

“Impossible Families”: Mixed-Citizenship Status Couples and the Law

JANE LILLY LÓPEZ

This article explores the complex and contradictory relationship between citizenship in the law and the immigrant reality of mixed-citizenship family life through in-depth interviews with individuals in mixed-citizenship marriages. An examination of mixed-citizenship marriage exposes the inadequacies of approaching citizenship as an individual-centered concept. The data indicate that, though both immigration and citizenship laws focus on the individual, the repercussions of those laws have family-level effects. Because of their spouses' immigrant status, many citizens are obliged by the law to live the immigrant experience in their own country or to become immigrants themselves.

For Camille, falling in love was the easy part. She and Giovanni clicked right away: they both loved art and movies and spent most of their time together making each other laugh. Before they married, Camille was aware that Giovanni was undocumented, but he had been living undocumented in the United States since he was six years old and he had never had any problems, so she did not worry much about it. Besides, she was an American citizen and, as far as she knew, that should be enough to help Giovanni get legal status once they married:

You have these ideas that, well, you're in love and of course things will work out perfectly and everything will just fall into place exactly the way you want it to. So, I honestly did not think at all that we would ever have any trouble with citizenship or anything like that. I thought we had it all figured out, even though we weren't doing anything necessarily. We didn't have a lawyer or anything like that, but everyone I had talked to before I got married was like,

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Address correspondence to Jane Lilly López, University of California, San Diego—Sociology, 401 Social Sciences Building, 9500 Gilman Dr., La Jolla, CA 92093-0533, USA. E-mail: jlilly@ucsd.edu.

“Oh yeah, you get married to an American citizen and they just become a citizen.” It’s not until after they get deported that you start hearing all the [other] stories.

Seven months after they were married, Giovanni was arrested after being pulled over for speeding; despite Camille’s best efforts to appeal on Giovanni’s behalf, he was deported shortly thereafter. Camille and her children have since moved to Guatemala, where Giovanni now lives, in order to be together as a family. When her friends ask why they decided to move to Guatemala and Camille explains that Giovanni was deported, her friends are incredulous:

They’ve been shocked. Every single person who has heard: their eyes get big, their mouths drop open. They’re absolutely shocked. [. . .] When I say deported, they all look at me funny and say, “But you’re American. Shouldn’t he have just been switched over?” So it’s a common misconception that everybody has, that it’s just fine and fancy free for these noncitizens to become citizens if they marry a US citizen.

Though thousands of Americans like Camille know that this is not the case, current scholarship on citizenship and the assumptions behind recent immigration laws are based on the premise that citizens’ relationships with both society and the state are not impacted by their relationships with immigrants. Based on interviews with twenty-two US citizens married to non-citizens, the findings presented here tell a very different story. The data indicate that, although both immigration and citizenship laws are directed toward the individual—despite often explicit links to family members—the repercussions of those laws have family-level effects. While categories like “immigrant” and “citizen” may facilitate the separation of certain groups of people in discourse and policy, such categories do not reflect a similar separation of those groups in American social life. Mixed-citizenship families embody the intimate intermingling of these different groups in everyday life and reinforce the relevance of family and other formal social relationships in an increasingly individuated society. In general, the findings reveal that the immigrant experience is not a phenomenon lived by immigrants alone. Though assimilation is “expected to be a one-way process that would also be natural and evolutionary” (Pedraza 2006, 41), the data presented here suggest that immigrant integration into society includes movement on the part of both immigrants and citizens, and that the law, instead of bringing immigrants up to the level of citizens, often pushes citizens into immigrant roles.

FAMILY, CITIZENSHIP, AND THE LAW

Classical scholarship on assimilation identifies “intermarriage” as an important “step” in the assimilatory process (Gordon 1964; Park and Burgess

[1921] 1969), but little research has examined the extent to which the nonimmigrant spouse in these marriages is affected by the immigrant spouse's dissimilated position in society. Rather, scholars have trained their focus on the immigrant, evaluating how a variety of conditions, such as the institutional context (e.g., Bloemraad and de Graauw 2011; Crul and Schneider 2010; Bloemraad 2006) and geographic context (e.g., Dreby and Schmalzbauer 2013; Marrow 2012, 2013) of the receiving country, enable or impede immigrant incorporation without examining the impact of those contexts on the inclusion or exclusion of citizen family members. And when scholars do propose a movement of both "insider" and "outsider" groups toward one another (Alba 2005; Bean and Stevens 2003; Alba and Nee 1997, 2003), this mutual movement toward a "composite culture" is proposed at a macro (community) level rather than a micro (familial) one (Alba and Nee 2003), limiting the ability to assess the effects of incorporation policies on individuals and families.

Gordon (1964, 130) recognized that assimilation outcomes for "mixed marriages" could vary, noting that a "vastly important and largely neglected sociological point about mixed marriages [. . .] is in what social structures the intermarried couples and their children incorporate themselves." But few assimilation scholars have explored this question, functioning instead under the general assumption that citizens and other individuals already assimilated into society will permanently maintain that position, thus aiding their immigrant spouses in the incorporation process without being (negatively) affected by it. By limiting the focus of assimilation research to the immigrant experience, scholars have overlooked the impact of immigration laws on citizens and the effect of family-level mixed-citizenship status on the citizen's own position within, and sense of belonging to, society. This oversight has also helped to mask the function of the law in determining which mixed-citizenship families "belong" and which do not, facilitating the incorporation of some while inhibiting that of others.

