of their need to remain close to medical services. They lack portable resources and thus rely more heavily on nonportable resources. However, the most vulnerable group are undocumented older immigrants who are unable to travel freely across borders. Their vulnerability over the life course, which was specific to their lack of legal immigration status, limits their opportunities to accumulate portable resources and they often have limited or no access to nonportable resources. Illegality influences lifetime economic opportunities and consequently standard of living, ability to travel, and geographically based support (e.g., portable and nonportable resources) leading to cumulative disadvantage. Older undocumented immigrants are thus trapped within the United States with few options but to "age in place" as a cumulation of their perpetual punishment. In sum, having a legal status gives a person more choice when it comes to where to live.

Returning to Mexico is easier for those with papers and who enjoy better health. Documented older immigrants who return to Mexico often have access to portable resources, specifically non-employment-based income streams like Social Security pensions, private pensions, and rental property income (from a property in the United States or Mexico). Their contributions to SS programs over their lifetime and their legal immigration status allow them to legally receive payments of benefits domestically or abroad (Nuscheler and Siskin 2006).[17] Some are also able to create wealth by purchasing homes earlier in adulthood, given their access to more resources (e.g., better employment opportunities and financial institutions). Similarly, documented older immigrants' ability to travel gives them access to nonportable resources like health care (Medicare) and other geographically based resources like subsidized caregiving and food banks. Beyond formal support, documented older immigrants' ability to travel also allows them to access informal family and in-kind support in two places.

For others, poor health and limited portable resources limit their ability to return to their home country, even when they can legally travel. Documented older immigrants who stay in the United States are often bound by poverty, poor health, and a greater need for nonportable resources and/or in-kind support from family. Although they can travel—and some do for short-term visits—and return to the United States., they would find it challenging to meet their basic needs (food, shelter, caregiving) without their nonportable resources if they were to return to Mexico.

[16] By "greater capacity" I mean that they can physically leave, but this does not mean they have the necessary resources to make a permanent move.

[17] Naturalized U.S. citizens can continue to receive SS pension benefits abroad with few obstacles if they meet all the requirements. Permanent residents must meet the same requirements and reside in the United States. for at least six consecutive months for uninterrupted receipt of benefits. Benefits can be suspended if an individual remains outside of the United States for more than six months, and they only resume if the person returns to the United States lawfully for a full month (Nuscheler and Siskin 2006). There are a few exceptions, one of which is that the country of origin has a totalization agreement with the United States.

Returning to Mexico is even harder for undocumented immigrants, who carry a double burden. Due to restrictions linked to their immigration status, they often have difficulty accessing both important domestic resources (e.g., income, health care, and housing) and transnational cross-border age-related support. U.S. federal law excludes them from fully participating in contributory programs like SS[18] due to their lack of legal immigration status. According to the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), undocumented immigrants who are not lawfully present in the United States cannot collect SS benefits, even if they have contributed to the program (Nuscheler and Siskin 2006:CRS-8). At the same time, having lived and worked in the United States for much of their lives, many older immigrants have not participated in Mexico's Social Security programs or experienced life in Mexico in decades. Their lack of papers limits their ability to travel back and forth and maintain ties, making it difficult for them to imagine a life there. As a result, older undocumented immigrants experience *perpetual punishment,* being bound to one place as a result of U.S. immigration law.

In what follows, I first discuss the different factors all older immigrants, regardless of immigration status, consider when deciding where to grow older: resources, health, family ties, safety concerns, and incorporation into life in the United States. Next, I examine how legal and health status affect their ultimate choice of where to live out their remaining years. I show how legal status offers more options when it comes to deciding where to live.

PART 1: CONSIDERING WHERE TO LIVE IN LATE ADULTHOOD

All the older immigrant respondents had similar considerations when deciding whether to "age in place," return to Mexico, or some combination of the two. The decision of where to also comes at a time when many older immigrants have more medical needs and less income from formal employment. Thus, the main factors that emerged from older immigrants' interviews included access to resources, health care, family ties, and safety concerns.

Access to Resources

Access to important resources like a secure income, housing, and safety nets was a key factor in older immigrants' decisions on where to age. As expected, and similar to nonimmigrants, many older immigrants experienced a decline in income when they left the workforce, either by choice or because of disability or formal retirement. On average, in the United States, one in five older Latinos survives solely on Social Security checks (Carr 2018). A decrease in income later in life is expected and has been demonstrated in research on ethnic/racial minorities (Carr 2018). Thus, it is not surprising that older immigrants would consider these factors.

Income. The primary sources of income for older immigrants included employment, for those who continued to work, and SS benefits like pensions and cash

[18] Many contribute to Social Security but are unable to withdraw any benefits because (a) they cannot provide legal employment authorization, (b) they used an *Individual Taxpayer Identification Number* (*ITIN*) to file their income taxes, or (c) they used a false Social Security number that is not tied to any account.

assistance (disability or supplemental benefits), other private pensions (e.g., 401K), and rental property income, for the non-employed. Overwhelmingly, the main source of income was solely SS pensions or surviving spouse benefits. When I talked to 72-year-old documented Olga Moreno, she and her husband relied on their individual SS pensions as their primary source of income[19]:

> I told my husband, "We have our house in Mexico, and with the $1000 that they will give you, and the $1000 they give me, we can return to Mexico. We can sit and grow old eating roasted seeds in our place." My husband was the happiest person when I said that. He was ready to go as soon as we could do it…I felt good making this decision… I had been living [in the U.S.] for more than 20 years…I decided because I realized that money would be tight if I stayed in the U.S. After all, we wouldn't have enough income to survive. The cost of living is much higher here for everything [than in Mexico]. So I thought if I get a $1000 pension and then must pay an $800 apartment rent [in the U.S.], then what about everything else? No one will let you live anywhere for free.

For the Moreno couple, what they could afford on their SS pension income was an important consideration when deciding where to live. After their last adult child got married in the United States, they returned to Mexico. The couple had invested their life savings to make sure each of their three adult children had a place of their own to live before they left, providing at least the down payment for homes in Livermore, Brownsville, and Tracy (they grew up in Oakland and San Leandro). Olga and her husband lived in their mortgage-free home in Mexico. For many older immigrants, SS was their primary source of income even if it was not enough to live on.

A few older immigrants had access to private pensions. Seventy-five-year-old Joaquín Peréz received a small pension from his employer, a local housing authority. He shared:

> I thought that I would retire at 65 years old, but I felt my work was easy and well paid, so I stayed another two years until I was 67. I started getting my SS pension, and we had an abundance of income between my SS pension and my private employer pension. My employer pension was not a lot, but it was secure. These two incomes added up. It was a small amount but appreciated. I can't complain since it helps us live.

Private pensions were not the norm among my respondents. However, the few who had access to these opportunities often shared that combined with their SS pension, this additional income provided them with extra security and more options for where to live.

Housing. All older immigrants were concerned with having a secure housing situation in late adulthood. Many preferred to have their own home or apartment. For example, 51-year-old undocumented Juanito Seguro described that it was important to him to have a home where he could grow old: "I have been building my house in Mexico in case I need to go back. I want to have a place to live that I can call my own." Although Juanito was renting an apartment in the United States at the time, he articulated the importance of owning his own home for late adulthood, even if it was in Mexico. After decades of living in the United States., he was still unable to purchase a home there on a day laborer's pay.

[19] All quotes were in Spanish and translated by the author.

Similarly, 55-year-old documented Leopoldo Ortiz shared how housing was an important factor in his decision of where to live:

> We have a house here and a place in Mexico, and I am currently disabled [due to a work injury and then a car accident]. After I get my pension, we might spend some time in each house across both countries… …We could spend some time here and then time in Mexico. We could spend 2-3 months in Mexico and then some time here [in the U.S.]. We must have the house, though, because one cannot live as a freeloader. I can't live as a freeloader [including with adult children]… I will also have the rent payments from the small in-law suite here on my rental property, and we can also rent the main house.

Leopoldo had invested in property in both countries earlier in his life. Thus, he had multiple housing options. Since he was unable to work, he was already experimenting with visiting Mexico several times a year, from two weeks to one month at a time. In sum, access to housing solutions gave immigrants more options when deciding where to live.

Other important resources were federal, state, and locally funded safety nets. Given their changing health needs, most older immigrants cited the importance of access to safety nets, including health-care coverage (e.g., Medicare and Medi-Cal), housing subsidies, In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS), Social Security, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and others when deciding where to age. For example, 76-year-old documented Adelaida Iglesias shared that she expected to "age in place" because she needed support to complete her day-to-day tasks:

> I don't know how I feel, but the point is that I fell in my senior apartment, and I don't remember how long I was unconscious… An ambulance had to come for me… After that, I was offered some assistance. The government will pay one of my daughters to take care of me. My daughter helps me with the household chores. They also pay her to wash my clothes, fold my clothes and clean my kitchen, the bathroom, and the living room. She also cooks for me whatever I like every day. They pay her a certain number of hours.

Adelaida also had access to housing subsidies for her apartment and IHSS, which was a crucial factor when deciding where she could live.

One critical safety net was the Health Program of Alameda County (HeathPAC), which provides low-income uninsured county residents without access to state-funded Medi-Cal or private insurance with affordable health care in nine community-based clinics. Fifty-three-year-old undocumented Nieves Jiménez shared how coverage through this county-level program was critical to accessing the help she needed with her injured hand:

> I injured my hand and I can go to the hospital with this health insurance for low-income people for my hand therapies… The prices for medical procedures are reasonable, like $10 for copays and a bit over $100 for like mammograms or x-ray tests… It can get expensive, but there are payment plans… My partner was recently hospitalized with bad pneumonia for more than a week, and thanks to the program, it did not cost us an arm and a leg.

This program allowed her and her undocumented family members to get the medical attention they needed, especially when unexpected illnesses or injuries occurred.

Health Care and Health Status

Health status and proximity to health providers were also important considerations for older adult immigrants when deciding where to age. Those who had poor health and needed regular contact with their medical providers had difficulty moving away. When I asked 66-year-old documented Teresa Exposito if she would return to Mexico, she shared concerns about being a burden for her adult children there because she had many illnesses that required many medications: “I am sickly now, which means pills after pills after pills.” When she was 52, she had had a work-related fall and broken her hand and arm and at the time of our interview she was still having surgeries (a total of four so far). When I asked her to tell me more about her other illnesses, she stated, “Well, I have issues with my knees (I don’t have cartilage), I have diabetes, high blood pressure, [and] cholesterol. I have all the illnesses” (laughing). She vividly recalled how she had been diagnosed with high blood pressure in her early 50s and more illnesses soon after. Her conditions required constant monitoring, and they were covered jointly by Medi-Cal and Medicare. In a follow-up interview, she shared that her only remaining daughter in the United States had recently moved to Mexico. Thus, she was now alone in the United States with all her adult children living abroad in Mexico and in Spain. Nevertheless, Teresa was still set on living in the United States in her apartment. Even though she could travel to Mexico, she stayed in the United States due to her poor health and to avoid being a [financial] burden to her adult children in Mexico. Teresa’s case supports emerging quantitative research that finds that Mexican return migration due to bad health vary by age (the general hypothesis suggests that Mexican immigrants return to Mexico due to poor health). Recent research has found that older Mexican adults in poor health actually tend to stay in the United States, while those in better health return to Mexico. However, this tells us little about the reasons and mechanisms behind this phenomenon (Aguila et al. 2013).

In contrast, older immigrants with better health who needed less regular contact with medical providers were more able to move—including returning to Mexico. Seventy-six-year-old documented Cecilia Durán shared that her main ailments were arthritis and, recently, her knees:

> When we moved back, we were healthier than now, and it was expected because we were younger… I have arthritis, and two years ago, my knees started causing me trouble… My knees are my only ache. They hurt if I walk too much like in a day. Now, I know how much I can walk in a day to avoid the pain and inflammation… I told my doctors in the U.S. during one of my visits. They took an MRI, and they said that it was not a knee cartilage issue. There was nothing they could do for now… I go to the Los Altos city center to get knee/leg massages every few weeks.

Cecilia did not have illnesses or injuries that prevented her from returning to Mexico. She took some medicines for her arthritis on an as-needed basis. Her primary care doctor had no recommendations for her knee pain except rest and nutritious eating to manage her body weight and avoid placing more stress on her knees.

Family Ties

All older immigrants with families considered how "aging in place," relocating, or a combination of the two would impact them. Families were important because they were a source of emotional and social connection and support.

Some older immigrants wanted to be near to their families to maintain close contact. Sixty-nine-year-old documented Mercedes Rodríguez shared that she wanted to "age in place" because all her adult children lived in the United States:

> I am a widow now. All of my children are married, they have their families, and I am not going to return to live there [in Mexico]. I do visit… I only visit Mexico. I visit my sisters, my daughter-in-law, her three children, my uncles, and my aunts. I visit them once a year in December. I'm going for Christmas.
>
> My [adult] children ask me if I want to return to Mexico. I told them, "What am I going to do in Mexico all alone?" All of them are here. I don't think they would all visit me if I lived in Mexico…They all have families, and the cost of living every day is high. I want to return for a bit longer, but I can't. I can't because I am afraid… I am afraid of being alone now that I am older.

For Mercedes, maintaining close contact with her older children outweighed her desire to return to Mexico. It was important for many older immigrants with families to preserve these family relationships, and they benefitted when interactions were close, warm, and supportive.

Others wanted to move away for a better quality of life for themselves or their spouses, but they still wanted to maintain connections with family members. For example, 60-year-old documented Míriam Gallardo, who was living on the outskirts of Los Altos, shared that at first, she did not return to live in Mexico because of her family. When her husband, Pedro, started returning to Mexico, they still had children in high school. Míriam recalled how she told him, "I am not going to return… No, I am not returning to Mexico while my children are in the U.S. I will never leave. Look at me now. I returned to Mexico [with my husband more permanently] once they all completed high school and college." Now that her children were grown, Míriam lived in Mexico with her husband most of the year. She felt more comfortable leaving them because they were adults, but she was still conflicted at times:

> Mothers always try to be there for their children, and that is why I always told my husband, "I am not returning to Mexico." That has changed slightly now that our children are older. Now I have returned, and I am happy here too with my husband, but it is difficult for me to leave my [adult] children every time I return to Mexico.
>
> "You feel the absence of your family when you migrate, but you get used to it." He tells me this because I used to say to him that I needed to cook for our children. He would rebuke, "Oh, who taught me to cook when I migrated at 13 years old? I learned to do everything." He indeed learned to do everything and still knows. Returning was NOT my dream. I like to be in the U.S. because I do

> everything with my [adult] children... However, many older immigrants have a similar experience. They travel back and forth between Mexico and the U.S. because they want to see their grandchildren, children, or they want to check in on their homes.

Míriam negotiated her role as a mother and spouse when deciding where she would live. She felt more comfortable leaving for Mexico with her husband once her children were adults because they could take care of themselves. Míriam also experienced tensions in her relationship with her husband when she worried about spending time with her adult children—especially when they returned to live in Mexico. It was clear Míriam still wanted to participate in her children's lives as she had in the past by taking care of them, even as adults. She had recently become a grandmother, and during the interview, she enthusiastically shared pictures of her grandchild's baptism celebration in the Bay Area. She was still figuring out what her role would be with her grandchildren.

Few respondents returned to Mexico to reunite with family, even though many of them had adult children or extended family members there. Sixty-two-year-old undocumented Jonathan Montero was one of the few who did return for his family. He had migrated to the United States on his own and spent decades there without his immediate family. He shared that he returned to Mexico because his immediate family (wife and now-adult children) were waiting for him; they had never migrated to the United States:

> Family is what brought me home… I probably wouldn't have returned if my family had migrated with me. I wouldn't have returned because they would have been with me, and I would have worked harder to improve our standard of living—a better standard of living for us.

Jonathan was undocumented while living in the United States, so there was little opportunity for family reunification. He also did not want his family members to risk their lives to migrate to the uncertainty he lived with in the United States because he had a difficult time when he was there.

Safety Concerns

Many older immigrants described hearing about kidnappings and delinquency in Mexico on the news and social media. Sixty-eight-year-old documented Celina Peréz brought up her concerns for her safety when I asked her if she planned to return to Mexico:

> Author: Have you returned, or do you plan to return to Mexico?
>
> Celina No, I don't. We can't. I do visit. I do see my family. My parents are deceased, but I visit my siblings. We like to go, but lately, delinquency has been high, so it is hard in Zacatecas (Mexican state). We are afraid of going because delinquency is terrible and all of that. We know people are kidnapped, and we consider that we are older now, and we travel by ourselves, the two of us [husband and wife]. Before we used to travel at least once a year [to Mexico] and now we haven't visited for a while…We haven't visited in over a year now. However, we still hear that the delinquency in Zacatecas is very, very high. It's difficult… We listened to this on the news.

Author: What do your family members say?

Celina Well, they tell us that everything is tranquil there. They say, “You should not worry about it. Everything is tranquil.” Of course, things happen to people going down the wrong path, right? Well, we are old now. We are more afraid now.

Celina was afraid that something could happen to her or her husband, 75-year-old Joaquín Peréz, because of their age and the fact that they were visiting from the United States. She believed these two things made them targets for kidnapping and demands for ransom money from their American children.

Older immigrants’ physical infirmity and fear of violence sometimes deterred them from returning to Mexico. When I asked 70-year-old documented Simón Santos why he decided to stay in the United States, one of his reasons was that he perceived that there were high levels of vandalism and organized crime that could impact his safety:

> … First of all, there is a lot of vandalism [in Mexico]. Second, any person can carry a gun. People don’t use the gun safety lock, and I know a loose bullet could hit me…. No, no, no, my Mexico is very dangerous. You can’t even start a business without being asked for money. Some people are in the mafia/cartels that ``demand cash from you in exchange “for protection.” Can you believe that? No, no, no. A friend of mine opened a restaurant [in Mexico] because he was a cook here in the U.S. The mafia arrived at his establishment asking for money. In short, he got angry, and they fought since he didn’t want to pay, and they killed him. The Mexican government is still investigating [the case] without any results.

Simón was a charismatic older man who liked to make jokes and laugh. He said he wanted to keep his joy in life because he could no longer walk. Both of his legs had been amputated at the knee due to an infection from a work-related chemical spill. He had limited mobility with the help of his wheelchair. Although he still traveled to Mexico once a year (or every other year at most), he was hearing more about the violence there through his social networks—particularly the rise in gun violence and organized crime. In sum, concerns about their safety or the overall safety of living in Mexico were an important consideration for all respondents.

Incorporation into the United States

Some older immigrants also shared that they felt incorporated into life in the United States. For example, 68-year-old documented Jaqueline Fuentes described her stance on returning to Mexico:

> I am like “La India María,”[20] I am not from here, and I am not from there, but I feel like I am more from here [U.S.] than there [Mexico]. In other words, I have Latino roots, but at the same time, I am good here. The U.S. has treated me well… I like

[20] “La India María” is an iconic Mexican film character who represents “Mexico’s economic underdogs and Indigenous rural migrants who try their luck in Mexican cities seeking employment opportunities” and she is often portrayed as “the unassimilated, backward indigenous woman navigating perils of urban Mexican modernity” (Tumbaga 2020:759).

> the atmosphere here, where I have lived and worked. I have many friends from work, and my family is here. I know that if I returned, I would be alone.

Jaqueline had migrated to the United States with her nuclear family at a young age. She built a career working as a translator in a county job in San Francisco. All her siblings were living in the United States, her parents were deceased, and she still traveled periodically to her hometown, but only to visit. Now that she had retired, she was traveling more across Mexico and other countries because she wanted to explore the world. However, Jaqueline had created a community in the United States that she did not want to leave.

Similarly, 51-year-old undocumented Juanito Seguro shared that it would be difficult for him to return to Mexico because he was used to the lifestyle in the United States and would more likely consider moving to Hawaii: "I would like to visit Mexico and then come back. I am used to life here, and my children are adults and married now…If I could travel and pick where to live, I would return to Hawaii… I lived there once, and I would like to return." It was hard for Juanito to imagine leaving what he knew in the United States and returning to his home country without knowing how life would treat him there.

Multiple older immigrants also described wanting to age in place in the communities they had created in the United States. Sixty-nine-year-old documented Camila Santana expressed her feelings about returning:

> I don't know; I just don't think it would be possible [for me to return]… I visit, and I want to return [to the U.S.] after 2-3 days. I miss where I live, my bedroom, and my neighborhood. I know it may be silly, but I have my friends, all my things, acquaintances, and friendships that I no longer have in Mexico.

Camila recognized that during her short visits to Mexico, she missed her home and community in the U.S. Migration had prevented her from maintaining her relationships in Mexico and she was unsure that she could return to Mexico without these connections. All older immigrants, independent of immigration status, had similar considerations when choosing where to live.

PART 2: HOW IMMIGRATION STATUS AFFECTS WHERE OLDER IMMIGRANTS LIVE

Now we turn to how immigration status and health status influence where immigrants live. Documented older immigrants have more freedom and flexibility when deciding whether to return to their country of origin, in sharp contrast to undocumented older immigrants who are "locked into" the United States and for whom the decision to return is more permanent and limiting. Beyond individual preferences and similar considerations of where they want to live and age, these decisions are facilitated or constrained by their immigration status, along with the portability of necessary resources, their health, their ability to maintain family relationships and interdependence, and legal concerns.[21]

Portable Resources

[21] In this manuscript, family ties are synonymous with informal family support.

As previously shown, access to critical resources was an important factor when deciding where to age. *Portable* resources were vital for those who returned to spend their late adulthood years in Mexico. The portability of resources was thus a crucial factor in older immigrants' decisions to "age in place," return to Mexico, or a combination of both and highly dependent on legal immigration status. Documented older immigrants had more access to portable resources; thus, their experiences are highlighted here. I define portable resources as possessions or assets (e.g., cash) that can be transported across space—including international borders. Reliable portable resources for documented older immigrants included non-employment income streams like Social Security (SS) pensions, other private pensions (e.g., 401K), and rental income from property in the United States, Mexico, or both.[22] Employment authorization directly affected the types of jobs and opportunities immigrants could access across their lifetimes, consequently it affected their ability to accumulate portable resources that are transferable across borders in late adulthood.

Pension income. Legal immigration status grants older immigrants access to SS pensions: naturalized U.S. citizens can receive their pensions abroad while permanent residents must meet residency requirements.[23] It was quickly evident that documented older immigrants who returned to Mexico had one or more reliable portable resources that made their return possible. The most common source of portable income was an SS pension. Sixty-seven-year-old documented Isaac and 65-year-old documented Barbara Parra recently retired and returned to Mexico. Before doing so, they had both been naturalized as U.S. citizens. While living in the United States, they had bought a home in California, which was rented now that they lived in Mexico. At the time of our interview, they were temporarily staying with their siblings while their own home was being remodeled. Isaac and Barbara had two critical portable resources that made living in Mexico more attractive than staying in the United States: their SS pensions and rental income from their U.S. home. Isaac shared his thoughts:

> I am no longer working, and we are trying to see how we will balance our time in the U.S. and here in Mexico. We are trying to take full advantage of our retirement plan, but it is tiny. It's not that I don't like it. It's that it's a little uneven compared to the cost of living in the U.S. In the U.S., with what they give you in retirement, you can barely live (if at all).
>
> And if you pay rent [in the U.S.], you can't live to pay rent [or a mortgage] and live with the minimum that they give you; on the other hand, if you come here for a while with the income of the [house] rent and with what they give you [referring to his Social Security pension], you can live with little more comfortably in Mexico than in the U.S.…This is the reason that we came to Mexico. Most of the year, we live here in Mexico. Our adult children have made their lives in the U.S.; thus,

[22] Older immigrants who are naturalized U.S. citizens can continue to receive their Social Security (SS) pension benefits from abroad without penalties while permanent residents and citizens of other countries may have some restrictions as to how long they can receive benefits while outside of the United States. (Social Security Administration 2022a).

[23] Unlike naturalized U.S. citizens, permanent residents must reside in the United States for at least six consecutive months for uninterrupted receipt of SS pension benefits (Nuscheler and Siskin 2006). Receipt of other benefits depends on SS program rules.

> we visit them, too. We both live here in Mexico as much time as possible, but we also have our health insurance, everything in the U.S., and thankfully we do not need to use it readily, but we have the benefit.

It was clear that Isaac was trying to use the portable resources at their disposal to do what was best for the couple's day-to-day lives, even if it meant moving back to Mexico. Isaac had waited until he reached full retirement age to maximize his income during retirement. Barbara had stronger feelings. She told me, "No, you can't live on the retirement pension. You can't afford to live with that only [in the U.S.]." Their responses point to structural constraints like the high cost of living in certain areas in California and the inequalities built into the SS pension system (i.e., the yearly cost-of-living adjustments assume the cost of living is the same across the United States). The portability of their SS pensions made it reasonable and desirable to return to Mexico to live more comfortably with their limited income. Among my respondents, this was even the case when SS pension amounts were lower than the nationwide average benefit of $1614 per month (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities 2022).

Rental property income. Another vital source of portable income for documented older immigrant returnees was rental income from their homes in the United States or Mexico. Although homeownership does not require a legal immigration status, legal status allows access to institutional services for home mortgages and financing options.[24] It is easier to secure financing as a legal immigrant with a stable and verifiable income. Sixty-five-year-old documented Zeferino Serrano lived in his own house in the central plaza of Los Altos with his brother (his roommate) and rented his home in California. He had purchased his Mexican home while living and working in the United States and paid it off before his retirement. Zeferino shared, "I have my rent from my home in the U.S. I have my Social Security pension check. I am doing well with this. I retired at 62." At the time of the interview, he was renting his U.S. home to a good friend who had previously been his housemate. Zeferino explained that this arrangement worked well because it required little property management on his part:

> My current tenant is my friend, my old housemate. He got married and now has two children. I rented the house to them because they kept raising their apartment rent. I don't dare raise the house rent because they take care of my house… He recently asked me if I was willing to sell my house to him and I am thinking about it… If he buys it off me, I think I will sell it to get rid of it. I know it will not be the same because then I will get a lump sum amount of money that could easily be spent versus receiving rent monthly that I know is coming… If I get the lump sum, I may finish it all, and [then] nothing will be left… Eventually, it will be spent. My rental property will no longer be my cash cow that I can keep milking and living off. This will be the main difference, but I also think to myself, "If they leave and I must rent to another person, what reassures me they will pay? If I must travel every two months to charge them the rent, it won't be worth it, so I am considering this sale to avoid future trouble and fatigue… I can cover my living costs with my pension, and the proceeds from my house can be an emergency fund for unexpected costs."

[24] Noncitizens can own property in the United States with or without an immigration status.

