1 Introduction

LEGAL STATUS IN FAMILY CONTEXTS

Surmounting legal barriers, for many of the forty million foreign-born individuals who live in the United States, marks the first step on the yellow brick road toward the American dream.[1] To achieve legal status, immigrants have typically had to meet certain requisites. Today, however, we face an emerging social problem: the complete elimination of pathways to legalization for many US immigrants. This book focuses on the fallout, exploring what it means to have or not have a legal status under restrictive policy conditions. Accounts from children and parents in Mexican immigrant households show that illegality—the term I use for the awareness of needing a legal status and the negotiations around lacking a legal status—generates social inequality in the contemporary United States.[2] Mexicans certainly are not the only immigrant population facing the impacts of illegality,[3] but US immigration policy has made legalization especially onerous for Mexicans.[4] Demographers estimate that of the 11.7 million unauthorized persons in the United States in 2012, approximately 58 percent were Mexican.[5] Mexican families' experiences

Photograph by Bob Anderson

demonstrate the divisive impact of stagnant public policy on the everyday lives of families.

This book is also a sequel.

Fifteen years ago, I lived and worked in one of the new and flourishing Mexican immigrant communities in central New Jersey. Many parents I knew had left their children in the care of others to come work in the United States, so I began a study of the meaning separation had for parents and children (and their caregivers) living apart.[6] The militarization of the US-Mexican border and the tightening of the US immigration system, efforts that began in earnest during the 1980s, created the conditions under which families' prolonged separations unfolded a decade later.[7] Prior to this period, Mexican men commonly migrated north as labor migrants, periodically returning to visit their families—wives and children—who typically remained in Mexico.[8] Family separation involved men's temporary absences from the family unit. Yet as circular migration became ever more difficult for men to accomplish, many young married couples rejected the stress of long-term spousal separation.[9] Employment north of the border attracted women, many of whom, discontent with long-distance marriages, reunited with their husbands.[10] It also lured unmarried mothers who saw migration as their only means out of poverty.[11] With a marked increase in deaths on the border families regarded women's migration north, crossing the increasingly militarized border, as risky.[12] But they viewed it as even riskier for children.

So women set forth without their children. They considered these heart-wrenching separations to be difficult but temporary—as the absences of husbands had previously been. They deemed them worthwhile since they represented a step toward either family reunification or survival, a necessary sacrifice for the family to get ahead.[13] A decade after the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA), the last major immigration policy reform that combined legalization with increased penalties for unauthorized migration, temporary separations of parents and children for Mexican families made sense. Men could not return to Mexico as frequently as in times past. So women too came to the United States to work alongside men. Children waited with grandparents until parents had carved out enough of a foothold to send for their children. Families hoped that either with or without legalization programs they would eventually be able to reunite.

This logical strategy generated many a tragic experience. Unintended consequences ensued. Parents, especially mothers, grappled with guilt. The children I met felt resentful. Expectations parents had for their children, and children of their parents, often went unmet. Separation transformed power dynamics within families. I wrote *Divided by Borders* about how mothers, fathers, children, and caregivers made sense of these separations.

ADMINISTRATIVE TRAP

Over the course of the next fifteen years, US immigration and enforcement laws further solidified and restrictions increased. The Department of Homeland Security subsumed all operations of what had previously been the INS, or Immigration and Naturalization Services, and parceled out operatives to two agencies, one to deal with processing immigration applications (US Citizen and Immigration Services, USCIS) and one to enforce immigration laws (US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, ICE).[14] On both ends, families found themselves stuck. Post-IRCA, small changes to immigration policy rendered most of the unauthorized living in the United States ineligible to regularize their status through the USCIS if they had entered the country without inspection, as most Mexicans do when crossing the southern border. Even those who were married to US citizens and parents to US citizen children faced these restrictions. So unauthorized family members became vulnerable to the enforcement practices of ICE, which considerably intensified efforts to identify and remove unauthorized foreign-born residents often cooperating with local law enforcement agencies located thousands of miles from the US-Mexican border.[15]

During the 1990s, the tightening of our US immigration system meant that families considered undergoing temporary separations and living divided by borders. But by the start of the twenty-first century, the system had crystallized and become so strict and far-reaching that legal status had begun to divide even families residing together in the United States.