FAMILY AND THE LAW

Historically, citizenship and family were inseparably linked in the law (Volpp 2006; Bredbenner 1998; Cott 1998; Aleinikoff 1986). Between 1855 and 1922, noncitizen women who married US citizen men were automatically granted US citizenship; similarly, from 1907 until 1922, US citizen women who married foreign men lost their citizenship upon marriage, as the demands of familial fidelity were presumed to be greater than those of national allegiance (Bredbenner 1998; Cott 1998).¹ Women's suffrage and other equal rights movements ultimately led to the individuation of citizenship rights directly to women, rather than limiting them to paternal and spousal relationships. The extension of these rights to women and children was an undeniably good thing and followed the historical trajectory of the expansion of citizen rights to broader swaths of society (Marshall 1949). But the fight for these

individuated rights has also led to increased individuation in the law, freeing some individuals from family-related legal burdens but also removing some family-related legal protections.

Even after these changes, family reunification policies—founded on the notion that marriage and family are natural human rights that should not be impeded upon by nationality laws (see *In re Chung Toy Ho and Wong Choy Sin* 1890, 398)—remain an important focus of US immigration policy, enabling men and women to sponsor their spouses for permanent residency in the United States (Abrams 2013; Colon-Navarro 2007). But it is important to note that, from their instatement, these benefits have only been accessible to some citizens. As one of the few venues in which federal lawmakers in the United States can intervene in matters of marriage—which falls under the powers of the states—the US Congress has used immigration law to define ideal family types and favor those families over others (Abrams 2007). Immigration law historically identified married, heterosexual couples as the familial ideal, providing legal channels for family reunification; unmarried couples and same-sex couples were conspicuously excluded from spousal reunification benefits.² But even eligible families have faced significant roadblocks in accessing these citizenship rights (Mercer 2008). As a result, modern citizenship policy shows a persistent effort to move away from viewing citizenship as a family matter toward a more individualized conception (López 2008; Chacon 2007; Colon-Navarro 2007; Fix and Zimmerman 2001). This rhetorical separation of immigrants from citizens has enabled American lawmakers to increasingly criminalize immigrants and lower the standard of their treatment under the law. Over the past thirty years, many policies directed toward immigration and immigrants have been deemed by the US Supreme Court to be “unacceptable if applied to citizens” (Ngai 2004, 12) but have not been overturned, reinforcing the notion that immigrants do not deserve the same protection of rights that is granted to citizens (Abrams 2007; Kanstroom 2007).

Among the most devastating of these laws, particularly with regard to its effects on mixed-citizenship families, is the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) (Aldana 2007; Medina 1997). While previous immigration laws provided some relief for undocumented immigrants in mixed-citizenship marriages, the IIRIRA severely reduced family considerations and increased the difficulty for spouses and parents of US citizens to successfully contest a deportation order (López 2008; Chacon 2007; Colon-Navarro 2007; Kanstroom 2007; Medina 1997). IIRIRA also imposed automatic bars to legal reentry of up to ten years for any undocumented immigrant, including those married to US citizens, upon departure or removal from the country. While US citizens can petition for a status change on behalf of their undocumented spouses, IIRIRA requires individuals who entered the country “illegally” (i.e., not through a port of entry) to apply for a status change from their home country. This technicality exposes these undocumented spouses to a

“Catch-22”: they must return to their country of origin to receive their visa, but upon leaving they are automatically banned from legally returning to the United States—even as a temporary visitor—for up to ten years. While immigrant spouses of US citizens can apply for an “Extreme Hardship Waiver” to remove the bar to reentry, the petitioner must “prove that his removal would cause ‘exceptional or extremely unusual hardship’ to a citizen or permanent resident spouse, parent, or child” beyond that which would ordinarily result from deportation (Fix and Zimmerman 2001, 416). This standard has proven extremely difficult to meet; successful waiver applications are the exception rather than the rule. Undocumented immigrant spouses who overstayed a visa are not required to leave the country to finalize their visa application and thus are not subject to the ten-year bar (Colon-Navarro 2007).

This treatment of some immigrants as unwanted (and often criminal) individual actors, both in the law and by society at large, reinforces the notion that immigrants’ presence and impact in the United States can be easily set apart from the rest of society (Mercer 2008; Thronson 2006). But the case of mixed-citizenship couples clearly demonstrates that immigrants and citizens are intimately intertwined, despite the legal distinctions between them. The conflict between the individually focused intentions of immigration law and its family-level effects results in citizens being marginalized alongside their immigrant family members.

CITIZENSHIP AND THE LAW

These legal impacts shape the way US citizens in mixed-citizenship families experience both the subjective and objective dimensions of citizenship (Bloemraad, Korteweg, and Yurdakul 2008). Subjectively, citizenship is linked to a sense of belonging and is often expressed as a personal identity. Individuals use citizenship as a way to describe themselves and define who they are, linking themselves to a broader set of shared norms, values, and experiences tied to a particular national identity (Stolcke 1997; Tilly 1995). But the objective dimension of citizenship—a legal status conferred upon individuals by a state—is an institutionally controlled status that is principally designed to meet the needs of the state, not its citizens (Herzog 2011). Though treated separately under the law, subjective and objective dimensions of citizenship “cut across each other, reinforcing or undermining the boundaries and content of citizenship” (Bloemraad, Korteweg, and Yurdakul 2008, 156; see also Volpp 2006). US citizens in mixed-citizenship families experience this contradiction firsthand. In theory, their legal rights as citizens remain intact after marrying noncitizens. In practice, many of these citizens feel relegated to a “second-class citizenship” (Schueths 2012, 97; see also Thronson 2006) as they become subject to the intrusive and often punitive immigration laws that regulate all aspects of immigrant life (Abrams 2007; Ezer 2006).