Zeferino's rental income from his U.S. home was a critical portable resource; it covered the expenses related to the property (e.g., home insurance, maintenance, and property taxes), and the surplus was profit that subsidized his living in Mexico beyond his monthly SS pension check. However, at the time of the interview, Zeferino expressed concerns about his ability to manage the property while living abroad if his tenants—his former housemate and his family—decided to move out. He emphasized that he was just considering this sale option and was in informal talks with his current tenant. It was still not a given because he was still thinking about his choices. However, it was clear that it was an important decision that would impact his future portable income. In sum, many documented older immigrants who returned to Mexico owned a home (or had been a homeowner before selling) in the United States and/or Mexico and were able to collect passive income from at least one additional source. Having a legal immigration status had helped them acquire this asset, which allowed them to have portable income.

Managing portable resources. Portable resources were also easier to manage when older immigrants had family members who still lived in the United States or could travel back and forth themselves to manage their assets, as was the case with documented immigrants. For example, adult children often helped with rent collection by depositing checks, setting up bank transfer accounts (e.g., Zelle payment system), and transferring money from U.S. banks via international money transfer services like Western Union and the Xoom app. One of Isaac and Barbara Parra's daughters took care of collecting the rent and depositing it to her parents' U.S. bank account. Zeferino, on the contrary, did not have children, but the close relationship with his tenant facilitated the maintenance of his home in California, and his rent was deposited electronically. However, documented older immigrant returnees also had the possibility of traveling back to the United States if required to collect rent, complete routine property maintenance, or access their portable resources. Zeferino traveled at least once a year to maintain to check on his property.

Few to no portable resources. Many undocumented older immigrants remained in the United States because they had few or no portable resources. Given the lack of employment authorization over their lifetime, many had not been able to accumulate work credits to qualify for SS pensions, even though they had contributed to the SS fund. Some did have Social Security numbers (SSN) from previous work authorization. Still, they could not collect SS while living in the United States without current legal employment authorization documents due to the restrictions imposed by the 1996 PRWORA law (Nuscheler and Siskin 2006). The lack, or future lack, of a reliable income source was an important consideration for returning to Mexico. A few undocumented older immigrants who were still working had a home in the United States and were considering renting it and returning to Mexico. However, at the time of the interview, this plan had not materialized, and they thought it might be difficult to rent their houses without having the possibility of returning to check up on them. In sum, portable resources facilitated the decision to return to Mexico, and having papers facilitated access to portable resources.

Nonportable Resources

Having a legal immigration status also enabled older immigrants who met program requirements to access *nonportable* resources. I define nonportable resources as health care coverage (e.g., Medicare and Medi-Cal), family support (outside of informal monetary support), housing subsidies, In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS), Social Security Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and other geographically based support. Low-income and ill older immigrants were more likely to need these resources. To access nonportable resources from Mexico, older immigrants had to be able to travel back and forth to the United States, which required an immigration status. This was a serious consideration when considering return.

I also found that socioeconomic class greatly influenced older immigrants' decisions on where to age. Returnees were somewhat wealthier and did not need safety nets; however, documented older immigrants could access these transnational resources by returning to the United States if their situation changed and they needed them. Documented older immigrants who stayed in the United States were often low-income and/or disabled and had a critical need for these nonportable safety net resources. The impossibility of accessing nonportable resources while abroad influenced their decision to remain in the United States. They often found themselves geographically bound to the United States because of bureaucratic eligibility requirements. Meanwhile, undocumented older immigrants were the most economically vulnerable and were denied access to many portable and nonportable resources. Many decided not to return to Mexico because they would be unable to travel back to the United States once they left. Some undocumented older immigrants also relied on limited nonportable resources like Emergency Medi-Cal and food banks that were only available to them in the United States.

Having papers enabled documented older immigrants who moved to Mexico to travel back to access nonportable resources like health care for major illnesses or injuries as needed. Most returnees had Medicare coverage or would soon have it, but Medicare does not cover medical expenses abroad. Many took advantage of their trips to visit family in the United States to visit their primary care doctors for their annual check-ups. Beyond these yearly primary care visits, documented older immigrants emphasized that they would return to the United States for major medical services that could be programmed, like surgeries (excluding emergency medical care). Some shared that they had already used visits to the United States to have major medical procedures done. Seventy-eight-year-old documented Marco Durán had had multiple major surgeries since his return to Mexico. Many were performed during his visits to the United States (e.g., heart and knee) when he would go for his annual physical exams:

> I have had many surgeries in the U.S., and thankfully, they have all gone well. If we have major medical issues, we go back to Kaiser in the U.S. The last time, I wanted to return [to Mexico] as soon as my surgery was complete … My adult children wanted me to stay longer in the U.S. to recover from the surgery. They kept asking, "what are you doing down there [referring to Mexico]?" You don't have to work anymore (here or in Mexico). I don't see why I should stay in the U.S. because everyone is working all day, and if you want to visit someone at night, you can't. You can't visit people because they work, and they have to go to

> bed early. They can't take care of you for the same reason. Hence, you must stay at your own home, locked up, and watch TV. Here in Mexico, you don't have to do that. You can walk around everywhere or just walk outside and see/talk to people. Everything is different here.

Marco's major surgical procedures were covered under his Medicare insurance, and while he believed it was best to have major surgery in the United States for this reason, he did not feel the United States was the best place to recover. His adult children wanted him to stay there longer, but he did not feel the care he received was adequate. He recognized that his adult children (and others in the United States) worked, and work expectations constrained their time. They could not be around all day, so he preferred to return to Mexico as soon as possible. Thus, we see that while it was in Marco's interest financially to have his surgical procedures done in the United States, he believed that the recovery aftercare would be best in Mexico, given the better quality social life. His legal status enabled him to travel back and forth to access major medical care and health care and recover in his preferred setting.

Other documented returnees who had yet to go back for major surgical interventions shared that they would consider moving to the United States to use their health-care insurance coverage for major health concerns beyond nonthreatening chronic illnesses. For example, 65-year-old documented Leon Vega explained that he would consider returning to the United States to receive treatment for any major disease because he has Medicare health insurance:

> I have my insurance in the U.S.—Medicare coverage. Maybe one day, I will return to live in the U.S. I don't discard the idea, right, because I can. I have papers and medical insurance in the U.S., which is expensive here in Mexico… I have gone to the doctors here, but not for major health concerns. Do you understand me? For example, I have gone for a bad cold or flu, where I received injections. I have only had minor illnesses, nothing major.

Leon would seriously consider moving back to the United States if he needed major medical care due to fear of the perceived high costs of such care in Mexico. Similarly, 62-year-old documented Rosendo Rubio shared that he would return to the United States if he had a major illness that required prolonged treatment, as had happened to other people he knew:

> I would return [to the U.S.] … I think they return because of the money. We don't have money to pay for that kind of service here. Look, I have an uncle who would be here if he could afford his dialysis treatment. However, he doesn't have the money to do his dialysis treatment here… A woman I know here is completing her dialysis treatment here, and I don't know how she can afford to pay so much. She has many children, so I think they must help pay for it here.

Rosendo shared that his uncle could not afford to pay for dialysis treatment on his own in Mexico. Rosendo's own strategy in the case of illness, and what he considers the most viable option if he were to get sick in Mexico, reflects his uncle's experience. He compares this experience with that of his acquaintance, who was paying for expensive dialysis treatment in Mexico. For many returnees, it would be difficult to pay the full cost of major medical treatments without health-care coverage in Mexico; having legal status in the United States would enable them to travel back there to access this support.

For documented non-returnee older immigrants, nonportable resources and safety nets influenced their decision to remain in the United States because they were important to their everyday lives. This was a major consideration for respondents who required or desired immediate access to nonportable health-care resources such as Medicare[25] and Medi-Cal. In general, respondents expected that their health would deteriorate with age. When I asked seventy-two-year-old documented Elena González if she planned to return to live in Mexico, this is how the conversation went:

Elena: … I don't think I could return. I love to visit. I love going. However, I can't stay too long there. I only stay like a month over there because then I get sick.

Author: What do you get sick of?

Elena: Well, I get an upset stomach or illnesses like that. Then I start thinking, "Medicine is too expensive in Mexico, and here it is not. I get them here for free with Medicare/Medi-Cal and all of that. What am I going to do in Mexico if all my children are here [in the U.S.]?"

Author: Have you talked to your children about this?

Elena: Yes, they tell me that I should live wherever I want.

Elena was concerned about not being able to access the health care she needed in Mexico. Earlier in our interview she shared that she was prone to illness and needed to visit her primary care doctor and local emergency room much more than she used to. Knowing she was near the hospital and her doctor reassured her that she would have access to care, and knowing she had health-care coverage provided relief. Elena shared that a few weeks before our interview, she was hospitalized at her local hospital because she was vomiting. She was diagnosed with an intestinal issue preventing her body from effectively processing the food she consumed. Being close to her health-care providers, Elena could easily access care. Doctor and emergency room visits like this would only be covered by her Medicare and Medi-Cal coverage if she remained in the United States.

In contrast, if this had occurred in Mexico, Elena would not have been able to access health care so easily, and she would have been forced to pay out of pocket or be denied service. She did not think she would be able to be treated so quickly in Mexico, and it would be expensive. Documented older immigrants who stayed in the United States believed that health care was more accessible there than in Mexico—especially those

[25] Medicare is a government national health insurance program in the United States for people aged 65 and older. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "Medicare has two parts, Part A (Hospital Insurance) and Part B (Medicare Insurance). You are eligible for premium-free Part A if you are age 65 or older and you or your spouse worked and paid Medicare taxes for at least ten years…If you (or your spouse) did not pay Medicare taxes while you worked, and you are age 65 or older and a citizen or permanent resident of the United States, you may be able to buy Part A" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2022).

who had enough work credits for Medicare or were eligible for Medi-Cal. In particular, they believed that in the United States their ability to pay would not determine their access to health care because most hospitals are required to take patients who are unable to pay, or they could access medical payment plans. This was the case even though the welfare state and health-care coverage in the United States are often believed to be weak compared to other similar nations.

Some documented older immigrants who decided to stay in the United States had experienced health scares that made them more hesitant to return to Mexico. Sixty-eight-year-old documented Celina Peréz shared how her husband's heart attack during one of their last visits to Mexico cemented their decision to remain in the United States because health-care costs were too high in Mexico:

> For example, we arrived in Zacatecas when my husband had a heart attack. We were visiting for Holy Week (we practice Catholicism). We walked down to town, but my husband had a heart attack as we arrived at our home in Mexico. My adult children immediately traveled to Mexico to join us. It cost us quite a bit of money, but our seven adult children split the [medical] costs. We had built a house in Mexico, but we sold it because this happened. It had too many stairs now that we are older. My [adult] children told me, "Don't worry, mom, we each will pay our part of our dad's medical costs. Each person will send you our portion of the costs." There was a lot of union at that moment… There was a lot of cooperation between my adult sons, and my sons-in-law helped my daughters cover the medical costs because my husband was in critical condition… This happened in Mexico. In Mexico, Medicare and Medi-Cal do not work. It works here in the U.S., but not in Mexico. It was expensive in Mexico, but my adult children united and covered it together... We sold [the house] around the same time because it had too many stairs and was far away from everything. After my husband had the heart attack, we weren't okay (economically) because we have Medicare and Medi-Cal to cover our medical expenses, and we have everything. In Mexico, we don't, so we let go of the possibility of returning.

This event frightened Celina and her family because of the high health-care costs in Mexico. Since they were visiting Mexico, Celina and her husband, seventy-five-year-old documented Joaquín Peréz, did not have private health coverage in Mexico and were not enrolled in Mexico's universal health plan, *Seguro Popular.* Even though they were Mexican nationals, there was no way to apply and retroactively cover the costs of Joaquín's medical expenses. Nor could they transfer their Medicare or Medicaid coverage to Mexico. Most older immigrants in the United States at least rely on Medicare for health insurance. Others also require Medicaid coverage (equivalent to Medi-Cal) (Carr 2018). However, these resources cannot be accessed outside of the United States, and even moves within the country must be reported; these restrictions can tie documented older immigrants who need these services to the United States. This helps shed light on why the most ill older immigrants—even if documented—are unlikely to return to their home countries.

Nonportable public safety net programs have immigration status and residency requirements that influence older immigrants' decisions about where to spend their late

adulthood years. For example, 84-year-old documented Heriberto Calvo lived in a single bedroom in the home of one of his adult children in Oakland, CA. He spent most of the year there except when visiting one adult daughter and his grandchildren in Mexico, about once a year. A few years previously, his wife had passed away from Parkinson's disease.[26] Heriberto shared that they began to use nonportable safety nets like Medicare and In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS)[27] at the onset of her disease, specifically to support her until she passed. At the same time, they also decreased both the frequency and length of their trips to Mexico. After his wife's death, Heriberto "hired" his adult daughter as his care provider through the IHSS program. He was also advised by his wife's social worker that he qualified for monetary compensation via the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program, which he started receiving.[28] He recalled his experience trying to decide where to spend his later years:

Heriberto: Well, they are helping me here, you know.

Author: What do they help you with?

Heriberto: I get modest monetary support—just enough so I can survive. It is from the Social Security office… It is called, I think, supplemental something… This is a lot of money because I wouldn't ask for anything. If I have food, I can't ask for more… They give me about $600 or something like $620–640, and with this money, I buy whatever I want, and I eat whatever I want to eat… I go to play Bingo with my friends at the center. My daughter brings me here, takes care of me, and makes meals for me… She cooks for me, washes my clothes, stays with me, cleans the house, and all of that…She is my eldest daughter.

She helped me because I needed to hire someone to take care of me, right? My other children also told her, "You take care of our dad so that you can earn your own money." She also took care of my wife while she was alive, and the state paid her for this help. My wife passed away, and now she helps me. I am happy with her and her with me. It is not like I will scold her when she is helping me. I admit she is excellent at helping me do everything… I also have a social worker who my daughter checks in with in every year. If I return to my homeland, to Mexico, they will take away this support… They will take it away.

[26] Parkinson's disease is a progressive nervous system disorder that affects movement (e.g., shaking/tremors, loss of coordination).

[27] In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) "help pay for services provided to you so that you can remain safely in your own home. To be eligible, you must be over 65 years of age, or disabled, or blind" (California Department of Social Services 2022). To be eligible, a person must meet the following requirements: physically reside in the United States, be a California resident, must have a Medi-Cal eligibility determination, must live at home, and must submit a completed Health Care Certification form.

[28] Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is a cash benefit for individuals "with limited income and resources who are disabled, bling, or age 65 or older" (Social Security Administration 2022b).

Heriberto emphasized that despite being a naturalized citizen, he had to live in the United States to keep receiving SSI benefits and IHSS care provider support.[29] SSI provides monetary support for individuals who have limited income and resources. It has a 30-day presence requirement meaning that SSI benefits will stop if an individual is outside the United States for more than 30 days and won't re-initiate until they are back for at least 30 days. According to SSI program rules, you must "not be absent from the U.S. for a calendar month or 30 or more consecutive days" (Social Security Administration 2022b). These rules are different that the rules for Social Security pensions; as a naturalized citizen Heriberto is entitled to receive his pension while living abroad, but this is not true of his SSI benefits. In sum, the bureaucratic constraints of public programs can keep documented older immigrants trapped in the United States.

The accessibility of nonportable resources was frequently coupled with other considerations. In other words, older immigrants had multiple concerns. As I continued my interview with Heriberto, he shared that there were various considerations when it came to deciding where to age and he was weighing what it would mean for him to return to live in Mexico more permanently:

> There might be a day when I won't return to the U.S. from one of my visits [to Mexico]. I mean, you never know, but put yourself in my place. First of all, if I left, I would be giving up this support. It is getting harder to travel back and forth. Every day that passes, I am getting older, and everything must end. I tell my adult children, "I am comfortable with you here [in the U.S.]." I still feel good, and I haven't been sick. Here, I don't see much change in my life except I am getting older and older, and there might be a day when I won't be able to travel even if I wanted to. Time will tell. My eldest child tells me: "Dad, go back to your ranch and if you don't want to return, don't. We know how much you enjoy your visits, and you shouldn't worry about losing the support here [in the U.S.]. If they take away this support, let them take it. You shouldn't have to be here all your life just for the support." I know he says this because he sees that I have a good time visiting Mexico… I am happy over there while I still can visit because I have my four-wheeler and I drive around on it. I visit friends all over the place, and I have fun. Then, when it is time to come back, I don't come back too happy. I tell one of my daughters [in Mexico], "*Mija*, I don't want to return." She always tells me, "Dad, then why do you return? Stay here [in Mexico] if you like." I know I can do this, but my other children want me to return. I still feel capable of traveling back and forth. I can still make the trip… I feel happy here [in the U.S.] with my adult children, with all of them, and they all live nearby… If one does not call or visit me, another one does, or they bring me food. I am comfortable here. Why would I complain? But I feel there will come a day when I won't be able to return.

At the time of the interview, Heriberto was still living in the United States with his adult children, but he knew that he would have to decide whether he was going to stay or return to Mexico or his health needs would determine it for him in the future. However, access to nonportable resources, like IHSS, which provided his daughter with an income, and SSI, which provided enough money for food, was a significant consideration. Because nonportable resources cannot not be transferred across

[29] He became a U.S. citizen recently as an older immigrant.

borders, low-income documented immigrants who are eligible for these services often feel bound to the United States.

In addition to nonportable government-administered resources, documented older immigrants who remained in the United States also valued nonprofit and church-run poverty support programs. These programs were geographically bound. For example, seventy-six-year-old documented Adelaida Iglesias explained that in the United States, some organizations help older immigrants with food—especially those who are food insecure: "We are lucky here. I am sure you know, but there are many places here where you can get food baskets and other support, not in Mexico. The type of support and help is different in both places." Adelaida had lived in the Bay Area for 34 years and raised her children there, and thus was very familiar with the support available for needy families and services targeting older adults. She had also been a caregiver for older immigrants through the IHSS program and used to clean homes. Through these networks, Adelaida learned about programs that helped families and older immigrants.[30]

The extensive network of organizations in the East Bay region that cater to the public—targeting specific groups—was a resource that all the older immigrants valued. Fifty-year-old documented Dacio Márquez worked at a local community center. During my visit, he shared that they provide a food pantry for low-income workers, churchgoers, and older immigrants. He also explained that unlike in Mexico, "in the U.S., you can be poor, but you will not starve. This applies to older immigrants too." He saw that there were safety nets in place to support those who needed them in his current neighborhood. Similarly, 76-year-old, documented Carina Román also believed that she was better off in the United States than she would be in Mexico if she returned, even if she was economically disadvantaged:

> Why would I return to Mexico? Do you know how things are in Mexico? It is hard to live… Here, people make sure you eat, and if you don't have something to eat, you can easily get something. Thus, why would I put my adult daughters in an awkward position [to have to help me]?

In our conversation, Carina shared that she could get food at the organizations and churches in her neighborhood in Oakland, CA if she absolutely could not afford it. Documented older immigrants who stayed in the United States believed they were more likely to find support there than in Mexico if they ever needed it. They believed that nonportable resources were also more widely available in the United States; this was mainly the case for long-term residents who learned about these resources through their long-term relationships.

Undocumented older immigrants who decided to remain in the United States weighed their access to local and community safety nets—especially health care. For many—especially men and single individuals—their first encounter with local safety nets was as an older immigrant. Many had refused to accept any form of support from the government or agencies earlier in their adulthood because they were healthier and did not need help regularly. They also did not want it to impact the possibility of adjusting their immigration status in the future if they were considered a "public charge." However,

[30] See Dani Carrillo's work Field (2016) for work on social support programs for immigrants.

work injuries and medical emergencies related to aging required them to reconsider. Many were forced to use this support once they needed it. They also learned that local or state-funded programs did not necessarily impact future immigration applications.

For example, sixty-three-year-old, undocumented Emanuel Fonseca shared that he had never gone to the doctor before a work-related incident. After having suffered an injury, he was forced to seek medical attention, and his income decreased (and eventually ceased after worker's compensation benefits were exhausted). This was when he was diagnosed with other chronic illnesses. When I asked him why he would not return to Mexico, Emanuel shared the following:

> Because of money and Medi-Cal, I don't have Medicare, but I have another one… I have one that helps me with all my medical costs. I also have Emergency Medi-Cal. I also get help at my local clinic… They help me with my diabetes, any other illnesses I may have, any problems like a cut, or whatever I need, or send me to the nearest local hospital. They take care of me at the hospital with my Emergency Medi-Cal card. For an emergency, they will treat me at any hospital.
>
> In Mexico, who is going to help me? No one will. In Mexico, it is all about money. Imagine how much it would cost to get the same treatment I received here at my local hospital for my back? I believe these treatments are expensive. Who would pay that? No one would help me. I have been getting treatment here for five years since I got injured with the medical help I get. Imagine if I were a millionaire, I would have to pay for all those costs. How much money would I be responsible for?... However, right now, I don't pay for anything. This month I have to renew my cards – both the Medi-Cal and the Alameda HealthPac card. If I don't renew them, where will I get all the money to pay for the doctors? Who would pay for the MRIs and CT scans?... Everything they have done for me here costs a lot. Where would I get that money to pay for it? However, I got it done here [in the U.S.], and they wouldn't do it in Mexico. You have to pay first before getting service in Mexico.

Emanuel was single and childless and received little support from federal programs or family. After his work injury, he moved into his brother's garage to decrease his living expenses. Still, he extensively used the local health-care programs and emergency services (available to all) to address his biggest concern, his health. Emanuel believed that as a low-income individual, he would be unable to afford these services in Mexico, alluding to a dominant narrative among older immigrants in the United States and Mexico. Health services beyond one-off doctor's visits are expensive in Mexico, and many providers will not provide service without payment. There is less financialization of medical services (e.g., payment plans) outside of major cities and for individuals with little credit history in Mexico. Having spent most of his life in the United States, Emanuel had few ties to the bureaucratic structure in Mexico. His knowledge of the system is limited to what he knew before migrating and what he hears from extended family members and friends.

Other undocumented older immigrants also acknowledged that they would lose access to nonportable local resources like food pantries and community centers if they returned

to Mexico. Many had learned about these opportunities through their children's schools, community centers, and social networks. For example, fifty-one-year-old undocumented Efrén Alonso works cleaning carpets, and on the weekends he and his family do catering for events and gatherings. He has two daughters: one is in college and the other in high school. Efrén shared how he had become very involved at his daughter's school. The school made many resources available to families, including academic support for his daughters and community-level resources. He stated:

> The school sends us [parents] many web links with resources. We click and follow the links. They lead us to websites that tell us where to find support for the school, food centers, COVID-19, and so on… I have always been involved with my daughters' schools and anything in the community. I like to get involved because I learn a lot… Someone there referred us to our community clinic, too… There is much support here. It would be hard to get the same in Mexico.

Many undocumented older immigrants were connected to their communities, which provided them with support when needed. After living in Oakland for over 32 years (more than half his life), Efrén felt connected to his community and confident that he could access (non-cash) resources if he needed them. He was worried about losing this local level of support if he returned to Mexico. Because he had not been free to travel back and forth due to his undocumented status, he had not maintained his connections there. In addition, he was hesitant to return because he had not been back to his hometown in years, and he knew from what he saw on social media that it had changed a lot. In sum, Efrén and other undocumented older immigrants expressed concerns that they would lose access to nonportable local resources if they returned to Mexico because they would be unable to travel back to the United States

Health Status and Proximity to Health Providers

Because of their socioeconomic class and immigration status, documented older returnees had the ability to pay for day-to-day medical costs and the possibility of returning to the United States to seek medical attention if their health status changed. Documented older returnees were often healthier than their documented counterparts who remained in the United States, or not so sick or disabled that they needed to be near care services, and they tended to see travel to the United States for major surgeries as a real option. All returnees reported having at least one manageable preexisting illness (e.g., diabetes, cholesterol, low/high blood pressure) or minor physical injuries (e.g., hand/arm/back pains, knee issues), and a few had both. In contrast, those documented immigrants who did not return tended to be less healthy and need the nonportable resources discussed previously. Finally, among those without papers (the undocumented), age and the physical changes to their bodies made them worry about attempting a clandestine re-entry into the United States, even if they had done it in the past. Leaving the United States would also eliminate any access to nonportable local and state resources during a time in their life when they may not be able to work to pay off their medical expenses.

While in Mexico, most documented older immigrant returnees with manageable pre-existing chronic illnesses paid for private health care for minor ailments, sporadic medical visits, and prescriptions. For example, respondents shared that a doctor's visit

for minor health concerns cost MXN 500 (or about $25), excluding medications. Isaac and Barbara Parra described their health issues and the costs of prescriptions for their chronic illnesses, particularly Isaac's hypertension:

> Everything is relative… I have hypertension, which is high blood pressure. When I was planning for my retirement and making my Medicare selection, I considered that they would take $135/monthly from my SS pension for Medicare. This payment allowed me to access my medical appointments, prescription medications, and any necessary medical attention. Of course, I must pay a $22 medical visit copay and $18 for medications. Currently, I am on Amlodipine, and to refill my prescription, I pay a $18 copay at Kaiser… In total, for my medical visit ($22) and the medication ($18), it is $40… I went to a pharmacy to ask about refilling my medicines because I ran out. I asked for 2.5-milligram pills of Amlodipine. The pharmacist said, "Yes, we have them in stock, and I asked to look at them. They were the same pills as my own. I asked for the price, and he said it was 25 pesos for the monthly supply. That is a bit more than $1. I pay $18 for the same medication at Kaiser, and here without a copay or medical insurance, it costs me MXN25… This is a big difference for people in their old age or other retirees. We returned to Mexico because, unfortunately, medication prices in the United States are a fraud for those of us who need them. We can get them here at a lower price than the cost with insurance in the U.S.

Isaac felt comfortable returning to Mexico with a preexisting condition, hypertension. Through his direct research of prescription drug prices, he recognized that common prescription drugs were overpriced in the United States, even with Medicare coverage. He could afford to pay full price in Mexico for his medication given the low cost of prescriptions. He saved money by refilling his prescriptions in Mexico. Prices for doctor visits and prescriptions for minor or manageable illnesses were often comparable to their Medicare copays in the United States. Most documented older returnees shared that they could afford to pay the out-of-pocket prescription costs and as-needed doctor visits in Mexico for minor or manageable medical conditions. Most were covered by Medicare (without Medi-Cal). Thus, they always had a co-pay. Documented older immigrants who had medical coverage in both countries (private insurance/Medicare in the United States and *Seguro Popular* in Mexico) expressed similar sentiments. They preferred and could pay these out-of-pocket medical costs. Thus, it was clear that documented older immigrants with manageable chronic illnesses that come with aging had more flexibility to return to Mexico while those who were the most ill may not have been able to return.

Having papers gave documented older immigrants the option to travel back to the United States if their health deteriorated or they needed major health care. For example, Rosendo Rubio shared: "All the people that get sick here and are immigrants to the U.S. usually leave [when they get sick]. They return [to the U.S.]." He observed that those who had papers returned to the United States to receive major treatment.