Such an unforgiving system paralyzes families as well as the debates over immigration reform. Formerly, immigration policy debates often

remained outside the realm of partisan politics, uniting coalitions of strange bedfellows: business owners and humanitarians for more lenience; environmentalists, unions, and xenophobes for more restrictions.[16] When the right combinations of groups came together, amendments to the laws, however small, passed.[17] But in the early 2000s partisan politics engulfed the issue, blocking both comprehensive immigration reform and the passing of more modest measures, like the DREAM Act, which would provide conditional permanent residency for undocumented youth educated in US primary and secondary schools.[18] Bipartisan consensus exists over only one issue: enforcement.[19] Funding for border control has dramatically increased, from $1.2 billion in 1986 to $17.9 billion in 2012 (adjusted to 2012 dollars).[20] And the Obama administration (2009–present) has stepped up deportations, conducting them more frequently than at any other point in US history, surpassing estimates of the massive repatriation of Mexicans in the 1920s and 1930s.[21] Congressional discussions over immigration reform propose to maintain and increase existing border security measures as a precondition to any pathway toward legal permanent residence.[22]

Under this policy climate, Mexican migrant families have hunkered down. Border crossings for Mexicans, more costly than in times past, have become especially perilous as violent Mexican drug cartels expanded into smuggling operations.[23] Seasonal returns to Mexico have become ever more difficult to arrange and thus less common.[24] The net inflow of Mexicans to the United States had risen significantly between 1995 and 2000, right before I began research on *Divided by Borders.* Between 2000 and 2005, some estimates suggested that the inflow had come to a complete standstill.[25] Now more and more Mexican immigrants have their children in the United States and raise them here,[26] afraid that if they leave they will never be able to come back.

Pathways to legalization for the estimated 11.1 million unauthorized immigrants living in the United States do not exist.[27] No person is or can be illegal, but today's policies cast the everyday, commonplace activities of many people as "illegal." In the 1980s, Leo Chavez described the undocumented as living "shadowed lives" on the fringes of American society.[28] In the twenty-first century, those without "papers"—*sin papeles*—live among us as the parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and children of US legal perma-

nent residents and citizens. They may be our family members, friends, neighbors, fellow students, coworkers, or acquaintances. In 2010, 16.6 million people lived in a mixed-status family, that is, a family in which at least one member was unauthorized.[29] To put this into perspective, 4.5 million US citizen children had at least one undocumented parent.[30] Compare this to 4.1 million children living with a biological mother and a stepfather.[31] Numerically speaking, today you are about as likely to know a child living with a stepfather as you are to know a child living with an unauthorized parent.

This book takes up the story where *Divided by Borders* left off. It charts what happens when an unforgiving immigration system divides families internally while they are living together. The stories derive from four years of ethnographic research with Mexican families in two communities, one in Ohio and one in New Jersey. I conducted formal interviews with 201 family members: 91 parents and 110 children. I also visited twelve families periodically at their homes, sharing family meals and weekday afternoon routines and at times attending weekend family excursions. I followed twelve first, second, and third graders in these families into their school classrooms to better understand how children and their families navigated settings outside the home.[32] I draw on both formal and informal conversations and observations; some were with the teachers, administrators, and social workers whom Mexican immigrant families interface with regularly. Most were with Mexican community members, whether study participants, acquaintances, or, in many cases, those I consider to be my friends. *Everyday Illegal* documents how, under restrictive immigration policy, illegality is more than a legal status: it is a social one.