An increasing number of US citizens feel the weight of these stringent immigration laws due to their family-level immigrant status. Mixed-citizenship families in the United States fall into two general categories, based on the immigrant spouse's immigration status: legal or undocumented.

1. *Legal status*: Each year between 2009 and 2012, more than 250,000 spouses of US citizens were granted legal permanent residency, joining the ranks of the millions of mixed-citizenship couples with legal status living in the United States (Monger and Yankay 2013). If the immigrant spouse already has legal status (either temporary or permanent) or overstayed a visa, the US citizen spouse can sponsor him or her for legal permanent residency without invoking the IIRIRA multiyear bar to entry. US citizens can also sponsor a fiancé or spouse living outside of the United States for legal permanent residency.
2. *Undocumented*: At least nine million people living in the United States are part of a mixed-citizenship status family, with at least one undocumented immigrant adult and at least one citizen family member (Taylor et al. 2011). Most research on mixed-citizenship families has focused on families with two undocumented parents and US citizen children, and most available data on mixed-citizenship families reflect this bias. Though little data on mixed-citizenship status *couples* is available, the most recent (though notably old) estimates of the number of “undocumented” mixed-citizenship families with one US citizen parent and one undocumented parent range from about 375,000 (Passel 2006) to 1,107,000 (Fix and Zimmerman 2001; Suarez-Orozco et al. 2011). Due to the invisibility of mixed-citizenship status, these estimates are likely to be conservative. Because of requirements put forth in IIRIRA, it is very difficult for undocumented immigrant spouses of US citizens to adjust to legal immigrant status without leaving the United States for an extended period of time.

Together, these mixed-citizenship couples with legal or unauthorized status represent millions of families living in the United States. Other mixed-citizenship families live outside of the United States, often as a result of strict immigration laws that prohibit one or more family members from living in the United States.

Little research has been conducted regarding mixed-citizenship families, but the existing research has revealed important trends (Dreby 2012; Suarez-Orozco et al. 2011; Yoshikawa 2011; Schueths 2009, 2012; Thronson 2006; Bhabha 2004; Fix and Zimmerman 2001; Trucios-Haynes 1998). Research on citizen children with noncitizen parents (Dreby 2012; Suarez-Orozco et al. 2011; Yoshikawa 2011; Leiter, McDonald, and Jacobson 2006; Thronson 2006; Bhabha 2004) and adult citizens with non-citizen spouses (Schueths 2009, 2012) has demonstrated the interference of immigrant family members' status with citizens' ability to access rights,

relegating these citizens in mixed-status families to a “second-class citizenship” (Schueths 2012, 97; Thronson 2006). But the discussion of limited access to citizenship rights and the sustained focus on individual-level outcomes in previous studies continues to privilege a legal-individualistic perspective and overlooks the family-level reach of citizenship. The data presented here expose similar trends of citizen family members subject to immigrant-targeted rules and regulations and the significant effects those laws have on their daily lives. But this project goes beyond a description of citizens’ experiences to explore the role of the law in producing these unexpected impacts, revealing persistent group-level effects of immigration law despite its focus on individuals.

The study of mixed-citizenship marriages presented here exposes the inadequacies, from a sociological standpoint, of approaching citizenship as an individual-centered concept, both legally and theoretically. Because citizens and immigrants are intimately intertwined in society, laws directed toward immigrants often affect citizens, too (Mercer 2008; Medina 1997). The reach of these laws beyond immigrants effectively “assimilates” immigrants’ citizen family members into a family-level immigrant status (Thronson 2006). The data presented here elucidate the impact of immigration laws on citizens in mixed-status families, ranging from apparently small inconveniences—money and time spent on immigration applications and the limited ability to travel—to much more significant roadblocks—having the legitimacy of your love scrutinized by immigration authorities, lengthy separation from family, and even deportation. Understanding how the unintended family-level consequences of immigration laws affect the lives of US citizens in mixed-citizenship families is crucial in measuring the true reach of immigration laws beyond immigrants to citizens and underscores the continued importance of family and other social units in an increasingly individuated society.

METHODOLOGY

This article explores the experiences of twenty-two mixed-citizenship American families through in-depth, semistructured interviews. The common characteristic among my interviewees is their membership in mixed-citizenship status marriages (i.e., they are US citizens married to noncitizens or the noncitizen spouse of a US citizen). In this article, “noncitizen” refers to any individual who does not possess American citizenship. This includes those with permanent legal status, temporary legal status, and undocumented status. This study focused on spouses whose access to legal permanent residency and citizenship in the United States was dependent upon their citizen husband, wife, or fiancé(e). Noncitizen participants already living in the United States when they met their citizen spouses had entered the country with temporary status (usually as visitors) or were undocumented. While the

concept of family is highly contested, I followed the legal definition of “families” (as defined by the criteria for spousal residency sponsorship eligibility, immigration status adjustments, etc.; see Abrams 2007) to explore the tensions between family, citizenship, and the law.³ In order to determine the extent to which immigrant status affected the impact of the law in mixed-status families, I included families with “legal” and “undocumented” status in the study.

I generated a snowball sample of study participants through personal contacts and social networks. I also shared my recruitment materials with student groups involved in immigration issues based at a number of academic institutions and with a local immigration lawyer, asking each respective group to share the materials with anyone they might know who would qualify for the study. Additionally, many of the interviewees recommended other potential interview candidates.

Interviews were open to any US citizen married to a current or former noncitizen Latino, regardless of where they lived.⁴ All individuals meeting these criteria were eligible to participate in the study, irrespective of their own age, race/ethnicity, or gender. Thirty individuals participated in the study, representing a total of twenty-two mixed-citizenship families.⁵ The US citizens recruited for the study were given the choice to be interviewed individually or with their spouse, depending on personal preference and the availability of their spouse to participate in the interview. In total, eight couples were interviewed together, while the remaining fourteen interviews were conducted with only the US citizen spouse, whose comments were interpreted as representing the couple as a whole, unless otherwise specified by the participant.