The documented older immigrants who stayed in the United States and cited their health as a significant factor for doing so were often (a) less healthy, which required staying near their health-care providers, or (b) low-income and dependent on

nonportable resources. For example, 71-year-old Rosa Moreno shared that in the past, she had aspired to return to live in Mexico like many other immigrants, but that her current health status prevented her from returning:

> For many years, I wanted to return to my home state in Mexico… I had a dream of returning and purchasing a home… I aimed to buy a house in Mexico, rent it to young students going to the local university, and live there… I wanted to do that; however, now I have a rheumatic disease and all these other things. What can I do now?

Rosa was suffering from multiple illnesses that she felt kept her in the United States, where she had access to health care through Medicare coverage. The onset of disease made documented older immigrants consider the importance of their geographic location and access to their health-care providers. Rosa's only daughter is a major source of support for her, taking her to her doctor visits and helping her manage her household; thus, it would be difficult for Rosa to leave her daughter to return to Mexico.

As previously discussed in the section on nonportable resources, health-care coverage in the United States was a significant factor in many immigrants' decisions to remain in the country. This also applied to less healthy undocumented older immigrants, who were in part unsure if they would have access to similar coverage in Mexico. Many had been away from their country of origin for decades and were unsure about what resources would be available to them. Seventy-year-old undocumented Ursula Peña was a street vendor who sold tamales in a commercial center near her home. She had multiple health concerns, including diabetes and high cholesterol. When I asked her if she would consider returning to Mexico, she expressed concern about losing access to her medicines and care:

> If I return to Mexico, the doctor is too expensive and the medicines, too… I am very thankful for the U.S. because I don't have to pay or pay little for my medications… This is because I am low-income. I usually do not have to pay for my medicines, and I go to a local low-income community clinic… Compared to Mexico, I would not have these opportunities without an income, money, and by myself… I would not be able to afford them or pay out-of-pocket.

Ursula needed to have dependable access to her doctors and to medication, which she felt was an unlikely scenario if she moved to Mexico. She was unwilling to risk losing her current access by moving back to Mexico, where nothing was certain, and her undocumented status meant that she would be unable to travel back to the United States if it did not work out. Overall, less healthy undocumented older immigrants were less willing to risk returning to Mexico than those who were healthier or than documented immigrants.

Undocumented returnees and documented non-returnees also considered their physical condition when deciding to stay or leave and whether they thought they could cross the border clandestinely. Immigration has long been believed to be a young person's game. Many had last crossed the border over a decade ago and were concerned they would be physically unable to make the journey again. For example, undocumented 65-year-old Isadora Arias, who had decided to remain in the United States, shared:

> Another reason is that I can't return because of my age if I go. I can't run like I used to, and it is not safe to [cross the border]. I can't run anymore… I have thought about it, and the exercise of thinking about it works since it makes me think about my real options.

Isadora believed that she could not cross clandestinely back into the United States. Later in the interview, she also described how crossing the border had become more complex and expensive. At this stage in her life, she did not have the physical endurance or economic resources to consider such an undertaking. Others who remained in the United States similarly thought it unlikely that they would be able to get back if they ever decided to return to Mexico.

An undocumented older immigrant who returned to live in Mexico, 63-year-old Domingo Molina, lived most of his life working in the United States and sporadically returning to Mexico. When I asked him why he stopped returning to the United States, he shared that it was due to physical changes to his body:

> The last time I crossed the border, I couldn't anymore…It was harder for me to cross that last time because I am old now and secondly because we had to cross via the desert…The coyotes (immigrant smugglers) would take us through the Sonoran desert, which was very difficult. After that last time, I decided not to cross again. I didn't want to return to the U.S. because I was too old to be crossing the border clandestinely. I remember how I prayed to all the saints to survive that desert, and I promised never to return. I haven't returned since then.

Domingo no longer felt comfortable crossing clandestinely to the U.S because of physical changes associated with age. He recognized that it had become more difficult for his body and feared that another attempt would lead to his death. He also recognized that legal immigration was highly unlikely under current U.S. immigration law. Domingo knew he would be barred for at least 3–10 years and most likely indefinitely since he had lived in the United States as an undocumented for many years.

Maintaining Family Relationships and Interdependence

Documented older returnees can easily travel back to the United States to maintain family relationships, including informal and in-kind support from family members. For returnees, the ability to be transnational was critical and required a legal immigration status. Those who do not have immigration papers do not have the flexibility to travel back and forth. It is harder for them to navigate informal family support and relationships at a time in their lives when they may depend on family members. This section focuses on the stark differences between documented returnees and undocumented immigrants in the United States and Mexico.[31]

Documented returnees: travel flexibility. The documentation status of older immigrants and their adult children mattered for when it came to either party traveling to visit the other when they lived in different countries. It is not the case that "returning" means complete "assimilation" back into Mexican life or never going back to the United States. Most documented older immigrants who returned were naturalized U.S. citizens and held Mexican citizenship by birth. Thus, they could travel back and forth between both countries to visit their families without bureaucratic hassle with U.S. immigration

[31] An in-depth conversation on family support across all groups is discussed in chapter three.

services.[32] Documented older immigrants were able to see their families at least once a year—usually more often—and often planned the visits for holidays, birthdays, or other special celebrations. Seventy-six-year-old documented Cecilia Durán, who has lived in Mexico for more than twenty-two years now with her husband Marco, shared that her adult children worried about them living far away:

> Look, we have been living here for about 22 years now. At first, our adult children were happy that we returned to live in Mexico, but now they feel that we have spent too much time here and that we are far. We try to reconcile those feelings by visiting them three times a year. Next month, we will be traveling back to the U.S. for one week to attend our youngest granddaughter's quinceñera. I can't believe her quinceñera will be the last of our seven granddaughters. She is the baby.

When they first moved to Mexico, Cecilia and Marco were in their mid-50s and in better health. They were very independent and enjoyed their lives in Mexico, but their adult children had begun to express concerns about them living there as they grew older. To alleviate their children's concerns, Cecilia and Marco tried to visit for special occasions, like their granddaughter's upcoming quinceñera, and to reassure them that they lived well in Mexico. Documented older immigrants could travel to maintain relationships with their children because their choice to return to Mexico was predicated on their ability to be transnational.

Returning to Mexico with the option to travel back to the United States was also a strategy to maintain cohesive family relationships between documented older immigrants and their adult children. Olga Moreno told me that when she and her husband decided to return to their home in Mexico, one of their main concerns was maintaining separate households to preserve good relationships with their family:

> Now, living with your adult children and children-in-law is not healthy. It is not healthy at all. Everyone must live their life alone, independently, and tranquil. You should be able to do whatever you want without your mother-in-law living with you. I also know that if the necessity arises and you must live with your adult children, we will suffer, but we do it out of necessity.

By the time they decided to move back to Mexico, Olga and her husband had given up any legal ownership rights of the properties they purchased for their adult children as gifts, leaving them without a home of their own in the United States. Instead of remaining in California and living with their adult children, Olga and her husband returned to Mexico to live independently. They believed that living together with adult children or family could lead to tensions and rancor and wanted to maintain harmonious relationships at this stage; visiting their children in the United States was a welcome experience because it was temporary.

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[32] Sometimes documented older immigrants, especially those who had dual nationality with the United States and carried U.S. passports, complained about Mexican immigration bureaucracy when they were traveling. Two common experiences were (1) being charged the Mexico tourist tax (~ USD25) when they flew into Mexico using their U.S. passports and being asked to fill out "Official Entry Tourist Cards" and (2) being charged an exit penalty whenever they exited Mexico because they overstayed the 180-day tourist visa. The penalty ranges between USD30 and 320 (varies according to the number of days stayed beyond the 180 days).

Knowing that their adult children could travel to Mexico was also a significant consideration for documented adults. Some documented older immigrants mentioned that their adult children preferred traveling to Mexico during hometown celebrations, planning vacations to other cities in Mexico, or staying for a limited time. For example, Míriam Gallardo shared that her U.S. citizen children had traveled to Mexico to celebrate her birthday in Los Cabos:

> I was turning 60-years-old, so we all went to Los Cabos to celebrate. All my adult children came with their wives and kids. We all met up there. My husband and I traveled from Guadalajara to Los Cabos on an airplane… We arrived, a driver picked us up at the domestic flight's gate and then moved to the international flight's gate. We were picking up my adult children who were coming from San Francisco.

This was an ideal type of celebration when all her adult children gathered with them. It was possible because they planned it for her birthday. However, her adult children also visited them in their town near Los Altos for their hometown celebrations—usually, at least one adult child came and stayed in their home. Míriam attributed her children's attachment to Mexico to having spent summer vacations there when they were young. Now that Míriam and her husband Pedro lived in Mexico, that was an additional pull to visit.

Although having papers opened up the possibility of adult children visiting, documented returnees realized that their working children had limited time for visits given the lack of flexibility in their employers' vacation policies. While some children did visit, it was more common for older immigrants to travel, given their more flexible schedules. For example, Barbara Parra explained that her adult daughters, while legally able to visit their parents in Mexico, were often limited by their work schedules: "They love to come to visit [Mexico]. One comes every year and our other daughter, who lives in Pennsylvania, comes less frequently due to her job. … They always ask us to visit them often, even while living here [in Mexico]." Barbara and her husband traveled to visit their daughters for the holidays or birthdays more often than their daughters visited them in Mexico. Adult children were often restricted from traveling for long periods because they worked full-time jobs and were raising their own families. They could not visit their parents frequently— even if they wanted to. Thus, documented returnees considered their mobility critical to maintaining connections with their adult children and grandchildren.

For documented returnees, having limited contact with their children was not enough incentive to return to the United States. Some adult children of documented older immigrants did not visit their parent in Mexico due to time or money constraints or lack of interest even though most of their adult children were U.S.-born or held legal permanent residence. For example, 79-year-old documented Manuela Martin's adult children sometimes visited her in Mexico. Still, most of the time, it was she who returned to the United States to see them during the winter holiday season. They only stayed for short periods when they visited, as she shared: "They [adult children] come for two, three days here to Los Altos. They don't stay longer…They don't like it. They come to greet "El Señor" [the local religious Catholic saint of the city], to the hometown

celebrations, to visit me, and then they leave." Although documented returnees wanted their adult children to visit them in Mexico, they understood that they often would be the primary travelers returning to the United States.

Undocumented: It would be hard to leave my support. Undocumented older immigrants reported that they did not return to Mexico because it would be more challenging to navigate informal and in-kind support. Many undocumented older immigrants received financial support from or were dependent on their adult children because traditional wealth accumulation is harder for undocumented populations. Social Security numbers are not (generally) available for non-citizens or undocumented immigrants. Undocumented older immigrants were frequently dependent on their adult children, and returning to Mexico could disrupt this relationship. Seventy-year-old undocumented Leonor Araya lived with one of her adult daughters in San Leandro, CA. She had her own personal space in the garage where she kept all her belongings, her small space heater, and the futon where she slept. Leonor liked having this space because it was separate from the main house and helped keep her autonomy. Most of her adult children lived in the United States in cities across the Bay Area, and she had taken care of multiple grandchildren as they grew up. When I asked her if she would return to Mexico, she replied,

> Until now, no, because I feel good with my adult children. I think: "What am I going to do over there alone? What would I do?" But, if it were the case that I felt uncomfortable with my adult children here, like I feel they don't want me here. I don't have to put up with that… I keep my home in Mexico just in case I need it one day. I still hope to return someday like an old saying: "I left Mexico, but Mexico hasn't left my heart."

Leonor also received housing, care (when ill), and financial support from her daughter when she needed it. If she returned to Mexico, she would not have this immediate support from her daughter or other children. Being physically present in the United States gave her access to direct support from her adult daughter, who could see what her mother needed because her she lived with her.

Undocumented adults were concerned that they would be unable to visiting their children or, inversely, that undocumented adult children could not visit them in Mexico). For example, 66-year-old undocumented Sara Guzmán had moved to the United States with her three children (her youngest son was only months old at the time). The children grew up in California, and the eldest son and daughter decided to return to Mexico to live after high school because they wanted to go to college there. Sara was able to pay their Mexican university tuition since she remained in the United States. Now her youngest adult son (who is undocumented) was living in an apartment in Oakland, and they depended on each other. Sara worked as a caregiver for nonimmigrant elders while her son worked in a restaurant and did other side gigs for extra income. She shared that she had not returned because her youngest son was still in the United States:

> I don't return to Mexico because my son, who lives here, does not want to return. I have told him we should return to Mexico. My two adult children in Mexico tell me to return, but this son does not want to.

Although she remained living with her youngest son in the United States, she had not dismissed the possibility of moving to Mexico. Her two adult children tried to obtain tourist visas to visit Sara in California but were denied multiple times because they spent their childhood there without documentation and immigration services assumed they were likely to overstay if they were granted tourist visas. She said:

> My adult children in Mexico have worked hard, but they have not been able to obtain tourist visas. They will try to apply again because they have their businesses [in Mexico]… They attempted to get visas many times. It has never been approved… The problem is that my adult son stated he had lived in the U.S. in the past. He said: "I was not going to lie. I am like you, mom. I was not going to lie. I told the agent interviewing me that I had lived in the U.S., and I did elementary, middle school, and some high school." I think that has been the reason their applications have been rejected… My daughter tried too, but they denied it too… They were kids when they came. Now, they are adults, but my decision to bring them affects them.

Given these failed attempts, Sara's decision to return to Mexico will mean that she will not be able to see all of her children. If she returns to Mexico, she will no longer be able to see her youngest son, who is also undocumented, since he will not return with her. However, if she stays in the United States, she will continue to be separated from her other son and daughter who live in Mexico and are unable to visit her. In sum, some undocumented older immigrants found themselves in the difficult situation of having to choose whom to be separated from because their lack of immigration status or that of their family members prohibited them from traveling abroad. Lacking an immigration status would prevent them from visiting one another.

This point of view was particularly salient and shared among those who had family in the United States, especially women. For example, Leonor Araya shared the following:

> Here I have my grandchildren. I have 16 grandchildren and five great-grandchildren… I have a lot of family members here. When I go out, I will often encounter nephews, nieces, cousins, somebody I know… I also come here to the center to play bingo and enjoy life.

All but one of Leonor's adult children lived in the United States. If she returned to Mexico, she would be separated from the majority of her support network. Without the ability to travel back to the United States, Leonor was hesitant to return to Mexico. She knew that she would be permanently cut off from her social network in California.

Even undocumented older immigrants who had documented adult children and grandchildren believed it would be difficult for their adult children to visit them in Mexico because they had strong ties to the United States and fewer ties to Mexico, not having maintained relationships there. Undocumented older immigrants who had family in the United States knew that traveling to Mexico would mean being separated from family members. Ursula Peña shared that she would have liked to be able to travel back and forth between the United States and Mexico because most of her family, including her children and grandchildren, lived in the United States:

> I would like to travel to Mexico and then return to my family because all of them are here—my adult daughters. Also, some of my children and my husband are

> buried here. All my living relatives, including my grandchildren, are here. They were born and raised here. They grew up here… They will stay here in the U.S., and they will not go to Mexico like to live in Mexico. I don't mean not go, but not live or stay there permanently is what I mean… They are accustomed to living here in this country.

The family pull was a clear deterrent to moving back to Mexico. Ursula's adult daughters were critical of that option because they were her primary safety net. After our initial interview, the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and Ursula suffered a stroke. She was left without her primary income source—the proceeds from her tamale sales—so her adult daughters helped support her financially and took care of her while she recovered.

Legal and Bureaucratic Concerns

Older immigrants also considered their legal-bureaucratic position within the U.S. immigration system. This was particularly relevant for documented returnees and the undocumented. Documented returnees often became naturalized U.S. citizens before returning to Mexico to avoid having issues with U.S. immigration officers when traveling back to the United States. Undocumented immigrants, on the other hand, had to consider the permanent legal consequences of leaving the United States in terms of the options for readmission and the ability to access spousal survival benefits or their contributions to the SS system.

Becoming a naturalized U.S. citizen. Documented older immigrants who saw returning to Mexico as a viable option often became naturalized citizens to avoid scrutiny upon reentry during subsequent visits. Legal permanent residents (LPRs) often face scrutiny at entry ports, where Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) officers evaluate whether they (1) have been outside of the United States for under 180 days (6 months) and (2) have not abandoned their LPR status by making a trip abroad that was not temporary (i.e., all visits outside of the United States must be temporary) (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services 2021). This is colloquially known as the "6-Month Rule." For example, 64-year-old documented Norberto Ruiz shared the following story:

> I first became a U.S. citizen, and then I retired… I wanted to become a U.S. citizen. Because this way I don't have to travel back [to the U.S.] every six months. I still travel back, not because of my immigration status, but to see my adult children… I learned about this through word of mouth. Let's call it gossip. If I became a U.S. citizen, I was told that I would not have to travel back every six months. I can live wherever I want, which is why I did it… If I want to travel back, I do. If I don't, I stay as long as I want.

Norberto became a U.S. citizen before retiring to avoid having to return periodically to the U.S. to maintain LPR status. This permitted him to travel freely and to remain in Mexico as long as he wanted without fear of repercussions or complications when he visited his adult children and family in the states.

Returning is a permanent decision. Undocumented older immigrants' lack of papers permanently trapped them within U.S. borders, preventing them from leaving, even in late adulthood. Many respondents mentioned that they could not return to Mexico without travel authorization to re-enter the United States or legal immigration

status as any return without papers would be permanent. The permanency of the option made it difficult for undocumented immigrants to take the risk of returning rather than continuing to wait for a change in immigration laws.

Ursula Peña planned to continue living in her apartment in Oakland, CA, until further notice because she could not travel to her hometown in Mexico. It had been more than 28 years since she last saw her home, and she wanted to visit to settle her and her husband's estate in Mexico. Before moving to the United States, she had purchased a piece of land with her now-deceased husband, and they built a house on it while living still in the United States with the help of their adult daughters. At this point in her life, she felt she was only getting older and wanted to travel back to Mexico to settle the accounts: "I would return to Mexico to live if I had papers because I would be able to travel back and forth and do what I need to do in each place. Without papers, I am too old. Our house [in Mexico] is up on a hill." Ursula had held off from returning to Mexico because of her lack of papers. She thought she was too old to return to live permanently in Mexico since even her home there was not accessible to her due to age-related physical limitations.

Undocumented older immigrants were quick to point to their undocumented status as the primary constraint to deciding to age in Mexico. Isadora Arias lived in Oakland, CA, renting a small bedroom in someone's home. She had three undocumented sons who lived independently in different cities in the Bay Area and two adult children in Mexico. She shared, "I have not returned because I don't have the possibility of going. In other words, if I go [back], I can't return [to the U.S.]. That is one reason." Isadora's decision to stay was further solidified because her undocumented partner had left for Mexico a few months before our interview and was already asking her to help him financially to return. They had learned that the cost to cross clandestinely was over $10,000, and Isadora did not have the financial resources to help him. As Isadora's situation illustrates, undocumented older immigrants who remained in the United States were bound by legal constraints to remain there unless they decided to make a permanent move to Mexico.

Both men and women respondents expressed the same sentiments. Fifty-five-year-old Tadeo Jiménez had worked at the same restaurant for over 20 years and lived with his partner, 53-year-old undocumented Nieves Jiménez, her adult daughter and the daughter's partner. He had adult children from his previous marriage who were in their late teens and early twenties and lived with his ex-wife. Like Ursula and Isadora, Tadeo was hesitant to return to live in Mexico because it would be permanent, as he explained:

> I have not returned to Mexico, and right now, it doesn't seem likely… How can I return? I could leave [the U.S.], but then I would not be able to return. I could look for options to return, but they would be hard. It is so expensive now to try and cross the border. It also would be more challenging for me.

After living in the United States for 37 years without returning to his hometown in Mexico, he was not willing to risk crossing the border without inspection or to shoulder the high costs both financially and physically. The inability to move freely between the

United States and Mexico—to live transnational lives—was a significant deterrent to returning for older undocumented immigrants.

Waiting to adjust immigration status. The perpetual waiting and hoping for immigration reform and a pathway to change their immigration status deterred undocumented older immigrants from leaving the United States and returning to Mexico. It makes it unlikely that undocumented older immigrants will go because they have been unable to actively maintain connections to their home country. For example, 58-year-old Elias Aguayo had been undocumented for over 20 years and worked as a day laborer. When I asked him his thoughts on returning to Mexico, he shared that it was not an option until he could freely move back and forth, an opinion that echoed that of other undocumented immigrants. He stated, "I have not returned because now I am used to living here, more than 22 years now, and also not too long ago I qualified for a U Visa. I think about over a year and some months ago." He had recently become eligible for the U Visa, which provides a path to permanent residency, because he was a survivor of a violent crime and cooperated with the investigating law enforcement agencies. Before this, he had no pathway to legal immigration. He also was unsure if he could live permanently in Mexico. Elias was used to the standard of living in the United States and had not returned to Mexico in over two decades.

Other respondents wanted to obtain their legal immigration status to be able to visit Mexico without living there permanently. Fifty-one-year-old undocumented Magdalena Pardo had migrated to the United States in her 20s after ending an abusive romantic relationship and was still working cleaning homes. She had lived in the United States for 30 years without returning to visit her hometown in Mexico. Magdalena had bought a house and was still paying off her mortgage at the time of the interview. When I asked her if she planned to return to Mexico, she told me that she did not wish to return to Mexico but nevertheless wanted her immigration papers: "I am sorry to say this, but I would not like to live permanently in Mexico… I would like to have my papers (in the future) to travel and visit… I am still healthy, and I can still work." Obtaining a legal immigration status would give Magdalena a sense of security in living in the United States and traveling freely. Like documented returnees, some undocumented individuals' desire to return was predicated on being able to live transnationally.

Should I return to Mexico to access my Social Security benefits? For a small subset of undocumented older immigrants who had a Social Security number[33] or had a spouse with a Social Security number, moving back to Mexico was an option to access their Social Security pension and surviving spouse benefits.[34] Undocumented older immigrants who remained in the United States could not access their own or their spouse's contributions to the Social Security fund without proof of their current

[33] You can have a Social Security number if at any point in time you had an employment authorization document, even if you no longer have it or if you applied for immigration status before the rise of restrictions in the 1970s (Fox 2019). The Social Security administration started printing conditions like "Valid for work only with INS [now DHS] authorization" in 1992 and "Not valid for employment" in May 1982 for new cards or replacement cards only (Puckett 2009).

[34] Currently, you must have a valid immigration status to obtain a Social Security number, and the physical cards have any restrictions printed on them.

immigration status. Some older immigrants had secured Social Security numbers before applications required a legal immigration status, which is no longer the case since the Social Security Administration (SSA) started checking immigration status when issuing new or replacement cards in 2002 (Puckett 2009). Others had previously had work authorizations or visas that allowed them to access and work with a Social Security number, which they then continued to use. Others were in mixed-status relationships where one spouse had a legal immigration status or temporary immigration status that allowed them to hold a work permit with an SSN.

Undocumented older immigrants who had contributed to their own Social Security record could not access their benefits without legal immigration status while physically remaining in the United States, even if they met all other requirements. However, if they were to return to Mexico, they would be able to access these benefits from abroad without visiting the U.S. (Social Security Administration 2018). A few undocumented immigrants experienced this first-hand. Sixty-three-year-old documented Emanuel Fonseca suffered a work-related injury. After the injury, he received California (state) disability benefits until he exhausted them. At the time of the interview, was still injured and unable to work (he was sitting on a motorized scooter and would stumble when he got up) and was struggling to secure an income. His friends and staff at different local organizations he was connected to suggested he should ask the SSA Office if he was eligible for SS benefits.

> I have worked for more than 20 years [in the U.S.]. Right now, I don't work anymore because I'm disabled. And now I will see when I can go back to work, because here [in the U.S.] if one does not work there is nothing to live from because here the rent demands the most [money], well, depending on who they [the person you are paying rent to] are, whether they are family or not family… I have finished my disability [benefits], but they gave me some papers to take to [the] Social Security [office]. But the problem is that I do not want to go because if they ask me some questions like if I am here legally or not. What am I going to do for them to help me? … Because of the problem, what if they ask me for papers, I don't have them… But I do not think they will help me. I do not know anything about that… I just have my Social Security, which is the same one they gave me when I arrived in [19]81. Yes, but then I left [to Mexico], and it took me 11 years to return. But I still work with my Social Security number anyway. And then I have filed taxes and all that, but I do not know when I want to apply for the retirement or if I go to the Social Security [office] if they can help me. I can't work right now, and I don't know how to do it [apply for retirement benefits].

A few days after this conversation, I accompanied Emanuel to the SSA Office in San Leandro, CA, to check his eligibility for benefits. I traveled from Berkeley to San Leandro, CA, using the BART, and met him at the door of the SSA office. We had scheduled to meet at the SSA office when it opened because we were told it got busy and we did not have an appointment. Emanuel seemed a little nervous when he arrived with a bag full of papers (all types of documents, including his State of California disability papers and a copy of his Social Security card). We walked into the office and registered on the computer. We watched the TV announcements while we waited. First, his name was called to confirm his order of business. Then, his name was called again,

and I accompanied him to translate because he thought he would need someone. I started to translate, but the staff person said she was bilingual. She asked for an identification card, and he showed her his Mexican Consulate Card. The woman confirmed that his identity correlated with his SSN and that he would be eligible for disability benefits and a Social Security pension if he could provide a work permit (i.e., employment authorization document)--another term for a green card/immigration status. She reiterated that if he was able to show proof of immigration status, such as a work permit, he could access benefits while in the United States. Alternatively, he could access them from abroad by applying through the U.S. Consulate nearest to him. He was disappointed and asked how he could get a work permit (he was advised to talk to an attorney). We left the customer service window quietly after we thanked her for her time and did not talk until we were outside. In sum, Emanuel was eligible to receive about $1200 per month in disability benefits (plus pension benefits). However, despite having an authentic SSN card (with his name) and having worked enough to qualify for disability and pension benefits (a total of 40 credits or 10 years of employment), he could not access these benefits in the United States because of his immigration status. As an insured worker, he would be able to access these benefits from abroad if he returned to Mexico.

Undocumented surviving spouses of workers with Social Security record who completed their 40 credits could, in theory, receive surviving spouse benefits in their country of origin if they returned and applied abroad as “foreign spouses.” Thus, it would be reasonable to expect some widowed spouses to return to Mexico. However, there is a requirement to return to the United States every six months that they must fulfill in practice. The six-month travel requirement states, “If you are outside the United States for six consecutive calendar months without coming to the United States, then your benefits will be stopped beginning with the seventh month. To get your benefits started again, you must come to the United States and stay every hour of a full calendar month” (Social Security Administration 2018). This requirement is for foreign spouses who cannot provide evidence of having legally resided with the Social Security worker for five years. Meanwhile, spouses cannot access spousal benefits while physically living in the Unites States without an employment authorization document (an immigration status) because of this SSA policy.