THE JOURNEY

In the true spirit of a sequel, this book—like *Divided by Borders*—reflects some of my personal journey. In 2007, I got a job, so I uprooted my family—me and my sons Temo and Dylan—from the bilingual, bicultural community where we had lived in New Jersey and moved across Pennsylvania to northeastern Ohio. Four hundred miles is not much compared to the thousands of miles families I have interviewed have migrated,

but the cultural gulf felt tremendous. Temo had stood out as one of the whitest kids in his bilingual preschool classroom in New Jersey. Suddenly he became a student of color, with his tan skin and dark features, in a kindergarten class of children with blond hair and hazel or blue eyes. The new job demanded much of my time. I could not rely on the support of friends and family who had helped me through graduate school in New Jersey; single motherhood hit me head on. Every day I juggled the routes between work, school, and the Turkish babysitter who watched eighteen-month-old Dylan. Latino families did not live in my neighborhood. We stopped speaking Spanish at home, and Dylan began asking for *karpuz* instead of *sandia* or watermelon.

Something had gone missing from our lives. I learned of a nearby church that ran a youth program to support Latino children's Spanish-language skills and culture in a place where little else did. I signed up.

Over the next three years, members of a vibrant and diverse, though rather invisible, Latino community rescued me. One of the few groups helping new immigrants in the area, they were used to newcomers. Not all I met warmly welcomed me; I felt an outsider, with my newly obtained professor status differentiating me from working families in the community. But new friends helped me recover a sense of home and belonging. Invited to dinners and parties, I ate the foods I had learned to love in New Jersey and in Mexico. I met former farmworkers, migrants from some of the places I had been to in Mexico, as well as professional immigrants who had come on work visas to some of the area's largest employers. Quite a few—mostly men, but also some women—had intermarried. Particularly drawn to these families, I imagined their experiences to most approximate mine. I had lived with my now ex, Raúl, a Mexican immigrant, for five years. As I learned about others' lives, I gained perspective on my own.

For me and my family, though, the simple contours of daily life in Ohio had the largest impact. In the New Jersey city where we had previously lived, the Mexican community had a visible presence; walk down any street in the city and you could see dozens of handmade signs in Spanish alongside those of more formal restaurants, bodegas, and bakeries. In 2010, half of the city residents identified as Hispanic or Latino, and a quarter as Mexicans.[33] We regularly ate Mexican cheese and sweet bread, which I purchased at the Dominican bodega down the block. We listened

to music on the multiple Spanish-language radio stations based out of New York City. We danced salsa, *cumbia,* and *bachata* at parties with friends. We lived within walking distance of many people I interviewed for *Divided by Borders.*

In Ohio, the only Spanish-language radio was an hourlong program broadcast on Sunday mornings. Stores selling Spanish food products peppered seemingly random strip malls rather than being concentrated in any one area of the city. I found no bakeries; Mexican bread came shipped in from Chicago, and families bought Mexican food products at Walmart. The families I met lived in diverse neighborhoods, typically far from each other, and from me. I drove everywhere. Less than 2 percent of the population in the city where I met most families identified as Latino or Hispanic, and less than 1 percent identified as Mexican.[34] A few Mexican families rented and owned homes in the university town where I lived; I eventually met them all. In Ohio, distance made the Latino community much more intentional.

When I started formal research I hoped to compare the experiences of children growing up in these two vastly different local communities. After two years of fieldwork in Ohio (2009–10), I returned in 2011 to New Jersey, where I had previously lived and worked, to match the interviews and observations I had done with families in Ohio. I intentionally included those of many different legal statuses, reflecting the diversity in the types of immigrants I had met in Ohio. How much had illegality affected families in which one parent was foreign born and the other a US-born citizen? What about families in which parents and children—or siblings—did not share a legal status? In what ways did children with different legal statuses navigate their lives in these two very different types of communities?

I expected to write a book about the variations at the local level that altered children's experiences. But a different story emerged. Mexican parents and children in Ohio and New Jersey described surprisingly similar experiences with illegality. Being unauthorized—even in the relatively protective community in New Jersey—was very different from what it had been like in 2003 when I had begun research for *Divided by Borders,* and earlier when I had first met Raúl. Living "hyperaware" of the law children were cognizant of either their own legal status or that of their parents even before social structures made legal status prohibitive, before they sought

jobs, filled out applications for educational loans or college scholarships, or applied for drivers' licenses.[35] Illegality powerfully shaped children's lives and those of their family members, and their relationships with each other, even when no one in the family had actually been deported.[36] It affected families regardless of where they lived.[37] In a restrictive policy environment, illegality matters regardless of each individual family member's legal status. It begins to affect us all.