The twenty-two US citizens who participated in this study were married to immigrants from Latin American countries including Mexico, Colombia, Guatemala, Argentina, El Salvador, Peru, and Chile. (Of the eight noncitizen participants, four were male and four were female; three were currently undocumented, two had adjusted from undocumented to legal status, and three had always maintained legal immigrant status in the United States.) Participants ranged in age from twenty-three to sixty-five years old and had been married from one month to more than thirty years (as well as one participant who was waiting to be married upon the issuance of her fiancé’s visa). Seven US citizen participants were living with their families outside the United States as a result of their spouses’ deportation or voluntary removal; two other participants were living in the United States while their fiancé/spouse was living in another country awaiting visa approval. Two of the citizen participants were naturalized US citizens. Of the US citizen interviewees, ten were Latino and twelve were white; thirteen couples were interethnic. Fourteen of the twenty-two noncitizen spouses were undocumented at the time they married, having either entered the United States illegally or overstayed a visa. With three exceptions, all couples were married within the United States.

Study participants in the United States were living in communities throughout the country—including the Southwest, Northwest, Midwest, South, and Great Lakes regions—providing variety in terms of the local immigration context, such as the prevalence of immigrants, immigration enforcement, and public sentiment. Despite the variation in local context, interview responses from participants in these geographies showed no significant place-specific differences, suggesting a common experience of the law notwithstanding variance in local enforcement practices. The high recurrence of themes among respondents living throughout the United States and those living abroad confirmed this general trend.

The couples would generally be classified as working or middle class. US citizen interviewees included nurses, teachers, students, factory workers, homemakers, entrepreneurs, Zumba instructors, administrative assistants, retirees, and government employees. Their education levels ranged from high school to postgraduate, with most having some college experience. Eighteen of the twenty-two couples had at least one child at the time of the interview.

The data for this project were collected between spring 2012 and summer 2013. I conducted each of the twenty-two interviews personally, usually in person in the participants' homes or at an agreed-upon neutral location. (Five interviews were conducted over Skype.) Interviews typically lasted just over an hour, though duration varied from thirty minutes to two-and-a-half hours. Due to interviewee preference, eight of the interviews were conducted in Spanish. Each interview was recorded and later transcribed (and translated, when necessary) by the author. Pseudonyms have been utilized both in the written transcripts and in the narrative provided below to protect participants' identities.

The goals of the semistructured, open-ended interviews were to identify the dynamics of mixed-citizenship family life and the role of immigration law in both immigrants' and their citizen spouses' lives. Participants were asked a range of questions regarding their background; how they met their spouses; their normal, day-to-day routine; how they perceive their families in their local and national contexts; their experience with the formal immigration process; their thoughts on current immigration law and immigration reform; and their notions of citizenship and belonging. Given the very personal and individual nature of the experience of marriage and its intersection with citizenship, immigration, and the law, this research produced a variety of unique descriptive accounts of the mixed-citizenship marriage experience. Following the work of migration scholars such as Dreby (2012), Gonzales (2012), and Menjívar and Abrego (2012), I employed an inductive analytical strategy to look for trends and recurrent themes across interviews. After personally conducting and transcribing each interview, I coded them individually for themes, cross-compared my findings to identify common trends, and then recoded to confirm my findings. The shared experiences and challenges identified in my analysis pointed to issues mixed-citizenship couples and families commonly face, which are presented and discussed in the following sections.

MIXED-CITIZENSHIP FAMILIES AND THE LAW

PROVING YOUR WORTHINESS

While the legal immigration process is arduous for almost everyone, the process of sponsoring a fiancé or spouse is particularly taxing. In addition to providing all of the necessary official paperwork—birth certificates, marriage licenses, etc.—couples must prove to immigration authorities that their love is “legitimate.” Couples are asked to submit photographs, letters and e-mails, sworn affidavits from friends, journal entries, and more. In these cases, US citizens are scrutinized alongside their fiancés or spouses, asked by the state to prove not only the legitimacy of their relationship, but, implicitly, their loyalty and faithfulness to the country itself.

Lucy and Javier met in El Salvador two summers ago. Lucy, a recently graduated registered nurse, went to El Salvador through a volunteer program in which nurses and other volunteers could serve for three to six months in one of many foreign countries. Javier lived down the street from Lucy and the other volunteers and became friends with them as he helped them navigate the local landscape. Through these initially brief interactions, Lucy and Javier became better acquainted. Though she did not suspect it at the time, their friendship was developing into a serious relationship and, when her volunteer program ended, Lucy decided to stay on in El Salvador to pursue her relationship with Javier. Within months, Javier proposed and they began the long application process for his fiancé visa. Lucy mentioned several times that the process had been “really long and frustrating”:

It’s been a lot of official documents plus we have to provide evidence that we have an ongoing relationship. Evidence that we met in person within the last two years, so it can’t be any of this like meeting online and just wanting to get married without meeting each other. [. . .] Even down to the permitting evidence in the interview that are just ridiculous things, like—I copied my journal about when I was dating him, and I had to translate it all into English because it was bilingual. And I had to send it in to them as proof that we were really dating and wanted to get married. And I just thought, “*That’s so personal.*” But we had to provide evidence and at the time we didn’t have a lot of emails or anything because we were in the same place, you know? Our relationship was like normal couples—like going out to eat and talking and watching movies together.