Foreign surviving spouses are required to have a visa to travel to the United States to meet the six-month requirement to continue receiving SS spousal benefits. This was impossible for many respondents since they did not have a legal immigration status, and they believed they would be denied access to travel visas since they had lived undocumented for decades in the United States. This was the case for Ursula:

> When my husband passed away, I tried to access his Social Security benefits. He worked so hard for them and that he had contributed, right? However, they didn’t give me anything because I don’t have a Social Security number to be able to claim that money from his pension … We went to the Social Security Administration office to check if he had benefits that I could access. They told me that they couldn’t give them to me. They did say they could give them to me if I left for Mexico. Thus, I thought of going: “Well, I will return to Mexico if they give

> them to me, right?" My train of thought was that my daughters are married, they have their own lives, and I only had one daughter who was a single mom at that time. Then, they sent me to the Social Security [office] by Lake Merritt. Similarly, the woman told me that I did have a rightful claim to the money if I returned to Mexico, but I would have to come sign for the benefits every six months. Now tell me, how would I be able to sign every six months [without my papers]?

The bureaucratic rules on SS spousal benefits requiring a current legal immigration status to access help, specific geographic residency requirements, and travel requirements prevented Ursula from deciding to return to her hometown. Surviving spouses thus face a catch-22 when deciding if they should return to Mexico to access those benefits from abroad. By leaving their families and local community support networks, they would jeopardize the little support they had. The patchwork of laws surrounding eligibility for federal programs from the SSA and the disconnect with the immigration system made it difficult for older immigrants with complex migration histories. In a way, then, the system continued to perpetually punish these individuals, even at an age where the cash benefits were significant since many were aging out of the workforce.

CONCLUSION

As they grow older, immigrants all face the important question of where they want to live, just as nonimmigrants do. These findings shed light on the conditions that make return migration a possible option for some older immigrants and not others. Immigration policies effectively produced inequalities across the lifetime of older immigrants by shaping immigrants' employment opportunities (Flores Morales 2021), access to health care (Ortega et al. 2007; Ro et al. 2022), social mobility (Gonzales 2011) and many other aspects of their day-to-day lives. These effects are starkly visible when comparing older immigrants' considerations when deciding whether to "age in place," return to Mexico, or a combination of both.

All of the older immigrants I interviewed had similar considerations when making these decisions, including access to critical resources, health status (and access to providers), family ties, and safety concerns. However, having a legal status mattered for having access to portable resources and the ability to travel to access nonportable resources. Healthy, documented older immigrants with portable resources had a greater capacity to return to Mexico than low-income and sick documented older immigrants, who had a greater need for health care and nonportable resources, and undocumented immigrants, who had specific legal vulnerabilities across their life course related to their immigration status (or lack thereof). However, for documented returnees, the decision to return to Mexico was predicated on transnationality or the possibility of moving freely between the United States and Mexico.

The apparent class differences I observed in people's decisions about where to grow old stem from the structure of opportunities created by their immigration status over the life course. We can see how immigration status shapes the possibility of accumulating portable resources for old age and traveling to access nonportable resources if required. It shapes the type and amount of support needed from family members and

the ability to maintain relationships. Furthermore, the health status of older immigrants matters as it influences the level of care they need from service providers and family, which in turn impacts where they decide to live.

Lastly, immigration law has lifelong effects. It continues to control where both documented and undocumented immigrants can live and where they age. Documented immigrants often become naturalized U.S. citizens before returning to Mexico to avoid being accused of abandoning their LPR status, or they remain in the United States. Meanwhile, undocumented immigrants who return risk having to remain in Mexico permanently because they may not be able to cross the border clandestinely again or adjust their immigration status from abroad. This would permanently separate them from families or restrict access to their local support systems and nonportable resources in the United States. Together, these considerations, coupled with the effects of immigration status, can determine where older immigrants can move.

At the empirical level, these findings deepen our understanding of how immigrants continue to experience the effects of immigration law in late adulthood. They also add to the research on “aging in place” by suggesting that some individuals want to age in *places* but find themselves structurally constrained by their immigration status. Immigration law has a direct role in making aging in places an actual possibility or preventing it altogether. Moving is more viable for older immigrants who have a legal immigration status, are in relatively good health, and have been able to maintain connections to their country of origin. These findings also have policy implications and foreshadow the future experiences of more than eleven million undocumented immigrants—including DACAmented—if they remain without a legal pathway to citizenship. Like undocumented older immigrants, their movement will be restricted, and they will have no or limited access to portable and nonportable resources, further constraining their options. Simply put, they will experience perpetual punishment. Current immigration laws are creating the condition to perpetuate unequal experiences of aging.

CHAPTER 3
"I Do Not Feel I'm Old Enough to Live in Your Home:" Balancing Autonomy and Independence with Informal Family Support by Immigration Status

Teresa Exposito and Sara Guzmán were 66 years old at the time of our interviews. Both were undocumented and had migrated permanently to the United States, to Oakland, California, around the same time in the early 1990s. Both worked in the service sector: Teresa used to clean homes before becoming disabled; Sara worked cleaning homes before becoming a caregiver for elderly white Americans. They had both migrated to the United States with at least one young child and now had adult children living in Mexico. They considered themselves low-income/working class. They both wanted to remain autonomous and physically independent to avoid burdening their adult children with requests for support. Still, they had different resources available to them to achieve this ideal.

Although they were similar in many ways, they tackled the issues of housing and informal family support[35] differently. Teresa had become documented, while Sara remained undocumented. After suffering a work-related injury to her hand and arm while cleaning a client's home, Teresa could not return to work and was disabled. She lived independently in subsidized Section 8 senior housing. She had transitioned from receiving Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits to receiving Social Security (SS) survivor benefits because the amount was greater than her own SS pension. Teresa talked to her adult daughter frequently, and her daughter often provided her mother with in-kind support for moving with her husband to Mexico after their immigration petition for permanent residence was denied. Teresa did not expect any informal or in-kind support from this daughter or her other adult children because they lived in Mexico and Teresa knew they had limited resources for their nuclear families. Teresa relied on her subsidized Section 8 housing and spouse survivor benefits to remain independent.

In contrast, Sara continued to work and had no plan to retire. For many years, her primary work was cleaning the homes of middle and upper-class families in the Bay Area. When I spoke with her, she was working as a caregiver for several white seniors during the week and cleaning a church with her undocumented adult son every weekend. She lived with her unmarried adult son in a rent-controlled apartment—the same one they had lived in since his late childhood—splitting the rent and living costs (e.g., food, utilities). Sara shared that this living arrangement would only last until he married or had a family of his own. When that occurred, she would not have other income or access to government safety nets that could replace his contributions to the household. Sara was also hesitant to accept support from her adult children: "I have beautiful adult children, but I do not want to depend on them. They must live their own lives." Given the high currency exchange rate, it would be difficult for her two adult children in Mexico to provide informal or in-kind support if she remained living in the

[35] "Informal support" is defined as non-institutional support usually given to older adults by families, friends, or other individuals. Throughout the chapter, "informal support" and "informal family support" are used synonymously.

United States. For the time being, Sara was still working to meet her material necessities.

These two women with similar backgrounds exemplify how illegality interferes with immigrants' ability to lead autonomous and independent lives. They responded to the same challenges of aging—specifically physical and financial independence—differently because their immigration status either expanded or limited the resources and safety nets available to them.

Previous research on older adults' autonomy and independence has found that this ideal has been institutionalized in the United States by health and social policies targeting older nonimmigrants (Portacolone 2011). However, the desire to live independently is not universal or innate outside the United States. Some argue that it results from the high value placed on self-reliance in the United States and other industrialized societies (Cohen 2006). Others have argued that "independence" and "autonomy" do not mean "being able to perform activities for oneself without assistance, but being able to exercise control over whatever help is required in order to achieve chosen goals and objectives" (Fine and Glendinning 2005:610). Little has been written on the experiences of older immigrants and how they may struggle to live up to the moral imperative of independence. By focusing on this demographic (i.e., older immigrants), I shed light on these dynamics.

In contrast, the family and aging literature on Mexican immigrant families has focused on explaining older immigrants' late adulthood living and family experiences using the cultural concept of familism/*familismo* or the idea of cohesive family units and interdependency—especially regarding the care of older Latinos. Some see familism as a structural outcome created to address external forces' (e.g., economic, political, poverty) that can change with an individual's (or family's) acculturation to life in the United States and is intended to provide mutual support (Sabogal et al. 1987). Using the concept of familism to explain living arrangements and family life obscures the purposeful exclusion of Latino families from public policies that address the issues and inequalities they face (Maldonado 1975). For example, research on the living arrangements of older adult immigrants has noted the large number of Latino older adults that live with extended family members (Angel et al. 1999; Angel, Angel, and Markides 2000). Newer research has shown that although older Mexican immigrants be more likely to live with their families than nonimmigrants (or the general population), they do so less frequently than those who never migrate and remain in Mexico (Gubernskaya and Tang 2017). Family scholars have identified similar trends for immigrant families (Clark, Glick, and Bures 2009). Scholars have begun to contest narrow interpretations that see familism as a cultural outcome that places the family's needs above the those of the individual (Smith-Morris et al. 2013).

Other scholarship has used other social theories to explain family interdependence over familism (Gratton 1987; Wallace and Facio 1987). New attention has been given to the attitudinal and behavioral manifestations and the dynamic nature of *familismo,* with its costs and benefits for Latino families (Calzada, Tamis-LeMonda, and Yoshikawa 2013).

While others have focused on the increasing infrequent contact with the family (Ruiz and Ransford 2012). Immigration scholars have also begun to challenge romanticized notions of immigrant solidarity and social ties within families and between friends, especially among new immigrants (Rosales 2020). In Cecilia Menjivar's classic study *Fragmented Ties,* she argues that hostile immigration policies, limited economic opportunities, and resource-poor communities make mutual assistance conditional. Similarly, a study on Chinese and Korean older immigrants highlights how the meaning of family has changed since older adults feel more like peripheral family, less like authority figures, and more independent (Wong, Yoo, and Stewart 2006). Research on older immigrants from Taiwan and Hong Kong (and their children) also recognizes that receiving aging services offered by the state and market can also alter traditional arrangements of care (Lan 2002).

This chapter focuses on how all the older immigrants I interviewed shared the same feelings about and visions of leading autonomous and independent lives, but illegality interfered with their ability to achieve this goal. All the respondents, regardless of immigration status, preferred to exhaust all resources available to them before turning to family for informal support. Whether or not they have papers directly influences the financial and housing constraints older immigrants experience. Documented older adults had greater access to a range of resources. Those who had some assets used them to secure independent living, and those living in poverty with support from public benefits achieved this goal to some degree.

It is more challenging for undocumented older immigrants to live up to this ideal. Their ability to do so is disproportionally constrained because they are not eligible for federal contributory resources like Social Security pensions, disability, and spousal or survivor benefits. They are also excluded from most means-tested benefits (cash or near cash) and housing subsidies.[36]

This work bridges the literature on familism for older adults and on immigration to show how illegality in late adulthood forces undocumented older adults to be dependent of their families. Their experiences highlight the tensions, negotiations, and patchwork of care and support that older immigrants use to address their increasing needs, given the structural barriers they face.

I demonstrate how perpetual punishment emerges as older immigrants try to fulfill their desire of remaining autonomous and independent from family members while facing financial barriers and limited access to resources. I begin this chapter by describing their common goal of autonomy and independence. Then, I compare how immigration status affects older immigrants' ability to realize their desires and the consequences for their old age and relationships.

PART 1: MOST OLDER IMMIGRANTS DESIRE AUTONOMY AND INDEPENDENCE

[36] Means testing is used to determine if a person or household is eligible—usually based on their income and assets—for a specific benefit.

Contrary to the widespread assumption that Latino families ascribe to an ethos of familism, I found that both documented and undocumented older adults desired autonomy and independence, which meant both maintaining their financial and physical independence. To be clear, this is not to say that older immigrants did not value the informal support some of their families were able to provide. While many respondents treasured emotional and social connections with family members (e.g., visiting family, chatting on the phone, adult children visiting them) and welcomed their voluntary (and often as-needed) informal support, they nonetheless wanted to avoid *total* dependence on informal financial support. For example, 59-year-old documented Encarnación Ortega shared how she avoided asking for help from her adult children to stay independent:

> Even though I have three adult children, I am not the type of person to ask for anything. I have told them that I will never ask for anything but that I can no longer help them like I did when they were younger. I helped them a lot, and I still do when I take care of their kids. However, I won't be able to do it forever… I already helped them, and I can't help more. I am tired, and I need to look out for myself. I am old now. They should not expect me to ask them for anything, and they should not take from me.

At the time of the interview, Encarnación was a widow living on her own in her home, and having her own space allowed her to have a separate household from her adult children. She was receiving disability insurance as her primary income. If she needed additional help, she preferred to borrow money from friends than from her adult children. She had a good reputation and paid as soon as she received her monthly deposit.

Fifty-seven-year-old documented Amparo Bravo strongly expressed her desire for independence and described how she had witnessed other older adults' bad experiences living with their adult children:

> I can't predict what will happen years from now, but I can tell you a couple of things. I know that my pension will not be enough to keep paying rent and living here in the U.S…However, I know I will not be living for long periods with my adult children… I don't want to invade their privacy, and I don't think it is right. I just can't do that. I don't want to abide by my children's house rules. I want my independence. Do you understand? All of my life, I have walked my own path. I have been independent. I have maintained my stuff in order and on my terms. I have seen the experiences of many older adults who live with their adult children. I have seen how older adults are like their children's slaves. It's ugly… I don't want to generalize that it is everyone's experience, but it happens.

Like Amparo, all my respondents expressed an interest in keeping their lives and households separate from those of their adult children. Living apart from family was a way of keeping their autonomy and maintaining positive relationships with their adult children.

The older immigrants I interviewed want to be independent to avoid feeling like they are freeloaders. Both documented and undocumented older immigrants mentioned variations of the following Spanish saying: "A dead body and a freeloader smell on the third day." To avoid feeling like freeloaders, older immigrants found ways to contribute

to their households. Seventy-seven-year-old documented Joaquín Peréz shared that before he and his wife moved into their current Section 8 apartment, they would stay only short periods with each adult child and kept moving around to avoid feeling like "freeloaders." They would contribute monetarily to the household with minimal cash payments for utilities to maintain positive relationships with their children and to prevent conflict:

> We usually felt comfortable for like a month or so where we used to stay. We also had our adult children's attention when we lived with them. My wife and I were always trying to contribute to the household, like $100 or $200 for the water or electricity bills. We would feel good helping, and usually, we would feel good staying with them for some time. However, something always comes up. You start noticing the side eyes, the sour faces, and once we saw that, we would move to another adult child's home. I would tell my wife: "Let's go to our son's home now." We kept doing this around the Oakland area since most of them live here.

Joaquín and his wife, Celina, did not feel comfortable feeling beholden to their adult children when they lived with them, so by contributing to their adult children's household income with their token cash payment, they felt they could alleviate some of their feelings and maintain amicable relationships. After losing their home, they spent about ten years moving between their adult children's households because they had no other options. This experience cemented their desire to live apart from their adult children to maintain their autonomy.

Men were especially vocal about the importance of maintaining financial and physical independence and more open to other forms of support. When I asked 55-year-old documented Leopoldo Ortiz if he expected his children to help him when he retired, he stated:

> I plan to live off my pension and whatever comes from the rent. I don't expect my children to help me (*laughs*). No, as long as they don't take [money] away, it's okay [laughs]. No, no, no, no, I don't, no, no. Instead, if I can, I want to help them. I've never, never thought about them helping me, no. I always help them. If someday I can't walk or something like that, or there is no money, then help me. I don't know. It would have to be something extreme. Maybe yes, but if I have any resources I can turn to, I'm not going to take a cent from them.

He wanted to continue financially (as needed) supporting his adult children versus them supporting him. At the time of the interview, Leopoldo was disabled due to a work-related injury and a car accident. He had not worked for a little over a year following the back-to-back incidents. These two accidents led him to think about what would happen when he could no longer work.

In general, older adults do not want to be a burden to their adult children and family members. Over and over again, I heard from older immigrants that their adult children were busy with their own responsibilities. For example, 76-year-old Adelaide Iglesias repeated multiple times: "The family—my daughters—cannot be there at [my] side whenever [I] need them. They are mothers. They have their children and their husbands to take care of." She shared how she believed it is difficult for adult children to take care

of aging parents due to their responsibilities. Adelaide also did not want to feel beholden:

> I don't like to ask anyone for anything [including my children] because I feel bad. I would also feel bad if they said "no." Sweetie, I feel better the way I am. I get my [Social Security] check… I am not going to talk bad about my children. I would never speak poorly of them. My daughters sometimes have $20-$30 left over from their budgets—most of them have 4-5 kids. Of course, I like them to give me money if they can, but I won't ask for it. I am a mother who is considerate about my daughters' situations and how hard they work. I know they have their obligations like they have their children in school getting their education. I have one that has four children in school right now. I understand them as a mother. A mother is a mother, but I will never ask them: "Give me $50, give me X amount." No, I will not do that. If they have any money remaining from their budget and give me some, great. If not, that is great too. I am very, very considerate about their obligations. Just like I was the mother of seven, they are mothers.

Older immigrants preferred to use and exhaust all of the formal support resources available to them to avoid seeking informal family support. The only acceptable form of informal support they wanted to accept was voluntary and one-time gifts. One-time gifts did not make them feel indebted for the help.

Many shared that their desire for independence was shaped by their wanting to avoid conflict with their adult children, mainly their in-laws. By maintaining their financial and physical freedom, they felt they could protect these critical relationships. Sixty-nine-year-old documented Mercedes Rodríguez shared that she used to live with her adult son and her daughter-in-law and one of her adult daughters, all in the same household, before moving into senior housing.

> I lived here in Oakland with one of my sons. I liked living with my adult son, but my daughter-in-law was rough with me. I could tell she did not like my daughter and me living there, so I applied to get an apartment and live alone… I recall how I would purposely leave all day from around 10 AM to 3 PM [not to bother anyone].

Mercedes highlighted how living with her son exacerbated tensions with her daughter-in-law, who was not too happy with the living arrangement, despite having proposed it. While living there, her strategy was to leave their home most of the day to limit interactions that could increase tensions. Although she did not want to live with family so that they could maintain a good relationship, she sought to stay in the Bay Area and live near her five adult children, who were scattered across the Bay Area and the Central Valley.

Preserving positive relationships was important because disagreements could potentially damage relationships or threaten mutual assistance arrangements. Seventy-year-old undocumented Leonor Araya recalled how she helped a granddaughter with the childcare of her great-grandchildren when tensions arose:

> I used to take care of a set of great-grandchildren. One time I didn't like how my granddaughter talked to me. I opened an ice pop, and I didn't notice that I had accidentally stained the wall, and she saw me. She started questioning me: "Did

> you open an ice pop?" I said: "Yes." She responded: "And you stained the wall and floor?" I didn't tell her anything at the moment because I felt terrible. Later, I confronted her: "You know what, I didn't like what you told me. If I had seen I made a mess, I would have cleaned it. I know you come home from work and are tired. I didn't know I did that, but just tell me if you are not happy with me being here." The good thing is that I have somewhere to go. It's just that I never took this disrespect from her mother, her aunts, or anyone else. I don't have to put up with anyone. More so, I have my house in Mexico. I have somewhere to go. I told all my children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren: "If you are not comfortable with me, just tell me: Mom/grandma, I don't want you to live with me/us." … This granddaughter didn't say anything. I think she reflected on her actions.
>
> I mean, I was helping her by taking care of her children. She was paying me [for my labor], but I charged her a fair price… She gave me like $200 or $100 per week depending on the number of days, but I know that was under market price. I didn't pay rent or food, and she had a bed for me. They bought the bed for me to live there with them. I was comfortable living there.

This conflict was resolved, and Leonor continued to provide childcare for her great-grandchildren for a few more months, but it did make her reflect on her living arrangements and options. Leonor's story illustrates the importance of maintaining relationships; having a large family helped give older adults a sense of security and opportunities. Yet, Leonor still desired her own space where she would not have to answer to anyone.

Older immigrants believed that some measure of privacy was necessary to maintain their relationships with their spouses, children, or other family members. For 68-year-old documented Celina Peréz, who experienced living with multiple adult children after she and her husband lost their house during the 2008 recession, privacy was essential for a healthy late adulthood. She shared that one daughter wanted her to move in with her, but she would only consider it if they had their own separate space:

> One of my adult daughters, whose children I take care of sometimes, says: "Mom, when we purchase our house, my husband wants you to come live with us." I tell her: "But we are very comfortable here. We will only consider moving in with you if your house has an in-law unit on the back." That is the only way because all my life, my marriage was "perfect" (I think) because we lived independently as one household. Since I got married, my husband and I have had our own home. It is privacy that matters. I tell them: "I don't want to be there when you scold my grandchildren, and maybe we don't agree with it or something, and that is why it is better not to live together" [laughs].
>
> Anyone who wants to come to visit us is welcome at our apartment. Then my adult daughter told me that her husband asked: "Are you going to bring your mother?" She said: "I don't think she wants to consider moving in unless our house has an in-law unit on the back, then possibly yes." It would be very different from having a separate unit. I would be alone in my space, and they

> would be alone in their own house. I tell her: “You have your life, fight, do not fight with your husband and kids [laughs],” and I do not worry about it. Yell or don't yell at them. Because a grandmother is like that, you don't want your grandchildren to be scolded.

At the time of our conversation, Celina was living in her own apartment with her husband. She did not want to give up their privacy and autonomy to live with her adult daughter.

Many older immigrants had experienced living with family members for temporarily; they described how the lack of privacy caused tensions. Seventy-year-old Ursula Peña explained that her money-making activity—being a tamale street vendor—had caused conflict with her adult daughter when they lived together because she would wake up early to prepare her tamales:

> I must make a mess. Now that I am alone here, no one tells me, “You made a mess.” In the past, I also felt ashamed because I made a mess, and I knew they didn’t like it. Before, I would wake up super early and not let them sleep because I had to make my tamales. My daughter would say: “Mom, what are you doing so early? You are not letting us sleep?” “It’s because I have an order of tamales to fulfill” “Mom, you don’t let us sleep with all that commotion.” Now that I am alone, I make my mess, and I pick it up whenever I want. I do things on my terms and to my liking. And that is why I like it now. I am independent now that I am not with them. I often visit them or chat over the phone, but we live separately. I have my space.

The lack of privacy while living with her daughter made it difficult for Ursula to feel comfortable preparing her tamales, which was necessary because that paid for her rent and living costs.

PART 2: REALIZING DESIRED AUTONOMY AND INDEPENDENCE ARE LARGELY DEPENDENT ON IMMIGRATION STATUS

While older immigrants shared a desire for independence and autonomy, documentation status affected their ability to realize their desires. I first discuss how documented older adults are more capable of realizing their vision of living autonomously and independently than the undocumented. Then, I will discuss how it is difficult and sometimes impossible for older undocumented immigrants to realize this vision.

Documented Older Immigrants

Documented older immigrants were better able to realize a version of their vision of living autonomously and independently because they had individual resources and access to government safety nets. Documented status gives older immigrants access to housing and income streams that allows them to have options for their living conditions and physical independence.

Homeownership allowed documented older immigrants to remain autonomous and maintain positive relationships with their adult children when their income dropped. Homeownership is facilitated by authorization to work, which helps build wealth used in

old age. Home equity was the most common form of accumulated wealth for older immigrants in this study.[37] Most of the documented older immigrants in my sample had been undocumented at some point—either because they entered without inspection or overstayed their visas. Many became legal permanent residents a few years after coming to the United States and accumulated wealth through homeownership and additional employment opportunities. Seventy-two-year-old Elena González and her husband had purchased their home in Oakland, CA, decades ago and this asset provided her with autonomy and independence, especially now that she was a widow. When we were talking about her living situation, she shared how her now-deceased husband encouraged her to remain in their home for as long as she could—independent from their adult children:

Author: Do you live alone?

Elena**:** Yes, alone because my husband and I lived there. He had already died and left me alone. And he told me when he was very ill: "Do not move in with any daughter or son. Stay here because as time passes, we [older adults] disrupt or are a burden to our children. You stay here in our home. Here you can do what you want." I am doing that.

Author: What do you think of that?

Elena: It is true.

Author: Why? Tell me more.

Elena: Because as an older adult, your adult children will say: "Oh, that old woman does not bathe or does nothing--" a daughter or son can say this, or a daughter-in-law may say: "Your mother eats a lot, your mother chews with her mouth open, your mom does things like that, and to avoid things like this. Also, all my children are grown.

Thus far, she had taken her husband's advice to continue living on her own, and she tried to avoid asking for help from her family to maintain positive relationships with her adult children. Even when her children offered her a place to live, she rejected the offer:

Author: Do you want to live in your home forever? Wouldn't you like to live with your children?

Elena: No. However, my children ask me: "Mom, come live with us. You are not going to pay anything." I respond: "No, leave me there. I'm fine there."

Author: Why don't you want to move in with your children?

Elena: I do not want to depend on anyone, and I do not want them to feel obligated to help me.

Elena wanted to avoid feeling beholden to any of her adult children, so she avoided moving in with any of them. An offer of living rent-free was not enough to convince her to leave her home and give up her autonomy. She described another incident when she visited her adult daughter in Chicago, who asked her to move in:

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[37] Undocumented immigrants can purchase homes in the United States; however, they often face additional scrutiny by financial institutions—especially if they need financing through a home mortgage. Many lenders consider them high-risk borrowers, given the precarious nature of their immigration status. They are often required to have co-borrowers or higher down payments or additional insurance. They are not eligible for Federal Housing Administration (FHA)-insured loans unless they can show an employment authorization document (EAD) granted by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services.

> My daughter gets angry at me, the one from Chicago. She tells me: "Mom, we just bought a house. Mom, come live over here. It's very nice." So, I went to visit, but I didn't like it to live. I want to visit her only. And I said: "No, I won't stay here, not even if you tie me up here."

Elena was exaggerating about being "tied up" or forced to live with her adult daughter in Chicago, but this figure of speech shows just how important it was to her to remain independent and autonomous. She expressed that she enjoyed her visits to Chicago to see her adult daughter and grandchildren and her local visits to her adult children's homes in California because there was no obligation or necessity to share a home with them at this stage in her life. At the end of each visit, she knew she would return to her own home.