My family's experiences inspired this research, but *Everyday Illegal* is not our story. I include myself and my children in some of what follows because it feels impossible not to. My own experiences frame the relationships I had with many families. Often those I interviewed asked for details on my own life; my disclosures seemed only fair to those who divulged what, at times, seemed so private.[38] So I decided that the only way to respectfully tell others' stories was to do so along with my own; this type of quid pro quo developed in my conversations with families, and often I felt it was expected. Parents I interviewed asked me about how I had met Raúl and about what it had been like for me to be married to a once unauthorized Mexican. They wondered about my boys' relationship with their father, a topic that I at times found discomfiting, much as some of my questions surely disquieted them. Of course, legal status produced absolute differences between me and most of the study participants. My children and I are US-born citizens. We have the rights that come with this status, the ability to travel, drive, work, and go to college that so many I interviewed did not.

Yet my own experiences illustrate the creeping consequences of illegality, even for those of us who enjoy the rights of US citizenship. This is a trend I found true in the experience of every person I met and interviewed, even families in which all members had legalized their status. I pause to give one example. Raúl and I have been divorced for quite some time. While we were married, he obtained his legal permanent residency via a spousal petition, through his marriage to me. A few years ago, he called from his lawyer's office; in readying his citizenship application, they had detected a problem in the paperwork that presented a red flag, making it look as if our marriage might not be a legitimate one. Raúl's immigration lawyer recommended he not apply for citizenship. The USCIS had begun scrutinizing citizen applications; if Raúl submitted the paperwork uncov-

ering the mistake, even if I preemptively supplied an affidavit of support explaining the error, our family circumstances would look suspicious. He could be stripped of his legal permanent residency and deported. We squabbled for a few weeks over whose fault the mistake was; it is too bad immigration court doesn't accept this as evidence of a bona fide marriage. Raúl is stuck in what Cecilia Menjívar has termed a state of "liminal legality."[39] Even my two children cannot escape the threat of the deportation of their father.

THE STORIES

Everyday Illegal, much like *Divided by Borders,* documents the nexus between the public sphere of immigration policy and the private lives of families. With the exception of me and my boys and one family whom I interviewed in both studies, all of the characters here are new. They could, however, be one and the same; many parents I interviewed had experienced a separation from their children or from their own parents when they were children because of international migration. The plot also differs. In *Divided by Borders* I relate the conflicts inherent in separations from the perspective of different stakeholders—parents, children, and caregivers—bringing these three perspectives together when I tell the stories of three families. *Everyday Illegal* explores families' experiences thematically.

In chapter 2 I describe the culture of fear that current enforcement policies promote, outlining the ways these fears rise to a level of public health concern. For some, like Inés, whose story I refer to throughout the chapter, fears manifest in physical symptoms. Women, especially, may experience anxiety about the impacts of enforcement actions on their families. Indeed, because deportation efforts target men, women risk becoming what I describe as "suddenly single mothers." For the families I met who had, in the past, experienced the detention of a partner, significant hardships ensued, including problems with housing, food security, child care, and more, all without the emergency support services often available to other types of families who suddenly lose a spouse, such as Social Security benefits. When an incident ends in deportation, fathers in Mexico face significant financial barriers to maintaining a relationship

with their children in the United States. For others, current enforcement policies reinforce ongoing low levels of anxiety related to legal status, making them highly aware of illegality.[40] Even very young children have an acute fear of family splits due to deportation; they fear that their peers may judge them if the legal statuses of any family members are revealed. And children have begun to equate immigration with illegality, depending on media coverage to understand the threat that immigration enforcement poses to their families. Chapter 2, "*Nervios*," demonstrates the myriad ways that gendered enforcement policies put families on edge.