In addition to the information submitted with the application, Javier’s interview also required the disclosure of intimate information about Lucy. Javier had been warned that he would be asked personal questions about her during the interview and that he and Lucy should prepare in advance. While Lucy felt that a lot of the potential questions asked for very personal information “that you normally wouldn’t think to know about the person you’re going to marry,” she and Javier spent hours talking and thinking about the

questions in case one came up during an interview. Just one or two missed questions could lead to a denial of Javier's visa application.

Anne and Cesar also felt the scrutiny of the state during Cesar's visa interview. Though Cesar's application had been preapproved in their local immigration office in the United States, he was initially denied his visa in Ciudad Juárez because he had presented only a copy of his birth certificate, not an original. It took them nearly a month to obtain an original, causing an unexpected separation and great expense. When he was finally granted his second interview, Cesar received a two-year conditional visa. According to Cesar, the immigration agent was not wholly convinced that their marriage was legitimate and told them to be sure to have a baby before he renewed his visa in two years. Because immigrants sponsored by a spouse for permanent residency within the first two years of marriage are only granted a two-year conditional visa that must then be renewed jointly by both spouses, Anne and Cesar would have to face the scrutiny of immigration agents again before Cesar's legal status became permanent. According to Abrams (2007, 1684), "Even at this point, immigration authorities could still decide that the marriage is a sham and institute deportation proceedings against the immigrant spouse." Thus the admonition by the immigration agent to Cesar could be interpreted as a serious expectation. As Anne put it, "They wanted us to show that it was a real marriage and not just one for papers."

Anne and Cesar, Lucy and Javier, and other mixed-citizenship couples seeking legal status have to prove the legitimacy of their love to the state in a way American citizen couples never do. Nor are such measures necessary for applicants petitioning on behalf of other family members, such as parents or children—relationships that, in the eyes of the law, are objectively, rather than subjectively, established—in which birth certificates and other legal documentation are deemed sufficient evidence to establish relationship validity. Though the visa would be Cesar's, securing it was as essential to Anne's future as it was to his. And, despite Lucy's citizenship, her privacy was cast aside and her integrity put on trial alongside Javier's as part of the visa application process. Like hundreds of thousands of other immigrants applying for legal immigration status to the United States each year, Lucy and Anne understood the fragility of their plans—which hinged on whether or not they could convince immigration agents stationed thousands of miles away that their love for these men was real—and reluctantly subjected themselves to the heightened scrutiny of the American immigration system.

LONG-DISTANCE FAMILIES

Another participant, Carlos, is still waiting for his wife to be granted a visa to live with him in the United States, more than a year after they began the application process. Carlos met Estrella while working in Michoacán, Mexico, with his uncle. He and Estrella dated long distance for nearly two

years. When they decided to marry, Carlos left his job in Utah to live in a Mexican border city with Estrella while they waited for her visa to be approved. Unfortunately, the only job he could find across the border in California paid minimum wage, which was not sufficient to cover their needs and pay for all of Estrella's visa application expenses:

The job I had in [California] wasn't so great. I was only getting paid \$8 an hour. I mean, and it was fine, we were, you know, we had enough to survive [. . .], but I didn't have enough to earn up to save for the visa and then all the stuff we had to pay, so like, well, we were still trying to get it done, you know, slowly, but then we realized she was pregnant and then I lost my job there. It was a little hard to find a job in California. I'm not going to lie. And then I asked my brother how the job market was over here [in Utah], and he said I could find a job in like a week. And I did. I came [to Utah] and like a week later I had a job.

They decided that if they wanted Estrella to get a visa, their only option was for her to move back to Michoacán with her family and for Carlos to return to Utah to work. Carlos' need to work away from his wife in order to cover the costs of her visa application has put him in a situation paralleling that of many labor migrants: living far away from his spouse and child in order to support his family and hoping to find a way to get his family and his job in the same place again. Though Carlos and Estrella are confident that their separation is only temporary, it has been a difficult separation for them, especially since their daughter was born. "It's been really hard because, I mean, you don't get to see them, you don't have that touch like, when you get married, you know, you have them there, you hold them, and stuff like that. But, it's not the same." During the time that Carlos and Estrella have been separated, Carlos' brother and his wife, who live in the same town as Carlos, had their first child, which has become a constant, painful reminder for Carlos about what he is missing with his own family:

It's hard. I try to avoid those moments [with my brother's family] because, yeah, especially now that I know I have, that my daughter's born and not being able to be there. [. . .] They get upset pretty bad, [. . .] but I don't think they understand what I feel, you know? [. . .] I mean, I like the baby, you know, it's my nephew. I like to hold him and I have fun with him and stuff. But you still have that thought in the back of your mind, "*Man, I can hold my nephew but I can't hold my own daughter.*" It's hard, because when you go out and let's say your family get together with cousins, and they're all there and stuff, they all have their kids, and I look around and I just feel like the odd person out, you know? Because everybody's with their couples, the kids are playing around, and I'm just sitting there watching everybody else. So, I just feel left out a little because my family's not here.

As a result of his immigrant-like experience in his own country—working long hours far from his wife and child and unsure when they will be reunited—Carlos has seen the exclusionary dimension of American citizenship, one that

he was not aware of before. Though his family's mixed-citizenship status has brought with it stress and pain, Carlos continues to hope that these setbacks will ultimately be replaced with more opportunity and happiness once his wife's immigration application is approved. In the meantime, Carlos must struggle with his increasing sense of alienation from his community and adapt to his new immigrant-like role.