Low-income documented older immigrants who were not homeowners had crucial access to housing subsidies that helped them feel autonomous and physically independent. Housing subsidies for low-income older immigrants were contingent on meeting the program's requirements, including being a U.S. citizen or having a legal immigration status. Many reported having access to or knowing that they could apply for housing subsidies if they needed them through the Housing Choice Voucher Program Section 8 (Section 8), a program that assists low-income families, the elderly, or the disabled to afford decent, safe, and sanitary housing. It provides a rental subsidy and requires most individuals and families to earn less than 30 percent of the area median income (AMI). They are responsible for 30 to 40 percent of their monthly adjusted gross income for rent and utilities. Individuals must be U.S. citizens or legal immigrants to obtain Section 8 benefits. Sixty-six-year-old documented Teresa Exposito lived alone in her Section 8 senior apartment. She shared:

> I live alone in my apartment. It is a low-cost apartment, Section 8. I moved there because they charge me less rent, about $359/month. A local center helped me apply for it… I used to live in a studio nearby. It was hideous. It was not made for seniors or the disabled. The walls were ugly, it had a humidity issue, and I don't think it was okay… I applied to this program because they had told me that I would pay less rent [out of pocket] … I said yes right away when they called me… My apartment is super comfortable, especially for people like me. The bathroom is made for older adults or people with disabilities. It has all the handles, so you can hold on when you are moving around so that you will not fall. Most people that live there are older adults.

Teresa welcomed the transition to her Section 8 senior apartment because it decreased her rent burden and got her away from her previous unsafe housing situation. Her contribution to the rent payment was calculated to be 30 percent or less of her income.

Even if a person is eligible for housing subsidies, they are not guaranteed to receive them. Obtaining a subsidy is often a lengthy process that begins with learning about the program, followed by completing the application, and, if approved, waiting long periods for funding or housing stock. Older immigrants heard about the program via their family, friends, churches, and community members. During the application process, many were put on waiting lists for funding by the local public housing agencies (PHAs), and even when approved, they had to find apartments that would accept them. Teresa shared: "I

had applied for my [section 8] senior apartment, but I was waitlisted. It took a while, but I finally got the call that if I wanted to enter the program I could." For many, it took months, or even years, to get off the waitlist. Assistance was never guaranteed, even with legal status, and accessing it involved a lengthy application process in which the application and supporting documents are closely scrutinized. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has found that the demand for housing assistance exceeds the allocated resources. Despite these program constraints, many of my documented older immigrant respondents were able to secure Section 8 housing.

Documented status gives older migrants access to an income stream when they are not working that can provide for their necessities, too. Most documented adults (including naturalized citizens and legal permanent residents) with work histories were able to access or expected to receive formal support.[38] The three main sources of income were work wages for those who continued to work; Social Security (SS) pensions for those with a sufficient work history, or with deceased spouses with a sufficient work history; Social Security Supplemental Income (SSI) for those with little or no income; and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) for those who were disabled and had accumulated enough work credits. Although SS pensions and SSI monthly amounts were frequently low and insufficient to live in the Bay Area, documented older immigrants felt autonomous because they had a secure, reliable source of income (regardless of the amount). Even low amounts gave them a sense of contributing to their households.

Social Security pensions were the primary source of income for documented Latino immigrants over the age of 65 (Social Security Administration 2014). Seventy-five-year-old documented Joaquín Peréz was undocumented for more than a decade, but when he adjusted his immigration status, he completed his required credits to obtain his SS pension (equivalent to 40 quarters or ten years of work in eligible jobs). He shared how his SS pension (slightly over ~$1000/month) helped him and his wife:

> I thought I would retire at 65, but my job [at the Housing Authority] was straightforward. It was manageable and well-paid, so I stayed another two years at my job. I applied for my SS pension, and I worked a bit longer, so financially, we were great with both incomes… Now, I only get my retirement, but it is a big help… We pay for our housing using my [SS] pension.

His pension helped them pay their housing and day-to-day expenses to avoid feeling dependent on their adult children. In the past, they had experienced a mismatch in expectations of informal support from their adult daughter, who invited them to move into an in-law house in Texas:

> I have lived mainly in California, here in Oakland. We lived in Texas just for one year…Let me tell you a story. We lived and rented with one of our adult children in the Bay Area. We didn't have a place that we could call "our home." I have another daughter that lives in Texas on a small ranch…The place is enormous, and they have an oversized garage. My daughter tells me: "Dad, come live over here. My husband is making mom and you a small house here at the ranch. Dad, we won't charge you rent here since that little house will be yours." Sometime after, I told my

[38] For this chapter, "formal support" is defined as institutional support, usually cash, medical insurance, or a combination, received by older adults.

wife, “Woman, let’s go. We are here in the Bay Area with our adult children living in small apartments, and they are making us a small house of our own. I can’t believe we are not going and taking them up on their offer.” She said, “True, let’s go try it out.” We notified the SS office that we were moving. We gave our moving notice to all the places we had to, and we left to Texas. The house was lovely, small, and organized, with a bedroom, living room, and kitchen. It was beautiful.

You know that we are accustomed to contributing to household expenses, so we wanted to help with costs. Also, I believe that everything has a price here in the United States, so I asked my daughter: “Hey, daughter, how are we doing this? Are we going to pay rent, or how will we help you?” She said, “No, you should not worry about it. We can see later depending on how things are.” Things stayed that way for a bit, and less than a month later, my daughter tells me: “Hey dad, your son-in-law wanted to know if you could help with rent like $500/month, and that includes everything.” It surprised me because here in California, I would give my adult children $200 or $300 per month to help them out with the high rent costs.

Joaquín did not expect to live entirely for free in the tiny house at his daughter’s home, but given the pre-travel communication, he hoped they would contribute to paying the utility bills. However, through years of living in the United States, Joaquín and his wife had learned that they could not live for free, even with family and friends, which is consistent with findings from other research (Menjívar 2000). After this incident, they moved back to California and lived temporarily in the home of another adult daughter before being approved for a Section 8 apartment.

A few of my respondents had both private pensions and SS pensions. Sixty-eight-year-old documented Jaqueline Fuentes was undocumented when she came to the United States in her twenties, but she adjusted her status a few years later and was able to secure a well-paying job in government. At the age of 62, she decided to retire from her 30 plus years working as a translator for community health workers in San Francisco. She recalled her mode of thinking when she made her decision to retire:

I could have waited to retire until I turned 65, but I said: “I don’t have to send any more children to college. My house is fully paid for and secure. I want to travel. I would like to take advantage of the fact that I can still move around. Why shouldn’t I retire at 62? That is how I decided to retire. I had enough years working for the city that I could retire. I knew I would miss out on a higher pension amount than if I stayed a bit longer, which was a similar decision to my SS pension. I found out the numbers, and it was decided: “Well, I can live off what they give me in reality. What’s the point of living to work and not enjoying ourselves? I always had to ask for permission to go on vacation, and it was never guaranteed to be approved.

Jaqueline’s government pension (approximately $3400) with her SS pension ($1200) made it possible for her to decide to retire and live independently. She also did not have any more responsibilities towards her adult stepchildren because they were now adults.

Income from SS survivors benefits was critical for widowers, especially women. It provided documented older immigrants with a sense of autonomy and freedom from having to rely on informal family support. Seventy-six-year-old Adelaida Iglesias was a

lively woman who liked to converse and play bingo with her friends at a local senior center in her neighborhood in Oakland. She also took a lot of pride in her appearance, wearing bright red lipstick and nails that she proudly showcased as she walked with her walker. Throughout her life she had worked cleaning the homes of affluent Bay Area residents, but this provided only a small amount of SS pension income. At the time of the interview, she was receiving a percentage of her spouse's pension because it was higher than her own. Adelaida shared that she felt content with the formal monetary support she received since she was able to cover her living expenses with her guaranteed SS survivors benefits check (approximately $1000) and Section 8 housing subsidy:

> Fortunately, I am a very conformist person. I do what I can with what I have… If I have the money, I buy what I need. I wait until my subsequent [pension] check if I don't have it. When I get my pension check, I go to the bank and retrieve it… I pay my rent. From there, I know what I need for the house: toilet paper, dishwashing soap, this, that, and the list goes on…Then there is the electric bill. I pay it. Once I pay for my housing, I am the happiest person since that is where I sleep and rest. That is always my goal. After that, any money that is left over is used for any other things I need.

To Adelaida, the ability to pay for her necessities was empowering and indicated that she was not entirely dependent on anyone, including her adult children and their informal support. However, she (and other older adults) could always use more help since their SS pensions were small compared to the ever-increasing cost of living in the Bay Area. Having housing costs covered and income streams decreased the informal family support they needed.

SSI was an essential source of income for documented older adults living in poverty and without access to SS pensions. After being undocumented for decades, 76-year-old Carina Roman adjusted her immigration status in her mid-fifties through her son's family immigration petition in 2000. She worked in the informal economy as a childcare provider and as a tailor, both while undocumented and after receiving her permanent residency. Consequently, when she reached retirement age, she had insufficient credits for a traditional SS pension. She was not eligible for survivors benefits because she became a widow at a young age. Carina had learned through her social network and connections to a local Oakland community organization that she could apply to noncontributory formal federal support programs for low-income seniors. Her primary source of income became the means-tested cash assistance program SSI and Section 8 senior housing. When I asked her about her income and her housing situation, Carina opened up about the complex negotiations she had made over her life course to maintain autonomy and independence—negotiations that were constrained by poverty:

> I live alone… I live in an apartment complex with other older adults only… I endured living with one of my adult children until my grandchildren didn't need me. After my grandchildren began to attend school, I left their home. I departed because it was not the same attention and considerations [that I was being given]. I thought: "Why am I somewhere where they don't need me?" Thus, I started searching for a low-income apartment, and I have been there since. I also

> applied for supplemental income from the SS office, which is how I buy my stuff…I feel perfect. I feel tranquil; I feel at peace living there.

Carina highlighted how she left her adult son's home because she did not feel needed or valued in the household anymore once she stopped looking after her grandchildren. Taking care of her grandchildren was a form of in-kind support. It was how she felt she contributed to the family, but there came a time when she thought it was not valued the same. Furthermore, when I asked her how she felt living alone in her apartment, she described a sense of autonomy:

> I am here and living my life…I make my daily meals, I hang out with my friends, I go pick up my medications, and I can fend for myself… I feel happy that I don't need someone to help me move around. I ask God to let me fend for myself for whatever days I have left on this Earth.

Having her SSI income, however small the actual amount, allowed Carina to feel independent. It granted her a sense of autonomy from her immediate family.

For a few older immigrants, particularly those who became disabled before reaching administrative retirement age, disability insurance or SSDI also emerged as important safety nets. SSDI follows strict disability definitions, and individuals must have "a medical condition that's expected to last one year or result in death." Monthly disability benefits use a primary insurance amount (PIA) formula based on average lifetime work earnings and adjusted for historical wage growth to determine benefits (Social Security Administration 2021). Older immigrants had to fulfill the same requirements as native-born individuals and provide evidence of work authorization in the United States while still undergoing the long and complex bureaucratic application process. Documented 70-year-old Simón Santos started receiving SSDI benefits after his leg was amputated following a work-related incident when he was about 52 years old. He shared: "I started receiving my Social Security benefits when my leg was amputated in 2001. I was so happy I had enough credits to receive my benefits. Right now, I get about $930 every month." Simón's access to SSDI benefits gave him a secure income while he focused on his long medical recovery and learned to move with his only remaining leg. Those who became disabled transitioned to receiving their SS pensions once they were eligible to receive them.

SSDI was another source of income that enabled older immigrants to maintain autonomy from adult children and others. Fifty-six-year-old documented Daniel Castillo became disabled after suffering a stroke with severe brain hemorrhaging. While he was recovering, he lost his wages, and his doctors recommended he apply for disability because of the severity of the physical and neurological damage. It took over one and a half years to have his application approved, and once approved, there was a five-month waiting period before his benefits were released. When I asked about receiving help from his adult children, he dismissed the idea:

> I don't expect to receive help from my adult children because it would burden them, and I don't want that. I'd rather wait for what is mine; there is nothing better than what is yours. I stayed here [in the U.S.] to keep my disability benefits. I follow the rules of the programs. Some people have offered me small jobs, but I don't want to risk losing my disability benefits for a short-term work gig … They would

> take away everything that helps me recover, like my disability, Medicaid, and my low-cost [Section 8] apartment for the disabled. Do you understand that I would lose my housing? I am better off this way. It would be harder otherwise, and I don't want to depend on anyone else…If you don't live with at least another person, you can't make ends meet. It costs too much money to live here.

Daniel had two U.S.-born adult children, on whom he did not want to depend, and one minor child in Mexico, to whom he still sent monthly child support. After going through the long process of applying for disability benefits, he was unwilling to do anything, such as working, to risk this secure income or jeopardize his Section 8 housing.

When SS pensions or SSI were not enough or unavailable, documented older immigrants were also eligible for other formal safety nets. Some older immigrants mentioned that they had access to food stamps. This form of near-cash assistance was only available to older immigrants living in poverty who often had small amounts of cash income from SS pensions, surviving spouse income, SSI, or SSDI. For example, 79-year-old Matilde Castro was divorced and had been living on her own in a Section 8 housing unit for over ten years. Her eldest adult daughter helped her apply for all the programs for which she was eligible and completed many administrative tasks. Matilde did not participate in the formal labor market and thus did not receive an SS pension; nor was she eligible for SS surviving spousal benefits being divorced. She received a small token SSI benefit which she used to pay $230/month for her Section 8 studio apartment and some of her expenses. However, her SSI income is not enough to cover all her expenses, so she was advised that she was eligible for food stamps in addition to this income benefit: "Right now, I have small benefits that help me pay for my housing and food. My daughter helps me fill out the papers for the apartment and food stamps, but I can use them to pay for my studio and my food." Food stamps were a critical source support for Matilde, allowing her to get her regular groceries. She only had become eligible for food stamps because of a 2019 change to California law that allows SSI recipients to participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), known as Cal Fresh.[39] She valued the independence SSI income and SNAP food stamps give her which allowed her to avoid total reliance on her daughters:

> I like to live alone… Because I have heard adult children of other older adults state that aging parents are nuisances (*un estorbo*). My daughters have never told me this, but I have heard others complaining about older parents like: "Oh, they are nuisances…." My daughters have never said that, but I would like to avoid it.

Through these SS programs, Matilde was able to negotiate an independent living situation and some form of self-sufficiency separate from her daughters because she was still able to care for herself. The family was frequently not respondents' first option for support because older immigrants recognized their adult children had their own, and often multiple, responsibilities. Many adult children were still childrearing, growing their careers, and dealing with the consequences of their immigration status or nuclear families. However, older immigrants still needed informal family support, and there were many examples of mutual in-kind support.

[39] SNAP is a food stamp program that "provides nutrition benefits to supplement the food budget of needy families so they can purchase food" (U.S. Department of Agriculture: Food and Nutrition Service 2021).

Undocumented Older Immigrants

Unlike their documented peers, undocumented older immigrants had trouble realizing their vision of living autonomously. This had important consequences for their older years and their relationships with their children. They were less likely than documented immigrants to own their own homes. Most did not or would not have access to Social Security (SS). This was the case even when they had worked a lifetime—including if they contributed to the SS pension system. SS is the primary source of income in old age for most older adults in the United States (Carr 2018). Undocumented older immigrants have been purposefully and legally barred from obtaining Social Security number (SSN) cards since about 1972 when eligibility restrictions for federal programs based on immigration status were first introduced (Fox 2012). Undocumented older immigrants are also not eligible for most federal means-tested cash (or near cash) aid or housing subsidies. No undocumented older immigrants reported having successfully obtained any formal support from these resources. Many were aware of the programs because of conversations with their peers. Although they were excluded from these critical safety nets that help older adults remain as independent as possible, they had the same aspirations as their documented peers to remain autonomous and independent.

Exclusion from formal support programs meant that undocumented older immigrants had to rely more heavily on informal financial support from family. Their access to income (cash) was highly dependent on the strength of their social ties and relationships and was subject to the ability and willingness of their family members to provide support. Given the level of dependence, any disruption in the assistance circle (e.g., adult children's income) would affect older adults' well-being. Sixty-five-year-old undocumented Isadora Arias had worked most of her life in housekeeping in an Oakland hotel until she finally decided to leave her job. She had had conflicts with a new management team, and her partner and adult children—all undocumented like her—suggested she stop working since she was getting older. Isadora transitioned to being the primary homemaker. Her partner was the economic provider. Her adult sons provided in-kind support and token informal financial support on an as-needed basis. However, this arrangement was disrupted about five months before our interview because her partner abruptly decided to return to Mexico after receiving news that his mother was ill. At that moment, Isadora's stability was upended. She was no longer employed, and her partner had left her with two months' worth of expenses to pay for the bedroom she rented. When I asked her who helped pay her other expenses, like medication, she stated:

Isadora: Well, one of my sons. When my romantic partner was here, I would pay my expenses with the weekly budget he gave me. Now that he is not here, my middle adult son is the one that helps me, and I feel comfortable with him. Right now, two [out of three] of my adult sons—the middle and youngest ones—are paying my rent for me.

Author: How much is your rent?

Isadora: It is $750, and they are also giving me money for my phone and all my expenses. These two sons.

Author: How do you feel about the help you are getting?

Isadora: It feels nice, but at the same time, it does not because my sons have their families… My middle son has four children. He has to pay his rent. They have to pay for daycare/school for two of them… The others go to Catholic school. My daughter-in-law is friends with the priest, and the priest convinced them to enroll their children there. I think they pay like $400 per month…I can't count on my eldest adult son to come around so much because of his wife. I believe my daughters-in-law like me. Imagine if they didn't?

Isadora's life changed suddenly when her partner left for Mexico, and she was forced to rely more heavily on her adult sons than ever before. Two of her adult sons (the middle and youngest sons) stepped up quickly to cover her expenses, but she had mixed feelings because she knew they had their own expenses and nuclear families to care for. Isadora would continue to need this support from her adult children, and her well-being was tied to what her adult sons could afford.

Undocumented older immigrants preferred living arrangements that maintained some degree of separation from their adult children's households. Even when adult children offered their homes, older immigrants tried to avoid these situations as much as possible. They felt that if they lived with their adult children, they would have to follow their children's and their spouses' house rules, even if they disagreed. For example, Isadora shared that keeping her Chihuahua-mix dog and allowing him to stay indoors was non-negotiable for her, and two of her adult sons did not want her dog indoors:

> My adult children do not want my companion dog, so I won't go live with my adult sons. My daughter-in-law told me: "You have a room in our home, but not your dog. Your dog stays outside." My other adult son also said: "You have a room here, but the dog stays outside." I don't like that, so I prefer to stay where I am… I think they use my dog as an excuse, and I know they do not want him indoors, like in my room… I can't leave my dog. I scold him, talk to him, and lullaby him to sleep… I go to bed, feel him next to me, and feel accompanied, like when my partner was here. I don't feel lonely with my dog. I tell my adult sons this… They want my dog outside because they have children. In my head, I think: "Your children are not the only children that will live with a dog." I don't understand them because I always had dogs as pets when my sons were growing up. I think it is because of their wives. I understand and agree that their wives and children come first.

Isadora decided not to move in with her adult sons despite their invitations. However, she did not know how much longer she could continue renting her one-bedroom. Her housing depended on her adult sons' willingness and ability to pay her monthly rent. If they stopped or were unable to provide financial support, Isadora would be forced to move in with one of them or find alternative housing. It would be difficult for her to find affordable housing in the Bay Area without a stable income.

Some older undocumented immigrants decided to move in with family members, unlike Isadora. Multigenerational households are a common and effective strategy to address financial and caregiving situations for undocumented families (Enriquez 2020); however,

this strategy can cause conflict between older adults and their family members. Seventy-year-old undocumented Leonor Araya was vocal about the importance of having positive relationships with adult children, and she had expectations for what constituted desirable living arrangements:

> I live with my adult children because we have a good relationship, and so far, they have treated me well. I told them that I would not live with them if they mistreated me. I would leave to my house in Mexico. I would go even if I starved to death. I rather starve to death than live in a bad situation with my adult children. I tell this to other people who tell me that their adult children and children-in-law mistreat them… I have talked to older adults who cry as they share how badly they are being treated by their adult children, their children-in-law, and others. I tell them: "Don't be talking like that woman; you are an adult, and you put up with your adult children because you want to. Don't put up with them. Send them to hell and remember that God is big, and he won't forsake you." I am with my adult children because they treat me well, and if they didn't, I would not put up with them… I am a very calm person, but I am also very blunt and frank when I talk. I won't put up with being mistreated.

It was clear that Leonor was strong-willed and leveraged her home in Mexico as an exit strategy if living with her children in the United States became unbearable. However, even she recognized that it was unlikely that she would return to Mexico because all but one of her adult children were in the United States. Instead, she focused her energy on trying to create her own space within her adult daughter's home. Leonor purposefully moved from a bedroom in the main house to the garage to create a separation between her and her adult daughter's family. She preferred to set up her futon and television there with her rocking chair and spent much time in this space and in the back yard: "Whenever I want to be alone, I withdraw from my family, and I come back here to relax, to close my eyes, and I try to relax. No one will take care of you except you." She also completed miscellaneous tasks including caring for her grandchildren and tailoring clothes for some income that helped cover necessities, aside from housing. Given her circumstances, it would have been difficult for her to change this living arrangement.

While living together had its joys/benefits, this dependence was a real burden for some family members, resulting in cramped living conditions and financial strain. Multiple older immigrants did not want to feel like they were taking up limited space in their adult children's homes that they thought belonged to their grandchildren. For example, Ursula Peña wanted to avoid feeling like a burden at all costs:

> My [adult] daughter in Sacramento wants me to move in with her and her family. She is very possessive and always tells me, "Come live with us in Sacramento. Mom, you don't have to work, and I will give you your room." … I don't want to because she has her own family and children. I don't want her to take her son's or daughter's bedrooms and send them to sleep in the living room so that I can have a bedroom. I don't want this. I don't want to be a burden to anyone, do you understand me?

Ursula ultimately rejected her daughter's offer because she wanted to avoid the cramped living conditions and conflict over space. Instead, she continued to work selling tamales and sublet one bedroom in her two-bedroom apartment to cover her living

costs. It helped that she had lived in the same apartment for decades and had a good relationship with her landlord.

Older immigrants worried that being or feeling dependent or would put a strain on their relationships. Ursula explained:

> I just can't live without doing what I want because I wouldn't be in "my house." I just can't…They also have their husbands, and if I were there, they wouldn't be able to argue because I am there. I also know I would care for and scold, if necessary, my grandchildren. Thus, I think they should live in their own home alone as a family without me. I don't want them to hate me, and I don't want to hate them.

She received other sporadic gifts from her daughter, like grocery deliveries from Costco, and occasional payment of her utility bills, but these were discrete instances, and the help was unexpected. Like many of her peers, Ursula believed the separation of households was necessary for all involved.

Many older immigrants were happy to receive some informal support from their adult children, as long as it did not infringe on their financial or physical independence. For example, they appreciated when adult children acted as language and cultural brokers. Older immigrant parents still provided their adult children with support though their childcare of their grandchildren or sporadic in-kind support. However, many were contemplating what would happen when they could no longer work. For example, 56-year-old undocumented Severino Flores still provided housing or financial support to his young adult children. He felt great satisfaction and a sense of protection now that two of his children were adults:

> My kids are my roots. When your kids empower themselves, grow stronger, learn more, and become independent, you start to feel protected. I feel very protected by my two eldest children because they understand how life is here in the U.S., the language, and how to survive. As a parent, I feel more protected with my adult children.

Severino was still working and providing for his family through his painting business. He still had strong ties to his children. His adult children already provided in-kind and brokering support, helping him run his business by writing up work contracts, preparing and sending invoices, taking care of payroll, preparing their system for the accountant, and so on. He particularly valued this help because it was difficult for him to "write in English." However, Severino was afraid that he would eventually have to depend on his adult children:

> For those of us who are undocumented, aging will be more complex, and we might have to depend on our adult children. Our children will have the heavy burden of taking care of themselves and their parents. They shouldn't have to do this. I hope I don't have to entirely depend on my adult children for the end of my life. However, I also know we are not prepared. I think many Latinos are not ready… However, it is still hard for those with an SSN—at least here in the Bay—because they don't get a lot [from their SS pension], maybe $1200 per month. You can't live in the Bay with $1200.

Severino believed that there may come a time when he would be unable to work as he had been and that it was likely that he and his wife would become dependent on their adult children. He had recently purchased a home in the Bay Area and had multiple properties in Mexico. He hoped to leverage these assets to produce income via rents or sell these properties for profit when he was older. However, Severino recognized that this could create financial strain and burdens for his adult children.

Generally, not all undocumented older adults have family members they could rely on for informal support. Men more frequently than women reported weak relationships and conflict with family members that prevented support. For one, migrant fathers' ties to their adult children were not as strong as those in Mexico because their migration had transformed relationships with other family members. For example, 58-year-old undocumented Elias Aguayo's ex-wife returned to Mexico with their daughter when she was three years old (she was 30 when we spoke), and he had not seen her since. He attributed their distant relationship to the conflict with his ex-wife; however, because of his undocumented status, he could not visit or physically see his daughter. He had other family members (non-children) in the United States, but he insisted that he could not count on them:

Elias: To tell you the truth, I don't have anyone to turn to if I need help. Well, here in the U.S., family members change. The family changes.

Author: How does it change?

Elias: Many people say the same thing: "My family has changed since we migrated. My family is different now. It is not the same." … Like. I can't ask them for help with anything… I have always worked for myself, but asking for help from a family member is like telling them, "I need help, no." I won't ask for help, and I would rather wait than ask a family member for help." I think they don't like to help or be asked to help even if they are family. People are less willing to help. This is how the family has changed...I would not say that "My family is the best." I can't say that; why would I say that? If I ever needed help, I don't think they would help me.

Elias had weak ties to family members who lived in the United States. Some were just as resource-poor as he was, and also undocumented. He kept repeating that "the family changes" in the United States. This was partially tied to the work and economic demands of living in the United States, which made it difficult for family members to help others.

Other immigrants' relationships had been strained because of migration, affecting their support network in old age. For example, 50-old undocumented Renata Arcos had left her three young sons (ages 0-2) with her mother when she had migrated to the United States on her own after a failed relationship in Mexico. This disrupted and fractured her relationship with her children, which remained difficult as they grew older. Renata shared how she did not have the support of two out of her three children:

> My three adult sons never wanted to talk to me on the phone when they lived in Mexico. I worked to bring them to the U.S., but when they arrived, it was sad.

> They rejected me as their mother. This is my painful experience, and it continues because they don't consider me for anything. It is so unfortunate—all this rejection. It is like I don't have adult sons. Now, my middle adult son lives with me and seems to understand why I left them: "Mama, now, as an adult, I understand why you came to the U.S. and why you had to leave us." However, my eldest son and the youngest don't, and we have limited contact.

Parent-child relationships suffered when undocumented immigrants left their young children in Mexico for long periods while they worked in the United States. Renata did not feel comfortable asking her children for support from and was only now feeling like her relationship with her middle adult son was improving. He paid most of their monthly rent, while she was able to cover the utilities because she continued to work cleaning homes. Imagining a time when she would need help, Renata was not confident that she would get support from her two other sons.