I then turn to within-family experiences. When restrictive laws vastly increase the number of unauthorized residents in the United States, intricate webs of dependency emerge. Chapter 3, "Stuck," describes power negotiations between spouses and between parents and children for members of what we now so often call "mixed-status families." As with the impacts of enforcement efforts, gender matters greatly, with illegality intersecting with existing gender and generational negotiations. Particularly acute for couples experiencing conflict, legal status places women like Isabel, whose story the chapter follows, in an especially vulnerable situation in which they may feel stuck not only with manipulative partners, but also in relationships with the sympathetic individuals they encounter to help them navigate their way out of abusive relationships. Women living in intact relationships also experience increased burdens because of legal status. Women do more household labor when they are unauthorized and dependent on the income of a legal-status partner. Surprisingly, despite working outside the home, women with legal status also get stuck with more housework when they live with an unauthorized partner. Gender patterns also exist in the division of household labor between parents and children, including what scholars at times describe as brokering activities, with girls performing more tasks than boys. Again, legal status matters, with unauthorized boys reporting more household work than US-born boys and unauthorized girls getting stuck with the most household tasks. These patterns suggest significant intersections between gender, generation, and illegality in power negotiations within families.

Chapter 4, "It's Not Fair," extends the theme of the intersections between generation and illegality by considering what happens when legal status differentiates children. An overt pecking order arises under restric-

tive immigration policy, extending different opportunities to US-born and unauthorized children in different families and siblings in the same families, like that of US-born Camilo and his unauthorized sister and brother, whose story the chapter follows. While one might expect that legal status would matter for children once they entered the workforce, or sought higher education families' accounts show that illegality also marks differences in younger children's daily routines.[41] US-born children and unauthorized children differ in their day-to-day activities, including the opportunities they have access to outside the home, affecting their contributions to household labor within the family. US-born and unauthorized children also have different relationships to the family migration project, with the former often experiencing periods of separation from their parents. The impacts of these separations bleed into children's school performance and access to opportunities outside the home. Legal status even shapes children's identity formation, with the unauthorized feeling excluded from the United States but also from Mexico, a place they cannot visit. Inequalities between children in different families, and among children living in the same family, characterize restrictive immigration policies. Over time, illegality—just like race and class disadvantages—is likely to have unexpected long-term consequences for children's social mobility.

As it turns out, children appear to be well aware of these differences. Chapter 5, "Stigma," looks at how legal status shapes children's peer relationships outside the home. While families' stories of the culture of fear, dependency in relationships, and children's prospects for social mobility did not differ across the two communities, the contours of peer relationships varied considerably by where children lived. Children in Ohio surrounded by few children like themselves described many experiences of isolation, as well as incidents in which their racial or ethnic differences from peers mattered significantly. In a place where the Mexican immigrant community is invisible as a social group, children like Kevin—one of the children the chapter focuses on—attempted to blend in. Proud of their heritage, children in Ohio did not keep their racial or ethnic differences a secret, but they often deemphasized them. Legal status mattered less in interactions with peers.

In contrast, children in New Jersey lived among peers just like themselves, in a community with many other children of immigrants and many

other low-income Mexican families. Although also quite proud of their Mexican heritage, children in New Jersey drew symbolic boundaries with other children along the lines of legal status, much as children in other settings differentiated along the lines of race, class, and gender. They viewed legal status as a stigma, information that was private, and a secret to be kept from their friends. They might stigmatize children like Preciliano, a child whom I describe in the chapter as encompassing traits associated with the Mexican foreign born, a group the children identified with unauthorized migration. Comparing children's peer group experiences across Ohio and New Jersey suggests that while national immigration policy has immediate impacts for all families, some of the long-term consequences of illegality for children may vary by where they live.