For Julia, family separation has been two fold, first through separation from her husband and later, separation from her parents and siblings. Though she and her husband, Santiago, met and courted in the United States, Santiago was compelled to self-deport shortly after their marriage. With little knowledge of the immigration system, Julia had applied to adjust Santiago's status just weeks after they married under the false impression that marriage to a US citizen would qualify her husband for an adjustment to legal immigrant status. Rather than receiving a notice for a visa interview, though, the correspondence she received from US Citizenship and Immigration Services mandated that Santiago leave the country voluntarily within thirty days or he would be forcibly removed. Unable to find a way around it, Julia and Santiago packed up and left for Mexico City, where they stayed a few weeks with Santiago's family before settling in Monterrey. Leaving the country automatically triggered a ten-year bar against all legal entry into the United States for Santiago, and though they tried to petition for an exception, his case was denied. Once summer had ended, Julia left Santiago behind in Monterrey and returned to the United States to finish her last three semesters of college. She spent most of her first two years of marriage thousands of miles away from Santiago, the antithesis of what she imagined life as a newlywed would entail:

We were husband and wife, but I felt like a widow because I was devoted to someone and I wore a ring. So I didn't—I definitely never felt single. I didn't feel divorced. I just felt like I loved someone who I never ever see. We Skyped, we sent letters to each other, but no matter what, it takes a toll on your relationship. [. . .] You're not connected with the other person.

Once she graduated, Julia moved to Monterrey with Santiago. Even though she is no longer physically separated from her husband, she now must live thousands of miles apart from her parents and siblings. Though she manages to visit her family once a year, she must travel alone: "The hardest thing with this kind of relationship is I never have Santiago and family at the same time. [. . .] When I do go home every year, it's just, I'm alone. Everyone's there with their husbands or everything. And everyone knows I'll be coming alone." This continued family separation, coupled with other hardships Julia and Santiago have faced as a result of his ten-year bar from reentry to the United States, has pushed their marriage to the brink. When I interviewed Julia and Santiago, they were separated and seriously considering filing for divorce. When I asked them what they thought their lives would be like if immigration had never been an issue in their relationship, Santiago

said right away: “I think we would be in the States with kids already,” which caught Julia off guard. She thought about it for a minute, and then agreed. She went on to explain:

When I went home for Christmas, and I knew that divorce was a likely thing that was going to happen to us, I went home and I realized that, really, a lot of the emptiness that we’ve had in our relationship, or the hole that I have that cannot be filled is just having, like, I have two separate lives that cannot come together. And it really does come down to that. [. . .] I think we’ve just been kicked when we were down a lot. And that’s been—it’s been hard to recover. And now we’re at a crossroads where we don’t know if we can keep trying, and it would have made all the difference, I think, if Santiago was able to stay inside the United States.

Rather than facilitating their ability to live in the United States together, the burdens of current immigration law have pushed Julia and Santiago apart from each other, both physically and emotionally, to the point of separation and divorce. This conflict between family and country has also led Julia to feel increasingly alienated from the United States:

It’s my home and it’s my country, but I feel unwelcome. And now I live here [in Mexico] because I can’t there [in the United States] with who I wanted to. It’s a very weird feeling to have that from your country. Unwelcoming. And unaccepting of your decisions. Even if I decided to marry someone who was illegal.

Unfortunately, in her quest to love and have a family in the United States, Julia has been left with a broken heart, a broken family, and a sense that she no longer belongs in her own country.

MOVING INTO THE SHADOWS

For many mixed-citizenship couples living in the United States, being together has not eliminated the conflicts caused by their mixed-citizenship status. Juliette and Tenoch, who met through a mutual friend in 2009, are one such couple. From the day they first met, Tenoch was open with Juliette about his undocumented status. While she has learned to cope with it, Juliette lives daily with the lingering fear that Tenoch could be deported at any time. Though she insists that they’re just a “normal” family, she did concede that “the only difference is, I guess, normal American citizen families don’t have to worry about if someone’s leaving—getting kicked out of the country.” Because of the ever-present threat of deportation, Juliette and Tenoch have discussed on many occasions what they would do if he was deported:

The conversation is kind of like, “Well, what if you did have to go?” And he’s like, “Well, you would go with me.” And it’s as simple as that. [. . .] It’s kind of like for us there’s not a boundary. Anywhere that anybody had to go, that would be where we would go.

Though Tenoch has thus far remained safe, he has had a few scares:

At first, I was petrified. The first time I was ever with him and the first time he ever got a ticket was, he didn't have a license, and the guy was like, "If I ever catch you driving again without any driving permit or whatever then you'll go to jail." And then that made me nervous because immigration goes there every week or something. And so I was freaking out. So he went and got his license. And then, after that, they just give him tickets and nobody even says anything. So, it's more like if you're doing something illegal—felonies or repeated violations of bigger things—I'm pretty sure then they would try to start questioning more.

Though Tenoch constantly reassures Juliette that everything will be okay, they still take extra precautions, including limiting their travel as much as possible. Being able to travel freely was the first thing that came to mind when I asked Juliette what will be different if Tenoch is able to adjust his immigrant status: "Travel. I mean, obviously, like we—I could go on a plane, but he couldn't. Unless he just wanted to go to Mexico and never come back." And though they technically could travel within the United States now that Tenoch has a state-issued driver's license, they both feel the risks are too great. While Juliette would love to be able to travel freely and enjoy the other small and large benefits of citizenship with her family, she has had to adapt to the daily challenges of undocumented immigrant life in order to protect her family and ensure that they can stay together.