Some felt that in the United States, family members were unwilling to support them without receiving something in return. Sixty-three-year-old undocumented Emanuel had little income after exhausting his worker's compensation and State of California disability benefits and was forced to move in with his brother. Still unable to return to work, he had few options. He reiterated what many respondents shared about their existing, implicit expectations regarding informal financial support from family members: "Here [in the U.S.], the rents demand the most [money], well, whomever they [the person you are paying rent to] are, whether they are family or not family…No one lets you live for free, even family." He moved into a house with his two brothers, one of whom was married and the other single. He was paying $300/month to live in the garage. Before, he had been paying $1000 for an apartment. Emanuel believed he only received family support because he had assets: a house and a vacant lot in Mexico. He shared:

> The current situation is challenging with and without family members. Nowadays, it is not like it used to be when someone would help someone else. If someone sees that you have something to offer, they will help you. If not, they won't. My brother is helping me by letting me live in the garage because he knows I have a property in Mexico. If I did not have that, I do not think he would help me. I have a vacant lot in Mexico, and he has told me: "Well, if you want, I can pay your rent every month, and we can make accounts. I can keep the vacant lot." If I didn't have that property, I am sure he would not offer to pay my rent portion. I am not selling my vacant lot to my brother right now. I want to try working again… I don't know why, but more friends and people outside of my family have helped me. I don't want to be repetitive, but I feel others help me more than my family.

Unlike other low-income documented older adults, Emanuel could not access legal support and did not have children. His brothers were his closest family members in the United States, and a sister took care of his house in Mexico. Emanuel felt that one of his brothers was willing to help him pay his rent, if necessary, because he was interested in a possible exchange for Emanuel's vacant lot in Mexico. Thus, although Emanuel did not have access to formal support while living in the United States, he could leverage his assets in Mexico to pay his living costs in the United States.

Others never made their own families; they didn't marry and never had children. These older immigrants often had to work longer and had no actual plans for what to do when they would no longer be able to work. For example, 50-year-old undocumented Martin Campos came to the United States to provide financially for his now-deceased parents and siblings in Mexico. However, he did not create a family of his own in the United States or Mexico. He had always lived with roommates and maintained communication with a sister in Mexico. Past research has shown that migration and illegality disrupt the quality of family relationships (Abrego 2014) and family formation (Enriquez 2020). It would be difficult for Martin to activate his family's support from Mexico while living in the United States, even though he had maintained good relationships with several family members there, including his sister and a niece. He had some cousins in the United States, but they had little communication and weak ties. In sum, for some men, migration disrupted family ties and family formation, which are essential given migrants' structural exclusion from most formal support resources. Their informal family support within the United States, were they to ever need it, was fragile or non-existent.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I argued that documented and undocumented Mexican older immigrants strove to meet their ideal of independence, defined as physical and financial autonomy from informal family support. Other types of support, including in-kind and emotional support from families, were preferred over financial and housing support. Having their own income source helped older immigrants avoid being completely dependent on family, feeling like freeloaders, or burdening their adult children. It also helped them avoid conflict with adult children (and in-laws) and protect their children and privacy. Contrary to the familism literature, my findings show that not all older immigrants want or expect the support of family members.

But documented older adults were more capable of achieving independence and autonomy than the undocumented. Documented status gave them options that most undocumented people did not have, including access to housing outside of the family through homeownership and housing subsidies (Section 8). During retirement, it also gave them access to income sources through SS programs—SS pensions, survivors benefits, SSDI, and SSI. This is not to say that every documented immigrant could live up to this ideal of full financial and physical independence. While documented older immigrants were more able to achieve some degree of autonomy through their accumulation of wealth and access to public benefits (similar to nonimmigrants), many were still vulnerable given their greater dependence on small amounts of SS as an income source, the limited public benefits for all US residents, and the high cost of living in the Bay Area. Undocumented older adults, however, had more trouble realizing this vision despite facing similar challenges related to aging. They were not eligible for most SS programs, which meant they had to rely on informal financial support from family, often straining essential relationships. And not all undocumented older immigrants had a family to depend on. These findings add to the literature on immigrant illegality by showing how illegality continues to shape all aspects of immigrants' lives as they age, but in different and sometimes more intense ways like having to work longer and depending more on family at the expense of their bodies and their relationships.

CHAPTER 4

"No Tengo Miedo" [I'm Not Afraid]: How the Fear and Threat of Deportation Evolve over the Life Course

Elias Aguayo, a 58-year-old undocumented man, had lived in the United States for 23 years, but he had a history of traveling back and forth to Mexico before finally settling in Oakland more permanently. We met when Trump was president in 2019. At the time, he was working as a day laborer, and he shared how he performed various types of strenuous labor, from landscaping to construction to moving. I asked him whether he was afraid of deportation, and he responded, "No, I'm not scared at all, no, I'm not scared [of detention and deportation]." His confident statement conveyed a sentiment that was consistently expressed among the undocumented older immigrants I interviewed.

The dominant assumption across the migrant illegality literature is that undocumented immigrants fear the U.S. deportation regime. Earlier researchers have described this phenomenon as "living in the shadows" (Chavez 2013a). Because they are wary of being deported, undocumented immigrants often fear authority figures, including police, landlords, and social workers (Suárez-Orozco et al. 2011); they sometimes accept abusive or unsafe working conditions and often avoid labor unions. We also know that the threat and fear of deportation, or of being visible to government officials who might deport them, is a function of temporal and geographic context (García 2014; Schmalzbauer 2014); social status, such as student/work status (Abrego 2011; Gleeson and Gonzales 2012) or parental status (Abrego and Menjívar 2011; Berger Cardoso et al. 2018; Enriquez 2015); ascriptive characteristics, such as race and gender (Aranda and Vaquera 2015; Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2013); and strategic behaviors that allow for "legal passing" (Garcia 2019).

Other literature has examined how the perception of bodies matters for how individuals and groups are viewed, stereotyped, and treated in their day-to-day lives (Flores 2016; Gonsalves 2020). Older adults are frequently stereotyped based on their their physical appearance (Wilkinson and Ferraro 2004). Meanwhile, the prototypical undocumented immigrant in the mainstream narrative created and promoted by the state apparatus, mainstream media, and public discourse is Latino (often Mexican), working-class, and male (Chavez 2007, 2013b; Flores and Schachter 2018). Undocumented children are often portrayed as vulnerable, innocent victims of their parent's actions, and in need of protection (Huber 2015). Undocumented youth/young adult DREAMers are deemed deserving through meritocracy (Abrego 2008), and middle-aged adults are often demonized as criminals (Chavez 2013b).

In this chapter, I show that visibility and fear of deportation are also functions of the life course. Much of the existing research on migrant illegality across the life course has focused on earlier life course transitions and trajectories, including children's development and education (Yoshikawa 2011), the transition from childhood to young adulthood (Gonzales 2011), and the linked lives of immigrant parents and their children (Enriquez 2020). The one quantitative study that focuses on the fear of deportation for

this age group by sociologists Rodriguez, Paredes, and Hagan (2017) found that older Latino immigrants aged 50 years and older feared immigration enforcement at lower levels than younger immigrants using quantitative pool survey data from the Pew Research Center's 2007, 2008, 2010, and 2013 National Surveys of Latinos. They also found some evidence that this fear decreased for those over 65 years old compared to 50- to 64-year-olds. But we know less about *how* late adulthood shapes views about immigration enforcement beyond "lower levels of fear." I add to this literature by focusing on older adults and illustrating how the experience of illegality changes as they age.

I show that older undocumented migrants like Elias tend not to fear deportation in the same way as in the past. As Mexican immigrants age, they feel less visible to the authorities and therefore less susceptible to and fearful of deportation. This is a function of bodily changes associated with aging and the of fact that they are no longer in moving in spaces or engaged in activities that make them visible or vulnerable, such as going to work or driving. Thus, I bridge research on age stereotypes and ageism—"prejudice and discrimination against older people based on the belief that aging makes people less attractive, intelligent, sexual, productive" (Butler 1969:243; Wilkinson and Ferraro 2004:340)—to understand how bodily physical changes that come with age and stereotypes surrounding these changes impact older immigrant's fears of deportation. In addition, the older undocumented migrants in my sample had decades of experience with illegality. I show that the longer immigrants live in the United States, the more they feel invulnerable. For example, many older immigrants embrace the "good immigrant" narrative and believe their adherence to the law will protect them from deportation.

At the same time, older immigrants continue to fear the deportation regime; their illegality remains salient, just in new ways. While older undocumented immigrants are less visible and feel less vulnerable to deportation, their concern shifts to their undocumented adult children, who are now entering the stage of life when they are prime targets for immigration officials. This transition is significant because older immigrants depend on the support of their children to weather old age. Undocumented immigrants are ineligible for most federal public benefits, including Medicare and Social Security—essential sources of support for aging low-income workers. Older migrants thus worry about losing both financial and social support should their children be deported.

My argument is presented in two parts. First, I show how bodily changes, life transitions, and time in the United States influence immigrants' fear of deportation. Then, I show how fears about their own deportation are replaced by a growing fear that their undocumented adult children might be deported.

PART I: DECREASED FEAR AND VISIBILITY

As immigrants get older, their fear of deportation decreases, along with the actual threat of deportation, in part because their visibility to immigration authorities decreases. This occurs for two reasons. First, scholars have argued that older adults are less visible in today's society generally, and this is especially true for marginalized groups like women

(Hurd 2000), LGBTQ populations (Butler 2004), and incarcerated individuals (Psick et al. 2017). I find that this is also the case for undocumented older immigrant adults (as well as older immigrants in mixed-status families). This decreased visibility lessens the threat and fear of deportation among older undocumented adults. Second, older immigrants no longer fit the stereotype of the prototypical undocumented immigrant: young, Latino (often Mexican), working-class, and male (Chavez 2013b). However, as older immigrants got older, they felt that their natural bodily aging helped conceal their lack of immigration status because aging/ageist stereotypes are more potent than stereotypes of illegality. In other words, older immigrants were correctly perceived as older and not as undocumented, and consequently, they felt less fear of deportation or detention.

Changing Physical Appearances and Embodiment

Undocumented older immigrants believed that their changing physical appearance altered how others viewed their aging bodies. Graying hair, visible physical ailments, and mature age do not fit the stereotypical racialized profile image of a young/middle-aged undocumented immigrant. Physical and visible changes of aging collided with the dominant narrative about "who" comprises the undocumented immigrant population. When I asked 58-year-old undocumented César Lazcano, who was partially deaf in one ear after a childhood infection and still working on his own as a landscaper across the Bay Area, if he was afraid of being deported, he listed all the reasons he was no longer fearful including the recognition that his physical appearance mattered:

> Look at me, fortunately. Fortunately, I have several points in my favor: I am light-skinned and older looking. They [immigration enforcement agents] can see me, they can ask me questions if they like, but it is unlikely.

César mentioned his physical appearance as the primary factor that helped him avoid drawing the attention of immigration enforcement in his day-to-day activities. In addition to his light skin, he was also older looking. He no longer fit the profile of the stereotypical considered undocumented immigrant—he had aged out. He firmly believed that given his aging appearance, it was unlikely he would be targeted for removal, although it was still possible.[40] Most of the older immigrants I interviewed were fully or mostly gray haired. This created a greater sense of security for older immigrants, and they were less afraid of being apprehended.

Other older immigrants highlighted the fact that their physical attributes had changed with age, and consequently, even if they might be read as "illegal," they were no longer an enforcement priority. When I asked them about the possibility of being deported, they repeated, "*mirame, ya estoy vieja/o*" [Look at me, I am old]. In these conversations, it was implied that "being old" made them less visible to enforcement authorities who, they believed, were not interested in detaining "old people." To an extent, older immigrants felt that they had aged out of being direct primary targets of racial and gendered practices of immigration enforcement.

[40] Respondents generally believed they would only be targeted if they committed a serious crime—independent of age.

The changes in physical appearance that come with natural aging, in conjunction with acculturation, gave older immigrants some sense of security because they no longer embodied the profile of undocumented immigrants. This belief was spread across older immigrants' social networks. Sara Guzmán had been assured by an immigration enforcement officer in her social network that she did not fit the profile of an undocumented immigrant given her age. In our interview, Sara articulated how she learned first-hand from immigration agents that it was difficult for them to detain older immigrants:

> My adoptive mother here in the U.S.—who passed—had a brother. The brother's two daughters are immigration agents. I took care of their father when he had a stroke. I explained my immigration concerns to them since they already knew my immigration status situation. Yet, they hired me to care for their father out of friendship and my full transparency [about my status], and there was always good communication. They told me that agents usually do not target older adults because of the way we look, and we have acquired the language, local dialects, and dress—like others here. It is difficult for them to detain anyone, but even more challenging to detain an older adult. They [immigration agents] know that many older adults, for the most part, are legal immigrants… Maybe it is easier to detain a young worker. But to detain a person my age is more difficult because they do not want to be wrong… The way we look. In other words, it is tough for them to distinguish whether older adults are legal or not.

Through conversations with the two immigration agents, Sara confirmed that her adaptation to the American lifestyle and "older" appearance shielded her from being a direct target for apprehension as an older adult. Knowing this made her significantly less afraid and gave her increased sense of security that allowed her to move more freely without daily fear of detention. Similarly, other older immigrants described how others in their social networks believed that "older people" were not the primary targets of immigration enforcement. For older Mexican immigrants, the natural changes to their appearance and their acculturation to life in the United States challenged the racialized narratives that equate "illegal" with "Latinos" and helped obscure their lack of immigration status.

The high number of older Latinos in the East Bay also provided an additional sense of security for older immigrants. Efrén Alonso, a 51-year-old undocumented man, had worked for almost two decades in Oakland and the surrounding areas in the carpet cleaning industry. His job required him to drive into many different neighborhoods to complete work orders. When I asked Efrén if he thought that older adults were direct targets of immigration enforcement, he stated: "I don't think that immigration enforcement targets older people unless they have some warrant or some police report or a prior record—they would look for them by name." He believed that older immigrants are not direct targets unless there is a warrant by name on file for them. We talked about why he thought this:

> Efrén: I think that when you are an older person, they won't see you do anything out of the ordinary. For better or worst, all the people you see in the street are older adults because we all look the same here in Oakland.

Author: How do you look?

Efrén: We all look Hispanic and older, everyone.

Efrén associated being "established" with age, maturity, and life experience. In addition, he felt that the high number of older Latino immigrants in Oakland made it more difficult to be singled out when engaged in his day-to-day activities. In contrast, for older immigrants living in a different place (other than the urban East Bay) with no or a small Latino population, it would be possible to remain a target (García and Schmalzbauer 2017).

For undocumented older Mexican immigrants, age-based stereotypes became a more significant visible social factor than ethno-racial stereotypes for how they were viewed and whether they were socially stereotyped by others as undocumented or not. Older immigrants perceived that aging decreased their visibility to immigration enforcement and, consequently, the risk of deportation. Many felt immigration enforcement practices no longer targeted them because they were not perceived to be "illegal," in part due to natural changes to their physical appearance as a result of aging.

Life Transitions

Older immigrants were no longer or decreasingly present in spaces or engaged in activities—including driving, working, and handling family responsibilities—that made them visible to authorities or vulnerable to immigration enforcement practices. Many experienced these life transitions gradually as they aged.[41] In addition, their fear of the consequences of deportation decreased as their children, both in the United States and abroad, aged into adulthood and their responsibilities towards them decreased.

Driving and transportation changes. Many migrants drove less or stopped driving altogether as they got older. Earlier researchers have provided evidence that traffic stops are the most common interactions immigrants have with any enforcement agency. Immigrants are most frequently cited or detained for driving without a driver's license (Enriquez 2015; Lacayo 2010). But older migrants often gave up driving due to cost or health concerns. For example, Sara Guzmán, an undocumented woman, still worked cleaning homes/churches and as a caregiver. She no longer drove and depended heavily on public transportation, Uber, and her adult son for transportation between her home and her work locations: "I do not drive anymore; it gives me anxiety. If it is too late, I usually take an Uber back home [so I don't] worry about getting home safely." Sara cited her worsening vision as the reason that she no longer drove and instead used other modes of transportation. The older immigrants who decreased or stopped driving as they grew older cited health concerns (eyesight or driving anxiety) or not being able to afford a vehicle. They either transitioned to using the public transit system more or relied on family and friends for their transportation needs. This made it less likely that they would be detected during a traffic stop.

[41] Life transitions are gradual changes which are "brief in scope and refer to changes in state" (Settersten and Mayer 1997:252).

Most of those who continued to drive had obtained a California driver's license. California Assembly Bill (AB) 60 granted any eligible California resident the ability to receive a driver's license—regardless of immigration status—starting January 1, 2015. As a result, migrants felt safer driving.[42] When I asked 56-year-old undocumented Severino Flores if he was afraid of deportation, he stated he was less fearful of driving now because he had obtained a California driver's license:

Severino: Right now, not so much, but before yes. Oh my God, I would see a police officer and I was praying to God that nothing would happen to me.

Author: And why were you afraid before and not now?

Severino: … Since I have my license, I have hope, so that gives me a little more confidence to drive. Since I've been in this country, I've never been given a traffic ticket for anything... So, that's why right now I feel less fearful, perhaps, than before.

Like Severino, many older immigrants had less fear of driving with a license. In addition, many shared that they knew their communities and had learned to navigate spatially to remain safe while driving in the East Bay, for example avoiding certain cities or areas that were known for traffic stops. The enactment of California's driver's license law had come when he was older. It alleviated immediate fears from routine traffic stops.

Changes in work arrangements. Undocumented older immigrants who no longer worked or who worked in what they perceived to be low-risk employment were less fearful of deportation. Undocumented older immigrants were often no longer working; thus, they had no contact with any workplace compliance enforcement and felt less at risk. In our interview, 63-year-old undocumented Emanuel Fonseca recalled how in the past, he had been let go from multiple factory positions because they requested proof of employment authorization and he was unable to provide it. He shared that once undocumented workers saw their employer's work verification request via formal letters, "no one showed up to work anymore because the letter stated until what day they had work and after that, you moved on." However, at the time of the interview, he was no longer working. He did not feel that he was in danger of being targeted for removal by immigration officials in his day-to-day activities. Emanuel explained, "I don't work right now, so I do not worry about being deported."

Some respondents had worked for years, or even decades, with the same employers or were self-employed.[43] This was important since most were not asked for employment authorization after the initial hiring date. At the time of the interviews, the respondents

[42] As of May 2021, sixteen states and the District of Columbia have enacted laws to allow undocumented immigrants to obtain driver's licenses. These states include California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington. Washington was the first state that began offering this in 1993.

[43] There were some exceptions, for example if a business changed ownership or moved locations. This may have caused tensions and job departures in some cases. However, employers are not required to act as enforcement agents; thus, enforcement authorities did not follow up when an employee could not provide work authorization papers.

no longer worked in places that immigration enforcement officials often target. No one worked in a factory or workplaces they associated with being targeted by immigration enforcement agencies. For example, when I talked to 55-year-old undocumented Tadeo Jimenéz, he described that immigration raids were infrequent and only happened under certain circumstances:

> Regarding immigration, there will always be raids here [in the U.S.], especially in factories or fields, but when immigration authorities already know that there are several undocumented immigrants in companies. That is where the raids are or when someone snitches on someone or a company. Yes, the truth is that they [immigration enforcement] will not walk door to door to check for immigrants. You don't see that… No, they can't go around like that, knocking and knocking [on every door]. [They may do this] only when agents are called: "You know what? There are several undocumented immigrants at this location," but because someone snitched on the company or a specific person. Then, they arrive at the particular location, and bang, they take anyone they find there without immigration status.

Tadeo explained this when we discussed whether he had ever thought about the possibility of deportation. In his experience, immigration enforcement scrutinized companies that had been identified and accused by a third party of hiring immigrants without work authorization. Tadeo had worked in the restaurant industry almost since he arrived in the United States over 37 years before and had not encountered random enforcement checks. He also recognized that there could be collateral damage at workplace raids; if immigration enforcement arrived for one individual, they could detain others, too. Finally, he understood that logistically it was unlikely that immigration agents would come knocking at every door to check for undocumented immigrants unless they had previous knowledge of law violations.

Other undocumented older immigrants no longer had to show employers proof of immigration status, notably those who had transitioned to self-employment (e.g., independent contractors) and those who owned and ran their own small businesses. For example, Severino Flores had started his own painting business four years previously after California's then-governor Jerry Brown signed into law legislation allowing individuals with an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) to apply for a state professional license, specifically a contractor license. He was no longer working as an employee and felt more secure since he controlled where he traveled. During the interview, Severino shared that he was hiring more employees to do the painting work for him while he focused on creating relationships with customers and took care of more administrative tasks. He decided to freelance because he felt he had the experience and had mastered the necessary skills of his trade, and he recognized that he had less physical endurance as he grew older. Being self-employed decreased older immigrants' fear of deportation because they were no longer required to provide proof of employment authorization (e.g., Social Security) to run a business. They also felt they could control where they traveled and worked.[44] The actual likelihood of being deported

[44] Immigration law penalizes the hiring of undocumented workers, but undocumented immigrants may become business owners. Businesses can become standalone entities for tax purposes.

declined in their eyes because they no longer were subject to work authorization checks.

Changes in familial responsibilities and roles. Changes in familial responsibilities, expectations, and roles of older immigrants also changed the consequences of deportation significantly. Some of these changes also decreased the fear of deportation. Dependent children's transition to adulthood lessened the consequences of deportation for older immigrants because family expectations and roles evolved. First, the pressure many undocumented older immigrants felt to provide financially for their children decreased, as did their legal responsibilities, because their children were now legal adults and often worked at least part time. At the time of the interviews, their earlier fears of being unable to provide for their minor children or being separated from their family due to their immigration status had not been realized. Second, respondents with young children in Mexico sent fewer remittances as those children became adults. Similarly, those without children provided less financial support for other relatives in Mexico over time.

As migrants aged, their children became adults and were thus able to care for themselves. The fear of deportation lessened for undocumented older immigrants with children as they became less legally and financially liable for their adult children's welfare.[45] At home, many older immigrants were no longer the primary financial providers for or legal guardians of their now-adult children. Older immigrants' family roles changed as their adult children became independent and left home. In our conversation over the phone, 55-year-old undocumented Magdalena Pardo recalled how she had been more afraid of deportation when her daughter and son were dependent as minors than she was at present:

> Yes, I have been afraid. Yes, I have been scared, and more before, when my children were young. Right now, they know that if they [immigration enforcement] deport me if they catch me, they [my children] must first check if I can be released on bail, and if not, well, they are old enough to visit me in Mexico now.

Magdalena, like all respondents, did not want to be deported. On a personal level, she did not want to return to Mexico, given her negative experiences with working and personal relationships there before her migration. Still, she recognized that the burden of deportation had changed. She believed that her adult children knew how to manage, or at least what steps to take if she were detained, and as adults, they were better able to take care of themselves, including traveling to visit her in Mexico. Magdalena maintained a close relationship with her two adult children, but they were now self-sufficient and less dependent on her. Both of her adult children had moved out of her home to attend college, and since then, they had lived independently. Her current outlook contrasted with her feelings about being detained in the past:

[45] Like most parents, regardless of immigration status, undocumented older adults wanted to support their children's upward mobility and socioemotional well-being into their children's adulthood. They identified "ideal parenting" as supporting and mentoring their children throughout their life transitions and beyond the legal age of 18 (Enriquez 2015, 2020). However, their children reaching the legal age of 18 provided some relief.

Magdalena: No, no, no, it's not the same anymore. Right now, of course, I don't want to be deported.

Author: Yes, of course.

Magdalena: Because I don't want to leave [return to Mexico]. But before, my fear was leaving my [minor] children—but before I had a written letter for my children. Well, guess with who? My guardian angels (a close friend couple), I would put that burden on them.

Author: Yes?

Magdalena: For my children, yes. Yes, I had a letter. But I asked this friend first if I could leave a notarized letter if something happened to me, that she would have guardianship rights for my minor children.

As a divorced mother, Magdalena had been fearful that her children would be left in the custody of her ex-husbands or foster care if she were detained. Legally, adult children were no longer subject to placement in foster care or supervision by state authorities—decreasing interactions with this public institution. Given her strained relationship with her ex-husbands, Magdalena had prepared a notarized document giving a close friend couple legal guardianship of her then minor children if she was unexpectedly detained. This plan eased her fear while her children were minors, but the fear also diminished as she grew older. Now that they were adults themselves, her children would be able to help Magdalena and contribute to any decisions if something did occur. Although she did not want to be separated from her citizen adult children, she recognized that they could visit her in Mexico or advocate for her if the need arose since, as U.S. citizens, they were free to travel internationally and continue living in the United States. Many adult children were self-sufficient or could be if circumstances required it. In sum, older immigrants' changing family responsibilities and roles decreased the fear of deportation because the consequences were no longer as dire.

Adult children's immigration status also mattered when it came to the consequences of deportation. In particular, having documented (citizen or DACAmented) adult children lessened older immigrants' fears of deportation.[46] For undocumented older immigrants, especially men, it alleviated some of the fear of not being able to provide financially if they were deported. Fifty-three-year-old undocumented Ivan Sanchez, his wife, and his only child had migrated to the United States over 16 years ago. When asked about his thoughts on being deported, Ivan expressed relief knowing that his daughter was legally an adult and protected from deportation under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) executive order.[47] He described this feeling: "It's also like something that leaves you with more space not to think about that [deportation], that she [daughter] can already do this and that. So, it's always an advantage." Then he shared, "We think

[46] "DACAmented" refers to individuals who are eligible and have acquired temporary deportation protections and work permits under President Barack Obama's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) 2012 (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services 2017).

[47] Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) is an executive order that defers removal of and provides work permits to certain undocumented immigrants who were brought to the United States as children, have obeyed the law, and stayed in school or enlisted in the military.

our daughter will be okay… she has DACA now, and in the future, she will be able to do more things hopefully if more laws pass like this one." Ivan's fear decreased because his daughter was now an adult and had some legal protections under DACA. Some of the conversations that Ivan had had in the past with his wife and extended family members were also no longer relevant. For example, he remembered talking to his wife about what would happen to their daughter if he was deported:

> For example, my wife's aunt told us that we could put her name down to authorize her to pick up our daughter from school. My daughter was younger [than she is] now. She is over 18 years old, but she was still a minor back then. But my wife's aunt did tell us to authorize her to pick our daughter up from school and do things like us, any of us, to help my daughter if anything happened to us [the parents]. Nothing more than that; it's the closest we've ever [come to talking] about deportation, right? And long before that, my wife would say, "If they deport you, I'll go back [to Mexico] with our daughter." But we didn't talk in more detail about the steps we would take.