Chapters 2 to 5 draw directly from the accounts of families I interviewed. In the concluding chapter, I summarize the evidence as to why, for children and families, legal status has begun to accrue the power of social status distinctions. Under restrictive immigration policies, the social consequences of legal status intensify, especially for children and for families, calling for a reframing of our understanding of illegality. Rather than an administrative category that one must wait in line to achieve, legal status is a source of social inequality. Restrictive policy environments heighten the social consequences of legal-status differences, so that children and families experience these differences much as they experience the effects of race, class, and gender. Immigration policy that hopes to moderate these social consequences for children and families must seek to deemphasize enforcement, decriminalize immigration violations, offer pathways to regularization for unauthorized migrants, and provide speedy mechanisms for regularization.

A NOTE ON METHODS

The policy backdrop, as well as the method, makes *Everyday Illegal* a continuation of the stories in *Divided by Borders*. What happens to Mexican migrant families who have decided to raise their families in the United States when the restrictions of US immigration policy become fixed and feel permanent? To answer this question I use the approach of "domestic

ethnography, focusing on features of family life as opposed to the community emphasis of traditional ethnographies.[42] Yet in the ethnographic tradition I link macro processes to micro interactions, exploring "how contemporary global migration patterns both strain and intensify the most intimate relationships of people's lives—the bonds between family members."[43] This book focuses specifically on the unexpected consequences of US immigration policy for the everyday lives of families.

The research design incorporates the perspectives of various family members but explicitly focuses on children's lives. I relied on community contacts in New Jersey and Ohio to help identify potential families for interviews and then selected a small group of six families with different legal-status combinations in each site (twelve in total) who agreed to have me hang around a bit more to better understand their children's experiences. Interviews, as I describe in the Appendix in more detail, offer only glimpses into children's experiences, so I sought to place these accounts in context: the contexts of parents' migratory stories, the family's daily routines, the typical school day, and the contours of the broader community. I met with and formally and informally interviewed community members, mapped the demographic data of the census tracts where children lived, and compiled the school report card data from the schools they attended. I attended twelve children's schools, sitting in the back of the classrooms and following them to classes like art, music, and ESL and to the lunchroom and recess, gaining permission from parents and then from the schools (and in some cases the superintendent), in order to observe each child for an entire three days. I visited these twelve children in their homes as well, spending time mostly with their mothers, cooking or conversing, watching children do their homework or play with my own children, who often came with me on visits. Contact with families in home settings varied; some agreed just to the six visits I proposed, others I visited much more often, and a couple families in New Jersey I visited less because of time constraints.[44] In these families, I also formally interviewed each of the children twice, once when we first met and once again a year later. I alone collected all the data, but I had others help to transcribe tape-recoded interviews, which I had conducted in Spanish, English, or a combination of both.

Although repeated contact with families mostly occurred with these twelve families, I occasionally visited with, or ran into, members of the

larger group of families I interviewed—I saw children in schools on my visits, for example, and spent time with other families at various events—giving me further insight into families' experiences within their broader communities. With a few, I have had longer-term contact, both prior to and since our formal interview.

I wanted to understand the specific details of the smaller group of families as they related to patterns among the larger group of interviews I did with eighty-one families, so I coded information gathered in those interviews (with the help of a number of research assistants) into SPSS.[45] This had the added benefit of allowing me to include information, like legal status and contributions to housework, on spouses, children, or siblings I did not interview. In the end I gathered information on a wide range of family types: eighteen families (and 84 individuals) in which all members had legal status; nine families (and 34 individuals) in which all members lacked a legal status; and fifty-four families (264 individuals) living in various types of mixed-status households.

In narrating families' stories, I weave between the experiences of an individual, or a group of individuals, and the overarching patterns I found across the families I met. I do so not to glamourize or dramatize but to humanize. I change identifying details often, as it is necessary to protect those I met; except in chapter 5, I purposively omit the state where the focal family in each chapter lives—in order to protect their identities. None of the names here are real, except for those of my own family members. I tell the stories that follow as richly as possible out of respect for the intricacies of family life. Of course, oversimplification is inevitable when the goal is describing social patterns rather than personal biography. And lives change: I lay out only the stories as told to me, and as I observed and interpreted them, at a given period in time.

Social science research often aims to identify generalizable findings. I cannot make such claims. My approach looks at the meanings legal status had for the individual children and families I interviewed in two sites, and no further. The reader should remember throughout that although I refer to families as living either in Ohio or in New Jersey, they do not represent the experiences of all Mexicans in either state or any site.