Other interviewees who have been in this same situation expressed a similar contradiction of feelings, asserting that everything was okay but then expressing moments of doubt. When I asked Berenice, who is currently undocumented, what the primary differences would be if she had citizenship, she said the main thing would be to qualify for better jobs. While her husband, William, generally agrees that her undocumented status has not severely impacted their day-to-day routine, he was quick to note that securing permanent legal residency and, ultimately, citizenship for Berenice would have a greater significance once they had children. William recognizes that his family's vulnerability to immigration enforcement would increase once children, dependent upon their mother for care, were introduced into the picture.

Emily expressed a similar mixture of calm and concern when describing her experience during the first year of marriage, before her husband was able to adjust to legal status. Her husband's confidence that everything would work out minimized her concerns, but she remained well aware of what could happen:

[When] it's your own family, you know, your own immediate family, that is kind of endangered, you start being more aware of the things that are going on around you. Like I said, we didn't live in a ton of fear, but you'd hear things on the news and you'd wonder, "Is that going to be us? Is that going to be what happens?"

Knowing that her family could be split apart in an instant weighed on her mind even after her husband received permanent residency. Until he became a citizen, she knew there was still a chance that he could be deported. Now that her husband has naturalized, having an “American” family has taken on a new significance for her: “Do I consider my family American? Yes, in the sense that I have safety. That I’m here, my family’s here, and none of them can be—well, not can be, but none of them are going to be taken away from me. I’m safe.”

Respondents expressed that safety and staying together as a family are their top concerns, but they also voiced other unique hardships they face as a result of their families’ immigrant status. Though Jennifer’s husband, Josue, had a college degree and had worked as a teacher in Chile before coming to the United States, he had to take a job as a janitor in a preschool when they first married because of his undocumented status. Jennifer was no longer able to work once their first child was born, and the family struggled to live on his low wages. Nicole, a graduate student, experienced similar challenges even though she had sponsored her fiancé to enter the United States legally. During the lag time between arriving in the United States weeks before their wedding and receiving his green card—about seven months—Jorge was not able to work, meaning that the couple’s only source of income was Nicole’s wage as a graduate teaching assistant. Additionally, given Jorge’s lack of a Social Security number and credit history, only Nicole’s information could be considered to qualify them for an apartment rental or a car loan, which severely limited their options. Once his green card did arrive, Jorge, a trained physician in Mexico, was required to take a low-wage, hourly position because he had no prior work experience in the United States. While their combined incomes helped cover the bills, Jorge’s immigrant status severely restricted their ability to advance economically for the first several years of their marriage.

Tenoch’s undocumented status has also affected his family’s ability to progress economically. Though Juliette and Tenoch both have jobs in the United States, her income is the only one that can be reported for loan applications and other large purchases. While she was able to secure a car loan on her part-time salary, she was denied a much-needed home loan:

[Tenoch]: If you don’t have a Social Security number, you can’t buy a car or a house or anything. We wanted to apply to buy a house, but Juliette was already paying her car loan. So there wasn’t enough for a house, but with what I earned, we probably could have qualified. But they can’t count what I earn. [. . .]

[Juliette]: They told me I can’t count what he earns. And I asked, “Even if I put it like he pays me?” and they said, “No.” So, even though we would like to be paying for a house because rent is so high, we can’t.

Because of Tenoch’s undocumented status, Juliette has, in many ways, come to live the life of an undocumented immigrant herself. Her ability to

progress economically is limited, her ability to travel with her family is limited, and she lives each day knowing that it could be her family's last day together in the United States. As Juliette, Emily, Jennifer, and Nicole know all too well, living together as a family in the United States does not eliminate the challenges mixed-citizenship couples face as a result of the limitations that accompany their spouses' noncitizen status.

IMMIGRANT, EMIGRANT, TRANSMIGRANT, FORCED MIGRANT?

For other citizens in mixed-citizenship families, emigrating from the United States is the only remaining option to keep their families together. Deportation, and the long penalties associated with it, can mean that families wanting to stay together must live outside of the United States for ten or more years.

Vicente's wife, Herlinda, was deported on his fiftieth birthday. They met at a party in Mexico—Vicente was in town visiting family, and Herlinda was a family friend. On his second visit to Mexico after they met, Vicente proposed, and Herlinda, who had a tourist visa at the time, traveled back to the United States with him, where they were later married. When her visa expired during a trip home to Mexico for Christmas and they realized how long the new visa renewal process would take, they decided to have her cross illegally and then adjust her status from within the country:

What happened was, right before it expired, [...] we actually went to Mexico for our first Christmas with her family. And I thought it was, again me being—well, probably naive is not the correct word, but probably more like not really aware of what the laws were as far as that goes, and that, you always keep thinking that when something expires, you just renew it. You know, you kind of renew whatever it is. You renew your driver's license. You renew everything. So, I thought, well we'll just renew her visa. Well, it turns out that there are different things that they ask you that they have to qualify to get a visa, and basically she didn't qualify at that point. [...] So, at that point, we were married. And I said, "Wait a minute. I can't leave her there." So, I've got to admit, we brought her across illegally. And so then, when she was back in [California], and then, I'd say within three to six months after that, we went ahead and filled out her paperwork, stating that she was here in the US illegally and everything else. And, in fact, I remember them asking us for \$1000 more because it was going to be kind of like—because she is already here in [the United States]—kind of like a penalty. So, I figured, if they ask me for that then ok, fine, things are going to move right along. And she was probably in the system for almost three years.