At the time of the interview, his adult daughter was studying at a local four-year university, and his fears of deportation weighed less on him. He saw that his daughter had a part-time job, was creating a solid support network through her involvement at college, would graduate soon, and would be able to acquire full-time employment. Although he never wanted to be forcefully separated from his family, he felt that DACA protected his daughter from the same fate and provided opportunities for her future, even if he was not present.

Over time, the need to support family in Mexico (via remittances) also declined, further decreasing the consequences of deportation. Older immigrants with transnational families, especially those with children in Mexico, described how remittance patterns decreased once their minor children reached adulthood. While these children were still minors, their immigrant parents sent remittances to provide financial support to cover their basic needs, educational expenses, and wants (e.g., toys, clothing, electronics). They often remained in the United States to maintain this economic-provider role within their families. However, their remittance practices changed over time, as did their social connections to family members abroad. For example, 52-year-old undocumented Calvino Valdovinos described how he had migrated to the United States to provide financial support and stability for his minor children after being laid off from his job at a factory in Mexico. He provided for them by regularly sending remittances and consumer goods/gifts by way of relatives or friends who traveled to Mexico:

> For example, the values and education my family instilled in me and my mother's advice made me who I am. My mother said that when you get married, your children come first, and that was true. My children (and their well-being) come first. That is precisely what I did, my children came first, even after their mother and I divorced. I sent child support or monetary remittances every week while my children were minors.

Calvino had supported his minor children financially until they were adults and even tried to pay for his daughter's and son's higher education. His son accepted his father's financial support to pursue a technical career as an electromechanical engineer. Calvino also recalled how in the past, he had accepted jobs he did not necessarily enjoy

to provide for his then-minor children: “Sometimes I had to work or take jobs that I didn't like to send money. As I told you, it is something that one thinks about, well, one who is responsible; not all of us are responsible.” As a parent, he felt responsible to provide for his minor children. However, these remittances patterns had changed since his two children were now adults with their own families. He shared, “I don’t have anything, no responsibilities, to stop me if something [deportation] happens—not anymore.” As a grandfather, he was not required, nor did he feel responsible to provide financial support to his grandchildren. He hoped he has instilled in his children the same sense of responsibility to care for their own children. Calvino did support them by paying for unexpected expenses and sending holiday gifts, but he sent remittances less frequently. In sum, Calvino’s fear of deportation had lessened because he no longer felt the same pressure to provide financially for his children that he did when they were younger.

Older immigrants who fulfilled their gendered role expectations within their families were less afraid because they believed that having fulfilled these roles opened the possibility of receiving reciprocal support from family members in Mexico. For example, men who fulfilled their role as economic providers felt they had completed their role as a financial caregiver to their adult children or family members. Similarly, women who maintained connections and communication with their parents and other family members over the decades thought they could receive mutual support. For example, 50-year-old undocumented Martin Campos did not have children of his own, but he sent regular remittances to Mexico to cover his father’s living expenses before his death. After his father passed, he sent remittances periodically to his eldest sister, brother, and nieces in Mexico. Over the years, he had helped them with living and education expenses. Martin believed that there was an unspoken mutual support agreement. He provided financial support, and his eldest sister cared for and maintained his home in Mexico. When we discussed whether he expected to receive support from anyone as he grew older, the importance of preserving relationships to allaying his fear of deportation became apparent. Having maintained connections while abroad had created the possibility that he would have informal family support if he were deported or voluntarily returned to Mexico. Even when financial support for other family members lessened over time, relationships remained important.[48] Martin recalled that his young niece offered to reciprocate the support she had received from him:

Martin:	Well, no. I do not expect any support from anyone because I have supported my family because it came from my heart. Sometimes my nieces tell me they will support me; they are the daughters of my older sister who is a single mom. Well right now, they are maybe like 14, wait my niece just turned 16 the other day and she tells me: “Uncle, I am going to study hard to support you, to reciprocate all of your support.” I tell her: “No, no, you work on doing well in school, so you can get ahead for yourself.”
Author:	Who is this? The eldest daughter of your older sister?

[48] Older immigrants described how they lost their parent(s), and with their death(s) came less responsibility to send regular remittances to Mexico.

Martin: Yes. I tell her: “Work hard to get ahead for yourself.” I help them because it comes from my heart and that is why I migrated in the first place. I also share with them: “If upon my return to Mexico and while I am still able bodied, I will work hard in life and work hard in Mexico to survive. Same here, I work hard to survive and while I am able bodied unless they deport me, I will be here.” I will be okay, regardless.

Martin lived in an apartment with other men from his hometown. He had never married and had no children of his own. Not all respondents had children, especially those whose family formation years had been disrupted by migration from the start. Among those without children, many told me that they provided financial support for their aging parents, siblings, and nieces/nephews and felt that by doing so they kept open the possibility of receiving family support in the future. While not having family in the United States limited his access to informal family support, Martin had invested in his relationships in Mexico financially and morally without expecting anything in return. He had fulfilled his expected role as a financial provider. I found that older immigrant adults transitioned out of spaces and engaged less with past activities and roles—including driving, work, and family responsibilities—thus decreasing the threat, and their fear, of deportation. These changes were tied to gradual life transitions related to aging.

Time in the United States. I have shown that changes in driving and transportation, work arrangements, and familial responsibilities and roles matter, and now will I show that the longer immigrants live in the United States and the more they acculturate, the more they feel invulnerable and less afraid they are of deportation. Many older immigrants shared that they embraced the “good immigrant” narrative propagated by politicians and news media outlets. Thus, abiding by social norms in their day-to-day interactions gave them a sense of security, which is line with previous research (Andrews 2018; Garcia 2019). In addition to changing with time in the United States, their behavior also changed according to culturally defined age norms. Age norms are “widely held beliefs about age-appropriate behaviors [that] guide processes of adult socialization” (Massoglia and Uggen 2010:544). Both time in the U.S. and changing culturally defined age norms helped decrease their fear of deportation.

The more time they had spent in the United States, the more likely older immigrants were to embrace the “good immigrant” narrative. For example, 53-year-old undocumented Nieves Jiménez lived with her partner, one adult daughter, and her daughter’s boyfriend in a two-story house in Oakland, CA, while the rest of her daughters live in Mexico. Her adult daughters in Mexico frequently voiced their concerns about her safety in the United States as an undocumented immigrant when they saw raids reported by the news outlets in Mexico. Nieves reassured them of her safety using the “good immigrant” narrative:

> I told my daughter, “No, that is a lie. They detain people who have, who have… what do you call them? People who have killed and all that. People with criminal backgrounds.” … I tell them, “They detain you if you have a criminal background.

Then, take into consideration that I don't put myself in danger. I don't work in factories because they say they raid factories."

Over time while living in the United States, Nieves had adopted the "good immigrant" narrative. She believed that she would be targeted for deportation only if she committed a crime.

Older immigrants' belief in the "good immigrant" narrative and success in navigating U.S. bureaucratic procedures further alleviated their fear. For example, Calvino Valdovinos stated that he had no criminal record and that he was so confident that he was a law-abiding citizen that he willingly gave his fingerprints to immigration services in support of his recent U Visa[49] application:

Author: And now are you afraid of that [deportation]?

Calvino: No.

Author: Because you don't have papers?

Calvino: I am not afraid because when you apply [for the U Visa] the application states that the FBI will run a check on your record or something like that... Well, I applied [to the U visa] three years ago and they haven't deported me. It means that I am fine. When I applied, I was conscious that I had not committed any crimes because when I completed my [U visa] application they asked if I was a prostitute or if I was involved in sex trafficking, involved in drugs, drug trafficking. They also call them terrorists [on the application] … Because they ask you the same question ten times [in different ways].

Author: The same question?

Calvino: Well, no, but in different ways. I mean, I am aware [of what I declared on my application]. Similarly, just as I declared that I willfully went to the immigration office and gave my fingerprints voluntarily. That means ... It means that everything that I declared was true. It means that I paid every traffic ticket that I owed when I owned a car, any fees that I owed are paid… I have a clean background.

Calvino believed that if he had committed a crime, he would already have been deported. On the contrary, he was a cooperating survivor of a violent crime that made him eligible for a U Visa. Calvino also believed in the "good immigrant" narrative because he had avoided deportation for more than 30 years of living in the United States. After successfully submitting his U visa immigration petition, he was "safe" from immediate detention and deportation. He had willingly made himself visible to

[49] The U nonimmigrant status (U visa) is set aside for victims of certain crimes who have suffered mental or physical abuse in the United States and are helpful to law enforcement or government officials in the investigation or prosecution of criminal activity (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services 2018).

immigration services by submitting his application and biometrics. The dominant narratives found on the news, media outlets, and the internet reinforced Calvino's beliefs that he was not an immigration enforcement priority because he had committed no crimes. In line with Andrews's work on "moralizing regulation" or when immigrants perform "good" behavior and distinguish themselves from those seen as "bad," I found that older immigrants believed their good behavior over the years had prevented their deportation throughout the duration of their time in the United States. (Andrews 2018:2486).

Law-abiding behavior and self-regulation practices learned earlier in life were further reinforced over the life course. Over time in the United States, these behaviors had become cemented for older immigrants. Fifty-eight-year-old undocumented César Lazcano described a conversation he had with his wife about what behaviors they should avoid and others they should continue:

> Like I told my wife once: "Do you want them to come for you? Start to mess up, like speeding, then you will regret it." I get up and get ready, turn on my work truck, and leave to work calmly and abide by the laws. I have everything in order. My truck registration is in order. It is under my name; I pay taxes and have insurance. I prefer to have all these things in order. There is an old saying: "It is better to have them than not when you need them." It is all there. I have been stopped in a traffic stop before, but this is when I used to drive more for a company. I paid for the traffic violation. I went to court and paid it.

The initial socialization immigrants received upon their arrival continued to shape and regularize their late adulthood experiences. Adhering to societal norms provided older immigrants with a sense of security concerning detention and deportation. Similarly, other older immigrants described being "good immigrants" by highlighting good citizenship-like behaviors such as a strong work ethic, paying taxes, and abiding by traffic laws.

Law-abiding behaviors were widely present in the day-to-day lifestyles of undocumented immigrants, and some were also influenced by changes to their routines and age norms. Older immigrants described "tranquil" lifestyles compared to their earlier adulthood that mainly consisted of fixed routines. Martin Campos explained what he considered to be law-abiding behavior in our interview when I asked him if he was ever afraid of being deported, especially since he still worked:

Martin: No, I haven't had any problems here. The reason is that we leave the house to work and that's it. I am tranquil. I don't go out much.

Author: Have you ever been afraid of deportation?

Martin: No, not here. Because I have been tranquil, we are very calm in all this area I live in. Here in this area of Hayward, we are tranquil. We all go to the store; we meet up with people there. Right now, I am going to wash at the laundromat. I went to wash [my clothes] at a laundromat with a cafeteria, ate some donuts with coffee, and chatted with immigrants from Guatemala and El

> Salvador. And yes, I live comfortably. We never think that they will come and detain us, no.

To Martin, doing laundry at the local laundromat and socializing at local cafes were part of a "tranquil" or law-abiding peaceful lifestyle that he believed was unlikely to attract the attention of immigration enforcement authorities. He also recognized that he had aged out of "high-risk activities," such as drinking and partying. He did describe having socialized more with friends at restaurants and celebrations in the past, but with years, this behavior had decreased. He had lived and worked in the same area for over 15-years without attracting any attention to himself and planned to continue this lifestyle. Martin's story exemplifies how law-abiding behavior is also shaped by changing age norms for certain types of activities and the types of places older adults spend their time.

PART II: LINKED LIVES OF IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

Fear of Deportation Shifts to Adult Children

While older undocumented immigrants were less visible and felt less vulnerable to deportation themselves, they remained concerned about the effects of the deportation regime on their undocumented adult children (and other family members) who were entering the stage of life when they become prime targets for immigration officials. This shift in the focus of their concern is significant because older migrants often depend on the support of their children to weather old age. Life-course and aging scholars call this the principle of "linked lives" or how "the lives of individuals affect and are affected by the lives of others" (Settersten Jr 2015:217). This section shows how adult children's immigration status impacts older immigrants' well-being. The deportability of adult children, spouses/partners, and other close family members was a primary concern for older immigrants, both documented and undocumented. While in K-12 education, their young children were legally incorporated under *Plyer vs. Doe* until they grew up and aged out and "learned to be illegal" (Gonzales 2011). Now, they feared that their undocumented adult children (and DACAmented ones to a lesser extent) would be detained as they were "just starting their lives," and adult children frequently had their own dependent minor children. Adult children were often a source of financial support for older immigrants themselves (mutual dependence. Overall, I show how linked lives, especially the social ties of immigrants to their adult children, were critical for day-to-day living. The looming threat of deportation of their adult children threatened social support stability for older immigrants and exacerbated family inequalities.

Having had their own lives and parenting shaped by illegality, undocumented older immigrants were concerned for their undocumented adult children's well-being. Sixty-five-year-old undocumented Isadora Arias no longer worked and felt that she was less subject to immigration enforcement herself, but she frequently worried about her undocumented sons. Multiple times she stated, "everyone is in danger when you are working out and about." She felt her undocumented adult sons were in danger when they were commuting or traveling— including everyday work commutes or for pleasure—and out in public spaces. In particular, she recalled how she had never feared for herself but did fear for her eldest son's safety because he drove a lot for his job:

Isadora: I have never thought about deportation.

Author: You have never thought about it? Why haven't you thought about it?

Isadora: Never, because I have always felt that it would not happen to me. I have always thought, "No, no, it will not happen to me." I have never thought about it happening to me. I know it could happen; it could happen to anyone. You just don't know if or when it could happen.

Author: What about your children? Have you ever talked to them about what would happen if you were deported?... What do they say?

Isadora: My children?...They have talked about it between themselves about what it would mean if they were deported because men are more in danger, in my opinion. They are out and about more and exposed to something happening.

Author: Yes.

Isadora: And my son, "*El Guero,"* the one that helps me, his company makes him drive to different places for work. There was a time that another former employer sent him all the way to San Diego… He was recently married and for his former employer he used to drive to San Diego. He would call me after he passed the checkpoints before arriving in Los Angeles. After he passed that checkpoint and when he arrived in Oakland, he would call me "Mom, I arrived." It was the same thing every week.

Author: How did you feel about it?

Isadora: Oh no, I felt horrible. Every Friday, I knew he was driving back from San Diego to Oakland. I was always waiting for him to pass the checkpoints and to call me to say, "Mom, I arrived." "Thank God you returned safely" I would say. I worried every week. Then he had his first child and then his second and he finally agreed not to continue working for this company. He no longer had one dependent, but two children. It was dangerous because when they worked, multiple workers carpooled together. The company would provide a van for the workers to travel back and forth together, and they were all Latinos and were filthy after a long day's work in roofing. They had to work, but this could draw their attention [police/immigration agents].

Isadora feared her son was exposed and had an increased risk of being detained while driving across the state, even though he held a legitimate license from the State of

Washington,[50] which is why she always wanted to hear that he had made it back home safely. She was concerned for her son's well-being and worried about the impact his possible detention would have on his minor children. Isadora asked him directly to change jobs because she was concerned about his safety and her grandchildren's economic stability. She wanted him to commute less to decrease the probability of being stopped and profiled as undocumented by law enforcement. Isadora recognized he was at risk as a male Mexican worker, especially when returning from work sites with filthy clothes in a vehicle with multiple other men. Similarly, she asked her youngest son to decrease his traveling within the United States during the anti-immigrant Trump presidency:

> My son sometimes—and he doesn't have papers—travels to Chicago and too many other places with his passport only. I told him: "Son, don't travel so much right now because with the president that we have," He just said: "Oh, mom," and then traveled for three months without me knowing. I realized it because he posted on social media with a caption saying: "Now I'm in such a place…".

Our conversation clearly showed that Isadora's youngest son had not shared with her that he was traveling because he knew she would be concerned. However, her concern for him was different because he did not have dependent children. Her own financial and emotional stability also depended on her sons' safety because they paid her rent, gave her a small token income, and frequently visited her in the one-bedroom apartment she rented. Thus, decreasing her adult sons' risks was critical to reducing her fears, exemplifying the complex connections of familial interdependence. In short, their lives were linked.

The deportability of family members also impacted the support networks of documented immigrants, as many were part of mixed-status families.[51] When I first met 66-year-old documented (formerly undocumented) Teresa Exposito in 2019, she was living in subsidized senior housing in Oakland, and she enjoyed the independence she maintained by living alone, the wide variety of transportation available in the Bay Area, and the ability to communicate in Spanish at most places she frequented. However, when needed, she also received support from her citizen adult daughter, who lived across the bay in San Mateo. For example, when Teresa was injured in a work-related incident, her daughter was present during the subsequent surgeries, handled the administrative paperwork at the hospital, and stayed with Teresa to care for her for the first few days of her recovery. She was also Teresa's emergency contact. However, in a second follow-up interview in 2020, Teresa discussed how her adult daughter, son-in-law, and grandchildren had moved to Mexico to live after her son-in-law was denied residency status and barred from reapplying for adjustment of status for 10-years. We were discussing her adult daughter, and she said:

> Teresa: My daughter left to live in Mexico… She left about a year ago, I think… It is because her husband could not adjust his immigration status and they [immigration courts and

[50] Isadora's son had obtained the license years ago from the State of Washington. This state has granted undocumented immigrants access to driver's licenses since 1993.

[51] "Mixed-status" families can include any combination of immigration statuses. I refer to a subset of families with at least one undocumented member.

attorneys] told him that he needed to return to Mexico for at least 10-years. The punishment… I told them: "Well, you could have left from the beginning, and you would have fixed your papers by now. But they didn't want to leave the U.S., however, you see he had too—he could not fix his papers and he invested so much money in his attorneys. It didn't work out… Yes, they had to leave [to Mexico]. They had built a home there [Mexico] and they went to live there.

Author: And now, do you have children here [in the U.S.]?

Teresa: No. No, I am alone and on my own now… Imagine.

Author: And how do you feel about that?

Teresa: Well, it sucks. Yes, I feel bad because at least before I had someone here [in the U.S.], right? Well, now I am worse than before (chuckling)… Well, I am all alone.

Author: And what have you thought about doing? Do you want to leave for Mexico?

Teresa: Well, sometimes yes and other times no (laughs)… Because over there [Mexico] everything is expensive, doctors, and everything. If it is expensive here, there more. You must pay, pay, pay. It even makes you sad to get sick… At least here [U.S.] you have payment plan options, but still, it is difficult.

Teresa was left alone, without immediate family members nearby who could provide informal support when necessary, due to the punitive nature of immigration laws that establish three to ten-year bans before undocumented immigrants who crossed the border "without inspection" can adjust their status[52] At the time of our last interview, her four adult children and grandchildren were all living abroad thousands of miles away, including three in Mexico and one in Spain. As a legal permanent resident, Teresa was hesitant to move back to Mexico with them because she believed that her living and medical expenses would be higher in Mexico, with little to no financing opportunities, compared to her subsidized housing costs, low medical deductible, and copays with Medicare in the United States. For non-working older immigrants, living costs and medical expenses were a concern when deciding where to live.

The spillover effects of immigration laws forced older immigrants to seek alternative support. Extended family and social networks became key to the well-being of older immigrants who were impacted by immigration enforcement laws and practices. Teresa described how she sought out a distant relative to be her medical emergency contact after her adult daughter departed to Mexico:

[52] Entering "without inspection" refers to entering the United States without a visa. The United States treats immigrants who cross the border—frequently the U.S.-Mexico border—on foot more punitively than those who overstay their visa by imposing these bans (Gomberg-Muñoz 2015).

Teresa: I have a nephew. He is the son of a niece, but he lives here. He does not live in Oakland, but he lives nearby. In the hospital, I assigned him, like in my medical and doctor records, I put him as an emergency contact and decision maker. I told him: “In case anything happens to me, you take care that they disconnect me from any machines. You tell them, that is enough.” …

Author: And what did your nephew respond to that?

Teresa: He said: “Well, whatever you like” (laughs). I told him: “Yes, any day now, I am closer that way [towards death] than here [living]. Why make you suffer? Just breathing through with the help of a machine. Well, just let me go peacefully.

Teresa’s experience highlights how immigration policies directly impact older immigrants even when they are not the direct targets of immigration enforcement. She had to find a distant relative to make medical decisions in the event she became unconscious, Teresa had also talked to the director of the senior center she attended about her last wishes in the event she passed, and she told her friends to check on her (welfare check) if they did not hear from her in more than 2-3 days. Although she was in contact with her adult daughter in Mexico via social media platforms and phone, Teresa did not feel it was the same as when her adult daughter was nearby. Her adult daughter, grandchildren, and Teresa were not directly subject to immigration laws. Still, the punitive consequences her son-in-law faced constrained the choices of his immediate family and impacted Teresa.

Furthermore, older immigrant immigrants with undocumented adult children who remained dependent due to disabilities or health issues feared their children would be detained and that they would be unable to provide for them. Sixty-three-year-old documented Sandra Morales had a disabled dependent adult son who was undocumented. While she was able to adjust her own immigration status, she was frustrated that she could not adjust her son’s status, even after first attempting to apply for DACA and then submitting a formal petition to change his status. At the time of our interview, she was still waiting to receive a response from immigration services, and she found it challenging to travel abroad to Mexico because she could not take her son along:

Sandra: It is difficult because I can’t take him with me wherever I go, I must leave him with my daughter.

Author: You can’t go to Mexico often then?

Sandra: I tell him: “Let’s go son.” “Where to?” “Let’s go to Mexico.” “No mom, you know I can’t go.” “Yes, you can go, but we can’t come back [to the U.S.].” “Well, you go, and I will wait for you to return.”

Sandra joked with her disabled undocumented adult son about visiting Mexico together. However, she did fear traveling both within and outside of the United States because of the risk of detention her son faced. Although she had traveled without her son in the past, leaving him with her adult daughter, Sandra wished she could take him with her

since she was his primary caregiver. Her adult daughter only took care of him when necessary.

Other older immigrants also feared their adult children would be detained and deported because of health issues, specifically mental illness. When I interviewed 72-year-old documented Catalina and 74-year-old documented Xavier Ramirez, they shared concerns for their 51-year-old undocumented son, who had developed a mental illness. In separate interviews, they vividly recalled an incident where their son was accused of hurting their landlord's daughter's dog and quarreled with her while he was having an illness-related episode, and law enforcement was called. Catalina described this incident:

> The landlord's daughter called me and said: "Catalina, your son hurt the dog, and he is crying." I told her to do what she needed to do and that I would not tell her what to do—I was afraid, however. She called the police. Since the police took a long time to arrive, my son was calmly sitting on his computer by the time they came. The police officer asked me: "Where is your son?" I showed him, and he replied: "I can't take him in because he is calm and controlled."

The police officers arrived once their son had calmed down and he thus avoided arrest. However, they shared other incidents when they and their other adult children feared for their safety but did not want their mentally ill son arrested while he was having an episode. Some of their other adult children did not visit them at their home to avoid interactions with their brother. Older immigrants with disabled or mentally ill dependent undocumented adult children worried about their children's exposure to life-threatening situations outside of their home in public spaces or about them encountering law enforcement officers when they were having an episode. This fear was intensified because of their adult children's lack of immigration status and dependence on their parents.

EXCEPTIONS TO DECREASING FEAR

As we have seen, older immigrants' fear of deportation and its consequences generally decreased as they transitioned to old age. There were a few exceptions, where respondents described instances when threats and fears of deportation might arise in their day-to-day lives. For example, older immigrants recognized that anti-immigration narratives and social media and family and gender tensions could trigger specific fears and uncertainty related to the threat of deportation. However, these fears were often for others in their social circles rather than themselves.

Anti-immigration Narratives and Social Media

Most of the interviews for this chapter were conducted during the Trump presidency. Older immigrants highlighted how harmful anti-immigrant posts and stories on social media could exacerbate fears. Researchers have found that under the Trump administration, about 49 percent of immigrant Latinos were more worried about their place in America than before, and 66 percent feared a family member or friend would be deported (Lopez, Gonzalez-Barrera, and Krogstad 2018). Older immigrant respondents recognized this fear in others but still reported less fear for themselves. Efrén explained that those who were afraid were more susceptible to social media posts:

> People nowadays on social media easily share and repost negative, inaccurate things. People then convince themselves of these things that do not even exist, which is why many immigrants live in fear of being deported.

In Efrén's view, fear was driven by exposure to harmful or inaccurate information about raids or detentions, and social media was thus a culprit in perpetuating these fears. Although he was not afraid for himself, he knew of other immigrants who were fearful due to their exposure to hostile rhetoric about immigrants. In sum, the narratives to which immigrants were exposed via social media or other media formats could shape their fears.

Older immigrants were also embedded in their families and communities and were thus exposed to anti-immigrant narratives, but many still claimed it did not impact them or impacted them less directly. Anti-immigrant narratives pushed by political actors, including the Trump administration, and widely broadcasted via media also affected the extent to which immigrants felt fearful in general. Still, older immigrants viewed these narratives with skepticism, given their past experiences. They shared that the resurfacing of anti-immigrant rhetoric was increasing fear in their communities, and they felt younger immigrant adults, especially parents, had more fears. Take three examples:

> Sara: I think yes, it [immigration] is more difficult now. Well, this year the president affected many people and a lot, but that was Trump. At least, the fear immigrants had was heavily impacted. However, if we look at the statistics, President Obama deported the most people in history.

> Tadeo: It was our president [Trump] who hardened enforcement policies compared to others… My partner says that we will no longer be able to work with this president [Trump] with all the news circulating. I tell her, "Do not put yourself in that mindset, think positively, and let's keep moving forward with our lives. Do not think that because he took office, immigration enforcement agents will be out in the street running after people, no." Since I arrived in this country, there have been good, bad, and somewhat bad laws and presidents and that won't change. I thank God I have never encountered immigration agents. I have never experienced raids.

> Nieves: My daughters and sisters [in Mexico] are afraid of me being deported because they see the news on the television. It shows people going out like normal, being detained, and deported to Mexico.

Sara noted that other immigrants she knew were fearful because of the increase in anti-immigrant rhetoric. Still, Sara felt less nervous, given her experience living in the United States and learning how institutions work there via her involvement in her children's schools and local community organizations. Meanwhile, Tadeo eased his partner's fears after the election and inauguration of Trump as president and the anti-immigrant rhetoric

circulating in the news, social media, and the community by reminding her that they had survived through past "bad" laws and "bad" presidents that had targeted immigrants. Nieves shared how anti-immigrant narratives were even perpetuated by news outlets in Mexico where family members of undocumented older immigrants saw them. Nieves found herself easing her relatives' concerns for her safety. This exemplified how older immigrants did the emotional labor to decrease others' fears about them being deported. However, all three respondents shared that they were unafraid.