To complete in-depth interviews with unauthorized migrants, the only viable sampling technique is through informal networks.[46] I worked dili-

gently to find families from several sources, informed by conversations with teachers and other community leaders and by my long-term involvement at each site. I gathered the most varied perspectives possible. For example, I sought interviewees who attended evangelical and Mormon churches; I did so in both sites, although this was especially important in Ohio, as I originally met many families through a Catholic church. I also looked for families without strong ties with the local Mexican community; this meant interviewing some families in New Jersey outside the focal city where I did most interviews. I spoke with some college graduates, a few with master's degrees and one with a PhD, alongside those who had less than six years of formal schooling. In New Jersey most educated migrants experienced a drop in class status after migration because they had migrated without a visa. In Ohio, however, I was able to interview quite a few professional migrants.[47] The stories I tell exhibit the complexity and diversity of families' experiences, yet I highlight those that capture commonalities with others I met.

Exploring the meaning of legal status for individuals' lives calls for this type of method: survey questionnaires cannot capture the nuances of family life, nor can such analyses elucidate the combinations of factors that make legal status salient for individual family members.[48] Even when demographers usefully describe overarching patterns, many large-scale studies have not included information on legal status, further limiting the type of information we have about the daily lives of the unauthorized.[49] Small-scale studies like this one help identify important themes, especially when they consistently arise among different types of families and across two very different communities.

I selected the sites in Ohio and New Jersey because I knew these places well, but also for the deliberate contrast. In both places the Mexican immigrant community grew in the mid- to late 1990s. These are the stories of new Mexican immigrants, distinct from the stories of those in places where Mexican immigrant settlement is much more long-standing.[50] In northeastern Ohio the community developed without a geographic center, a type of population typically not represented in the literature on the new destinations of immigration. In central New Jersey, the Mexican immigrant community congregated in a specific physical site, a pattern also notable in other parts of New Jersey. How family members come to terms

with illegality in their everyday lives across these different locales may not occur everywhere. But because settlement patterns similar to those in northeastern Ohio and central New Jersey have occurred in other US states, they might.[51]

LEGAL STATUS IN FAMILY CONTEXTS

Legal status has widespread repercussions for children and families regardless of where they live. Of course, legal status continues to be an administrative status that either allows or denies access to services in the United States. But more than this, under a restrictive policy environment, illegality follows individuals as they navigate life in the United States. In *Everyday Illegal,* I advocate for a shift from a legal to a social framing. When the immigration system emphasizes enforcement over legalization, legal status becomes the basis for social distinction in ways much like the effects of race, class, gender, and generation on the lives of children and families. As proof, I examine the processes by which illegality shapes family relationships, exacerbating existing inequalities between members while also creating new ones. Differences in opportunities reorder gendered relationships between spouses, creating new sources of dependency. Dynamics between parents and children mutate, with US-born children gaining power in certain cases over their undocumented parents. And children experience illegality differently depending on their own migratory history. Even when children attend the same schools and live in the same families, legal status puts children on different pathways that shape their lives as young people and also, potentially, in the future.

Consequences go well beyond those of the relationships between family members. When laws frame the everyday activities of individuals as illegal, there are trickle-down effects. Unauthorized migrants may feel stuck and fear authorities, but so do legal members of their families and communities. Their children, despite their own legal status, have begun to associate a stigma with immigration and to disassociate from their immigrant past. Children's understandings of illegality do not have meaning only in family settings. In peer group interactions, legal status wields influence. For children living in certain communities, it may become a

managed identity and status differentiation may become a salient feature of peer group culture.

In an immigration system that emphasizes enforcement and offers extremely few pathways toward regularization, illegality engenders social consequences for families and for children and their peers well beyond the paperwork that proves legal residence or US citizenship. *Everyday Illegal* tells the story of how under a restrictive immigration system illegality becomes an urgent social problem with unexpected outcomes not only for immigrant families but for us all.