Family Tensions and Gendered Differences

Women tended to be slightly more concerned than men with the possibility of family separation, even from adult children, in the event of deportation. This was due to their socioemotional ties to their children and the gendered expectation that they should care for and support their children throughout their lives, as well as their grandchildren. In addition, given the types of employment immigrant women had (e.g., cleaning, service work, restaurants) and work interruptions in earlier adulthood to care for their children, many women received or believed they might receive some support from their children.[53] Earlier research on Latina older women has found that they are "socioeconomically disadvantaged throughout their lives, [and] this disadvantage persists into old age and often worsens" (Torrez 1997b:73). Undocumented status exacerbates these disadvantages by minimizing the net resources available to these older women.

In the past, to avoid detention and simultaneously maintain flexible schedules to care for their minor children, undocumented older women respondents had navigated their illegality and motherhood by working at least part-time and participating in the informal labor market (including self-employment). While this helped them remain undetected by immigration enforcement authorities, the lack of employment security provided by those jobs and the physical toll they took on their bodies had left these undocumented women with few options for non-family safety nets. Most of the undocumented older women I spoke to had been working mothers when their children were younger, and many were still working. Given their immigration status and the types of jobs they had, their access to institutional resources that other older adults, including low-income adults, had or would have access to was limited. Undocumented older women who were no longer working often depended on their children for income; thus, family resources are crucial for undocumented women as they get older. Separation from these resources could have harmful material and emotional consequences.

CONCLUSION

As undocumented adults grew older and lived longer in the United States, they refused to allow their fear of deportation to dominate their lives and recognized that the consequences of deportation had changed. I have first argued that visibility and fear of deportation are a function of the life course: physical changes associated with aging and the fact that older adults are no longer in spaces or engaged in activities that make them visible or vulnerable, such as going to work or driving, decrease the threat of

[53] There is a complex relationship because older adults do not want to feel dependent on children, but given their legal vulnerabilities, family support may be their only option.

deportation. I have also shown that the longer immigrants live in the United States, the more invulnerable they feel. Similarly, the longer they live in the United States, the more they believe the “good immigrant” narrative reinforces their law-abiding behaviors; this supports Abigail Andrews’s work on moralizing regulation, a phenomenon where immigrants perceive protection or punishment as responses to their behavior (2018), in conjunction with culturally determined age norms for the types of activities in which older adults participate.

The evolution of their fear of deportation tells us a story of how these immigrants learned to live with the chronic strain of their immigration status over the life course, ultimately feeling invisible to immigration enforcement despite increased anti-immigrant rhetoric. Older immigrants were invested in denying that fear and the threat of deportation controlled their lives. Instead, their shared responses highlighted how they managed the effects of their immigration status and how some expected life course transitions (e.g., leaving the workplace, driving less) also decreased their fears. Undocumented older adults managed to remain “invisible” to immigration enforcement.

However, despite feeling less vulnerable themselves, older immigrants continued to share the experience of illegality with their families throughout the life course. Family is an essential source of day-to-day support for undocumented older immigrants, but it is only as strong as its members. Migration, relationship dynamics, and adult children’s resources all influence the type of support adult children can offer to their older parents—and vice versa. With their adult undocumented children entering the stage of their life where they are the prime targets for immigration officials, older immigrants experienced heightened fears for their children’s safety. In this way, older immigrants and their adult children continue to share specific vulnerabilities related to their immigration status.

Older immigrants who were already being supported by or would need the support of their adult children understood the immigration-related legal barriers for each family member. This was evident when they articulated their fears for any remaining undocumented family members. Those with undocumented adult children highlighted how they worried about their well-being and that of their grandchildren in the event of direct immigration enforcement. Given the legal constraints they face, undocumented older immigrants' families are likely to be their primary source of support when they can no longer work (and depend on any saved assets). The quality of past relationships with family and friends, even relationships fractured through immigration (e.g., divorce, transnational families), will determine how they experience their late adulthood. Undocumented older immigrants’ experiences exemplify the changing nature of the threat of deportation across the life course.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

Like the general population, immigrants in the United States are also growing old. However, due to past and current punitive immigration laws, the number of disenfranchised and vulnerable older immigrants is also rising. This work has tried to answer two questions: How does immigration status affect older immigrants' late adulthood experiences? And how does the experience of illegality change across the life course? Using 102 semi-structured interviews with documented and undocumented immigrants, I have detailed how illegality stratifies their experiences. This work sheds light on how illegality, the day-to-day experience of living with undocumented (or ever undocumented) status, changes as migrants age, as well as the consequences of illegality for older migrants. I have demonstrated that it seeps into every aspect of older immigrants' intimate lives across the life course. I have argued that older immigrants experience *perpetual punishment* due to the cumulative lifelong legal inequalities they have endured.

I have shown how perpetual punishment is manifested in older immigrants' day-to-day lives. Chapter 2 showed how illegality locks older immigrants in the United States. Documented older immigrants who are healthy and have portable resources have a greater capacity to return to Mexico. For the undocumented, the physical costs of getting across the border rise with age, and most importantly, many crucial resources for old age are not portable. Even the limited resources available to them in the United States make them ponder the costs of leaving permanently, especially those with bad health who may rely on family support. The lack papers locks in these immigrants for the entirety of their lives.

Illegality also interferes with older immigrants' ability to lead the autonomous and independent lives they desire (as shown in Chapter 3). Although it is difficult for all older immigrants to lead independent and autonomous lives, I revealed how it is more difficult for undocumented older immigrants to achieve the same ideal because they are excluded from the resources and safety nets that help the general older population. When older immigrants are forced to depend on family for housing and financial support, this can put a strain on family relationships. Those without strong family ties have few options other than to continue to work, long after their peers have retired. This takes an especially strong physical toll on their bodies.

Finally, I have highlighted how the experience of illegality itself shifts as older immigrants age and over the life course. I demonstrate that visibility and fear of deportation are a function of the life course. As older immigrants age, they become less fearful of deportation for themselves because they feel less visible to authorities. This is a function of both the bodily changes associated with aging and the fact that they are no longer present in spaces or engaged in activities that make them visible or vulnerable to immigration authorities. At the same time, they continue to fear the deportation regime as their worries shift to their undocumented adult children. In addition to worrying about their adult children (and their families), undocumented older immigrants worry about the

consequences for themselves should their adult children be deported because older immigrants are often dependent on their children's support to weather old age.

These findings have several significant implications for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers aiming to understand how immigration law has long-term, and even lifelong, effects on the lives of immigrants. With the growing number of older immigrants, especially undocumented immigrants, this work is timely and critical.

EMPIRICAL AND THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Experiences of Illegality Over the Life Course

Immigration scholars commonly focus on how immigration status (or the lack of it) affects earlier life stages: childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, and working-age adulthood (Chavez 2013a; Dreby 2015; Gonzales 2016). Fewer studies examine the experiences of older immigrants (Flores Morales 2021). By focusing on the experiences of older adults in late adulthood, I show the importance of mobility—both physical and geographical—for accessing critical portable and non-portable resources. Older immigrants with good physical mobility, or who are able-bodied and have fair to good health, may require fewer nonportable resources, allowing them to move more freely and be less tied to specific geographic locations. Meanwhile, those with limited physical mobility or poor health may use more portable and nonportable resources and be less geographically mobile. Meanwhile, having a legal immigration status enables older immigrants to move between borders without restrictions to access their portable and nonportable resources as necessary. The findings demonstrate how immigration status and health status intersect to facilitate or hinder individuals' ability to choose where to live, to live independent and autonomous lives, and to access the resources they need to survive. In addition, I show how the experience of illegality changes across the life course. As older immigrants age, they feel less visible to authorities and less susceptible to and fearful of deportation. Their fears of deportation shift to their undocumented adult children who are now entering the stage of life when they are becoming prime targets for immigration enforcement.

I contribute to life course and aging literature by showing how immigration status acts as another important social stratification category in old age, in addition to gender, race, and class. This work contributes to cumulative inequality theory or CI theory because I show how a social system, immigration law, generates inequality for immigrants over the life course. Older immigrants' life course trajectories are not solely the result of individual choices or actions but are shaped by accumulated risk, available resources, and human agency (Ferraro and Shippee 2009). Undocumented older immigrants perpetually suffer from the lifelong consequences of illegality, and CI theory highlights the consequences of the *perpetual punishment* in late adulthood. This finding offers insights for other aging marginalized and disenfranchised groups like formerly incarcerated individuals, who are often barred from receiving social benefits.[54]

[54] Formerly incarcerated individuals with felonies are usually barred from public social benefits (Eggleston 2007) and can experience less social mobility (e.g., employment prospects) given the mark of a criminal record (Pager 2003).

I also contribute to the research on transnational social protections and family. Transnational social scientists have begun theorizing on *transnational social protections* and *transnational resource environments* to understand how institutional sources of social support travel, or not, across borders for international migrants. Levitt and her coauthors (2017) propose a framework of *transnational social protection* (TSP) defined as "the policies, programmes, people, organizations, and institutions which provide for and protect individuals in the above areas in a transnational manner" (5). TSP occurs in *transnational resource environments* (TRE) which consist of "a combination of all the possible protections available to them from our four potential resources (state, markets, third sector, and social networks [individual ties])" (Levitt et al. 2017). In other words, international migrants draw on the four potential resource categories to meet their needs across the life course. Work in Europe has found that TSPs reinforce existing inequalities and create new ones (Faist 2014).

I add to this TSP framework by showing how immigration status influences the types of policies, programs, people, and institutions older immigrants have access to and can activate in more than one country (e.g., Mexico and the United States) to piece together resources to support a humane aging experience. The feeling of choice—of being able to do things, including traveling—is conditioned or constrained by immigration status. Documented older immigrants can cross international borders, maintain cross-border ties over time, and more easily access social safety nets in one or both countries.

The experiences of older Mexican immigrants also shed light on the changing nature of the family and the general lifelong experiences of Latinos. For too long, family research has focused on the cultural idea of familism, while immigration research has lacked theorization of the experiences of older immigrants who have aged in the United States. The focus on familism or the idea of cohesive family units and interdependency in Latino families is oversimplified and inaccurate. Older immigrants desire, autonomy and independence. A focus on familism also has taken attention away from the many barriers and constraints this population faces. Thus, the dominant narrative surrounding the experiences of older Latino immigrants puts the entire burden of care and support on individual families. It hides the inadequacy of public policies to help families care for aging loved ones and also the lack of a social contract that guarantees the necessary care for aging Latinos. In particular, undocumented workers who have contributed to society through their labor and tax contributions are explicitly denied resources or the ability to age with dignity. Although families are an important source of support for older adults, they are also constrained by changing realities like higher living costs, increased precarious labor, and the disinvestment in funding education, healthcare, housing, and other safety nets. This can burden the family with the responsibility to provide, given weak safety nets and exclusionary practices. By looking at older Mexican immigrants, we can theorize about the changing needs and responsibilities of immigrant families and the upcoming needs of many aging immigrants. Immigration laws have previously excluded them from necessary resources which are important in old age.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Older immigrants need access to healthcare to address physical and mental ailments that come with aging; for this to be possible, immigration laws need to change for immigrants of all ages. Immigrants need to be allowed to legally[55] contribute to critical safety nets and then have access to their contributions when the time comes. In essence, we need to help immigrants before they reach old age. We have to reimagine immigration laws that move away from current ideas of "making life as difficult as possible" so immigrants voluntarily leave. As my respondents' lives show, many are trapped inside the United States. It is also not enough to wait until immigrants get old to give them access to healthcare. We need to help them become incorporated earlier in the life course. We have to reevaluate our social contract with immigrants, who often work in strenuous and dangerous labor conditions. They are aging into perpetual punishment with little to no alternative.

Healthcare for All After the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Global Pandemic

Older immigrants need healthcare to weather the common ailments that come with aging, and this need exists across the country. However, healthcare in the United States is a patchwork of federal, state, and local policies with much variation across geographic areas. California has been more generous than many states in funding health and other safety-net programs for undocumented immigrants. As such, the findings here are likely a best-case scenario for aging immigrants.

Some states have begun to provide access to public healthcare, but it is uneven, and more is needed. The global COVID-19 health pandemic fueled the enactment of policies to fund public state health care for everyone, independent of immigration status. The state of Illinois was the first to extend state-level public health insurance for preventative care and medical emergencies to low-income immigrants over 65 regardless of immigration status in December 2020 (Bruce 2021; Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services 2020); it dropped to ages 55 and up in May 2022 (Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services 2022), and will fall further to ages 42 and up if approved (Hancock 2022). California followed by approving a more ambitious policy law AB133 or full-scope Medicaid (known as Medi-Cal) coverage for low-income adults over 50 regardless of immigration status, and it includes more services: preventative, medical emergencies, long-term care, and In-Home Supportive Services starting May 2022 (Office of the Governor Gavin Newsom 2021). Access to these services is critical for older immigrants, but it is still too soon to know the effects of this legislation.

Comprehensive and Humane Pathways to Legalization and Reasonable Adjudication Periods

To address the cumulative structural inequality produced by unjust immigration law, the law must be changed. It has been more than 30 years since the last and only comprehensive immigration reform. Immigrants and their families are in desperate need of change. As immigration law currently stands, many immigrants do not have a path to citizenship, and there is no waiting list to get on. First, a comprehensive and humane

[55] I emphasize "legally" because they already contribute to society. However, they are often barred from accessing services funded by the federal government and paid for through taxes, including their own.

pathway to legalization would ensure that immigrants have a clear path to citizenship, labor rights protections, and access to services to help their incorporation. It would also prioritize family reunification, demilitarize the Mexico-U.S. border, respect all immigrants' civil and human rights, and develop humane economic policies that decrease forced migration.

Second, immigration law would need to become less punitive. For example, the unlawful presence bars to admissibility under the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) sections 212(a)(9)(B)(i)(I) and (II) (the 3-year and 10-year unlawful presence bars) and INA 212(a)(9)(C)(i)(I) (the permanent unlawful presence bar) must be eliminated as they are intentionally and unnecessarily harmful to immigrants and their families. Immigration law is civil law, and any penalties stemming from infractions should be reasonable and avoid cruel and unusual punishment. Temporary and permanent bars are cruel to immigrants and their families.

Beyond changes to the law, the implementation of current law and any changes must also include reasonable adjudication periods. Some older immigrant respondents had immigration applications pending from a few years to more than a decade depending on the type of application. Like the punitive nature of the law itself, the backlog and long waiting times for adjudication of immigration cases for those with a pathway to legalization prolong the consequences of lacking an immigration status. These long delays extend *perpetual punishment.* Only by changing the law and decreasing the amount of time and the number of life stages in which individuals remain undocumented and excluded can we address the perpetual punishment immigrants endure.

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APPENDIX A
Methodological Appendix

REFLECTION
Much of my early research on immigrant populations stems from my background as the adult daughter of immigrant parents. I grew up culturally and linguistically brokering and translating at grocery stores, banks, schools, and so on and was thus keenly aware of family finances, strategies, and tensions. As an adult, I got better at navigating systems, seeking professional brokers (e.g., doctors, lawyers), creating systems, and using automation to help my immigrant parents. I often do not talk about this because, as sociologists, we learn about the objectivity we must have when conducting research; however, this "insider" knowledge helped me prepare my interview instruments and build rapport with my respondents across projects. They frequently asked me questions about my relationship with my parents and other family members. I also used my linguistic skills and personal brokering experience to translate for them and accompany them to appointments.

My specific interest in how immigration status impacts older adults came about when I conducted my earlier research with parents and their adult children in mixed-status families. In our interviews, several undocumented parents highlighted that they would never retire and would work forever because they would not have access to critical safety net programs that serve older populations like Social Security pensions and Medicare because they lacked a Social Security number. This triggered more questions on how documented and undocumented immigrants think about "retirement" and live their later years, and their expectations for quality of life. It prompted questions about how immigrants' experiences might diverge according to their current (and past) immigration status, or what some scholars call their status trajectory.

It also unbottled my fear of being unprepared financially to help my aging parents live a dignified life in late adulthood when the time came. I started to brainstorm about their future needs and what my role would be. My parents do not expect anything from my siblings or me, and they have voiced this loudly, just like the respondents who graciously shared their stories and struggles with me. My parents are also privileged as documented immigrants, and like many documented respondents in this study, they have and will have access to specific resources. However, my personal consciousness of these issues and insider knowledge sparked my interest in studying late-life inequalities faced by immigrants who, like nonimmigrants, will someday not be able to work and will require more medical care than they did before. What will these individuals do to weather old age? Here I provide additional details about my positionality and research methods while reflecting on how it has strengthened my research.

POSITIONALITY
My sociological questions have always been influenced by my experiences, interactions in my social world, and current events. Research is often more personal than is acknowledged in academic circles, and my research endeavors are no different. At the start of my graduate studies, many of my faculty and peers did not know that I was helping

my parents and siblings back home with informal monetary support because my dad had suffered a work-related accident. At that time, he had exhausted his worker's compensation benefits. This prompted my siblings and me to research what safety net programs he could access while he completed his recovery. We found that he was eligible for Medicaid insurance, Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and food stamps and had access to several local food banks. Doctors and community members also suggested he apply for these programs while he recovered. He selectively used some programs temporarily during his recovery and was subsequently able to return to work. Still, he was hesitant to accept help since he wanted to continue being self-sufficient. However, he preferred to exhaust all his resources before turning to his then young adult children (my siblings and me). He had come to believe that as an immigrant, he had to be self-sufficient and avoid asking for help from government programs (even when eligible), as well as from informal economic support from family to maintain his autonomy. However, these safety nets were critical in his recovery and decreased the informal support he required from my siblings and me for the remainder of his recovery. We were all college students at the time with limited income.

For us, this experience highlighted the importance of these safety nets and how immigration status mattered for accessing these programs. My dad had not used these programs during his 20+ years as a U.S. permanent resident (or colloquially a "green card" holder), but he was eligible when he needed them. When my siblings and I helped him prepare all the documents for his applications, his permanent resident card was always required evidence for formal support programs. At government offices, I recall how caseworkers reviewed his and my mother's green cards to check their immigration status and specifically the "Resident Since" date to verify their eligibility. I later learned that this date was significant. Laws existed that barred new legal immigrants (those who had be residents for less than five years) from accessing many government safety net programs.

Restrictions for new legal immigrants did not impact my parents' applications because they had held green cards for over 20 years and had adjusted their status before the 1996 federal welfare reform law—the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA)—was enacted. This law has made it more difficult for new legal immigrants to access U.S. safety net programs that were once available to legal immigrants regardless of when they arrived in the country. Although my dad has since returned to work, plans to continue working until he reaches legal retirement age, and is aggressively planning how to replace his income loss after he stops working, this experience gave our family an early glimpse of the type of support my parents may need as they grow older (and are unable to work) and how their immigration status matters to access critical safety nets. This research project confirms what I learned only a few years ago through this incident, namely that the U.S. immigration system stratifies access to essential social support safety nets (as intended) and that the law's effects trickle down across family members in working-class immigrant families (sometimes unintended).

COVID-19: FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS

Given the onset of COVID-19, I had to stop collecting interview data until the university determined the conditions would allow research to continue. This caused gaps in the data

collection. I also began a second wave of interviews from fall 2020 to 2021 and will continue this work. I interviewed a handful of the respondents twice, once in 2019–20 and again in 2020–22, to follow up after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, I also informally checked in with other respondents to see how they were managing during the pandemic. The questions I asked were following up on any changes since we last met and focused more directly on the effects of COVID-19 on their everyday lives.

APPENDIX B

Figure 1. Overall Binational Study

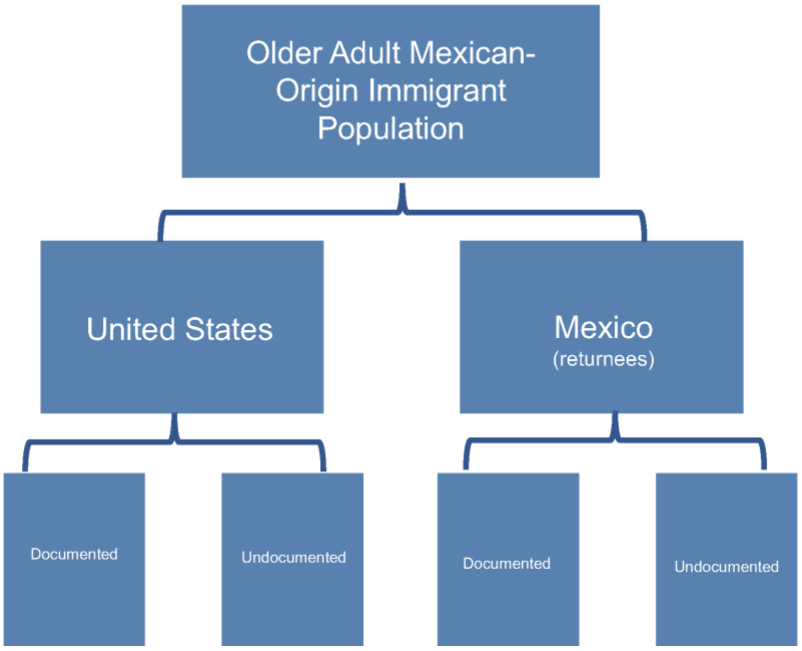


Table 2. Detailed Summary of Older Adult Mexican Respondents in the United States

LAST	FIRST	AGE	GENDER	LEGAL STATUS	MARITAL STATUS
Peréz	Celina	68	F	D	MARRIED
Peréz	Joaquín	75	M	D	MARRIED
Iglesias	Adelaida	76	F	D	WIDOW
Ortiz	Leopoldo	55	M	D	MARRIED
Exposito	Teresa	66	F	D	WIDOW
González	Elena	72	F	D	WIDOW
Rodríguez	Mercedes	69	F	D	WIDOW
Cabrera	Lázaro	61	M	D	SEPARATED
Flores	Rocío	76	F	D	DIVORCED
Torres	Margarita	72	F	D	MARRIED
Santos	Simón	70	M	D	MARRIED
Fonseca	Emanuel	63	M	U	SINGLE
Diaz	Claudia	76	F	D	MARRIED
Montoro	Edmundo	81	M	D	WIDOW
Cisneros	Berenice	79	F	D	WIDOW
Castillo	Daniel	56	M	D	SINGLE
Ramirez	Catalina	72	F	D	MARRIED
Ramirez	Xavier	74	M	D	MARRIED
Morales	Sandra	63	F	D	SEPARATED
Cortés	Patricia	72	F	D	SEPARATED
Calvo	Heriberto	84	M	D	WIDOW
Reyes	Fernanda	53	F	D	MARRIED
Rubio	Sofía	59	F	D	DIVORCED
Arias	Isadora	65	F	U	WIDOW
Peña	Ursula	70	F	U	WIDOW
Santana	Camila	69	F	D	PARTNERED
Moreno	Rosa	71	F	D	WIDOW
Fuentes	Jaqueline	68	F	D	WIDOW
Medina	Sarahi	66	F	D	MARRIED
Jiménez	Nieves	53	F	U	PARTNERED
Jiménez	Tadeo	55	M	U	PARTNERED
Castro	Matilde	79	F	D	DIVORCED
Araya	Leonor	70	F	U	WIDOW
Méndez	Ramon	50	M	D	MARRIED
Lazcano	César	58	M	U	MARRIED
Ortega	Encarnación	59	F	D	WIDOW
Román	Carina	76	F	D	WIDOW

Bravo	Amparo	57	F	D	DIVORCED
Aguayo	Elias	58	M	U	SEPARATED
Márquez	Dacio	50	M	D	MARRIED
Cabalero	Rosario	51	F	D	MARRIED
Seguro	Juanito	51	M	U	DIVORCED
Valdovinos	Calvino	52	M	U	SINGLE
Ceja	Teodoro	51	M	D	MARRIED
Vega	Olivia	52	F	D	MARRIED
Navarro	Daniela	67	F	D	PARTNERED
Arcos	Renata	50	F	U	SEPARATED
Sanchez	Ivan	53	M	U	MARRIED
Campos	Martin	50	M	U	SINGLE
Pardo	Magdalena	51	F	U	SINGLE
Cielos	Mare	52	F	U	DIVORCED
Flores	Severino	56	M	U	MARRIED
Madrid	Fátima	51	F	D	MARRIED
Madrid	Joel	57	M	D	MARRIED
Alonso	Angela	56	F	U	MARRIED
Rey	Sonia	55	F	D	MARRIED
Rey	Ricardo	56	M	D	MARRIED
Alonso	Efrén	51	M	U	MARRIED
Guzmán	Sara	66	F	U	SEPARATED
Suárez	Adalberto	54	M	D	MARRIED

Table 3. Detailed Summary of Older Adult Mexico Returnee Respondents

LAST	FIRST	AGE	GENDER	LEGAL STATUS	MARITAL STATUS
Iglesias	Leonardo	53	M	U	MARRIED
Ruiz	Norberto	64	M	D	DIVORCED
Pastor	Adela	52	F	U	MARRIED
Molina	Domingo	63	M	U	MARRIED
Montero	Jonathan	62	M	U	MARRIED
Gil	Feliciano	84	M	D	MARRIED
Pascual	Esperanza	63	F	U	MARRIED
Hernández	Baldomero	65	M	U	MARRIED
Blesa	Gertrudis	87	F	U	WIDOW
Moya	Orestes	70	M	U	MARRIED
Santos	Patricio	78	M	U	MARRIED
Cabrera	Samuel	73	M	U	MARRIED
Benítez	Fidel	53	M	U	DIVORCED
Serrano	Zeferino	65	M	D	SINGLE
Martin	Manuela	79	F	D	WIDOW
Campos	Genoveva	62	F	D	MARRIED
Herrera	Marcelino	65	M	D	MARRIED
Parra	Bárbara	65	F	D	MARRIED
Parra	Isaac	67	M	D	MARRIED
Vega	Leon	65	M	D	MARRIED
Gallardo	Pedro	66	M	D	MARRIED
Marín	Vanesa	59	F	U	MARRIED
Vidal	Guillermo	69	M	U	MARRIED
Delgado	Oto	69	M	U	MARRIED
Durán	Marcos	78	M	D	MARRIED
Fuentes	Gregorio	60	M	U	DIVORCED
Morales	Sandra	64	F	U	MARRIED
Rubio	Rosendo	62	M	D	MARRIED
Romero	Iván	87	M	D	MARRIED
Romero	Priscila	77	F	D	MARRIED
Gallardo	Miriam	60	F	D	MARRIED
Durán	Cecilia	76	F	D	MARRIED
Soto	Bruno	71	M	D	MARRIED
Ojeda	Andrés	59	M	U	SEPARATED
Vargas	Joel	65	M	D	MARRIED

Blanco	Josefina	60	F	D	MARRIED
Cano	Sergio	70	M	D	MARRIED
Guerrero	Pilar	82	F	D	WIDOW
Moreno	Olga	72	F	D	MARRIED
Cruz	Elisa	70	F	D	WIDOW
Ramos	Virginia	78	F	D	MARRIED