After submitting the application, Vicente would check on its progress from time to time. But nearly three years after the application was submitted, and after the birth of two children in the United States, Herlinda's case had not progressed. So, when Vicente took the day off for his fiftieth birthday, they decided to go to the local immigration office and check on the progress of her application, as they had on previous occasions. "We were going and we were discussing, 'Wow! It's almost been three years. Wouldn't it be

something? We're here just to check and see what's going on and all of the sudden, Oh, yeah! Guess what? Here's your green card." But, as Vicente recalled, "It turned out to be the complete opposite, kind of like the worst that could have happened." Shortly after the immigration agent began helping them, "All the sudden they ask her to step behind, kind of like a glass thing, the next thing I know they've got her handcuffed. They told her to take off her earrings and her ring and everything else, I mean, right then and there." Beyond the shock of the turn of events, what seemed so unreasonable to Vicente was that their case had been in the system for years. "It's not like we'd been hiding. [They] could have gone to that address [on our application] and picked her up any time [they] wanted to." But despite his pleas to give them a few days to arrange to take Herlinda to her family in Chihuahua, she was driven that same day from central California to Tijuana and left across the border to fend for herself. Their children—nine, two, and eight months—remained with Vicente for the first few weeks, until it became clear that there was nothing he could do to get Herlinda back into the United States. So he began to make arrangements to live as a family in Mexico during her ten-year ban.

In a way, Vicente was lucky. As a school teacher, he was able to transfer from a school in his Central California hometown to a school near the California border with Mexico, enabling him to live with his family without having to change professions or lose the tenure benefits that he had accrued in his previous school district. But Vicente now experiences the United States as a day laborer, crossing the border each morning to teach and then driving back home to Mexico to be with his family. Vicente talks about "spending his fifties in Mexico," a decade of limits and closed borders. As he nears the end of his family's decade-long exile, he feels that the ability to "call the shots" again is the right he's most eager to recover upon his wife's receipt of her visa:

I guess it's that freedom. That in other words, no one's dictating where I can or I can't go. That at that point then, not that we're necessarily going to be able to afford to go anywhere we want right away, any given date, but the idea that if we say, "You know what? Let's go here," we can. As opposed to saying, "Oh let's go! . . . Oh, but we can't." [. . .] You know, I want to take my family to Disneyland. I can't. I mean, I can take the kids, but we can't do it as a family unit. Things like that. [. . .] I think it's a temporary thing for ten years where I wasn't calling the shots. Other people were dictating to me what I could do. And once we get things squared away, then I figure, well, we're back to that. You know, where we decide.

In the meantime, Vicente avoids work get-togethers, family reunions, and other activities in the United States that his wife cannot attend. It was a harsh change to make at first, but over the past nine years, he has made the adjustment. "In the US, sometimes you do grow up I think with almost that false sense of almost as true a freedom as you can possibly get, to where you almost think you can go anywhere and anywhere whenever you want." What he has since learned is that such a notion is wrong, at least for his

mixed-citizenship family. When Herlinda was deported, Vicente had to choose between living in the United States and enjoying his full rights as a citizen or leaving the United States in order for his family to be able to live together. By living on the border in Mexico and working in the United States, he found a way to make the best of his less-than-ideal situation. But, had it been up to him to “call the shots,” he never would have chosen to leave.

Angelica made a similar decision to live in Mexico and work in the United States while she and her husband wait for his ten-year ban to pass. In describing their story, Angelica emphasized that you do not spend much time thinking about papers and citizenship when you are falling in love: “Our connection led us to fall in love, without thinking about whether it was convenient or not. In reality, it wasn’t, because it is a life that must be lived between two countries. I spend half the day here and the other half there.” She and Vicente are among thousands of Americans living between borders, cultures, and countries, waiting alongside their spouses for time to pass, hoping that their families’ ten-year exile will end with a visa and another chance to live the American dream.

For Camille, her husband’s deportation and bar from entering the United States has had devastating results for her family. She was seven months pregnant with their first child when Giovanni was pulled over for speeding, placed into custody, and put into deportation proceedings. Though she had believed that her citizenship would be taken into consideration during his deportation hearings, such was not the case:

When Giovanni was arrested and deported, my first thought was that America abandoned me; that they ignored my rights as a citizen. It didn’t even matter what they were doing to Giovanni. What mattered is how it affected me. And suddenly I didn’t have my freedoms anymore. [. . .] When he was deported, so was I. You know, and it’s like, sure they didn’t kick me out necessarily. I can come back whenever I want. But they took away my freedom by separating me from my husband. And so now I have to live in Guatemala if I want my family to be together. I have to leave and be separated from my parents and my siblings if I want my children to live together, if I want them to have their father.

Camille and her US citizen children are now living as immigrants in Guatemala in order to be together as a family with Giovanni. Though their situations have some parallels, Camille was not as lucky as Vicente or Angelica. As Giovanni is from Guatemala, Camille does not have the option of living right on the US border where she and her children could travel back and forth with relative ease. Their only legal options were either to live thousands of miles apart or to live together in Guatemala. (When I asked Camille if they had ever considered having Giovanni return to the United States illegally, she responded with a firm, “No. He has considered that, and I have told him no. Because I’ve already had him be in jail and had him deported. It’s not—the experience was awful enough that it’s not worth it to me. I’d rather forsake America than to have him try to come back the wrong way.”)

This government-mandated prohibition against living together as a family in the United States—a decision that was issued without any consideration for Camille, her children, and their rights as citizens—is the most painful and frustrating injustice of the many she feels they have suffered throughout their ordeal:

It just made me wonder if the citizens of the US are actually important to the US. Because I don't see how anything has been arranged for me and my children, who are all citizens. [. . .] They didn't try to keep us here. They didn't try to make it so that I could have my family be together—be a citizen who wants my marriage to work, who wants my children to be with their father, who wants my children to be with each other, who wants a complete American family. Not broken by divorce or a state line or a boundary of a country. And yet they didn't even just let it happen, they forced it on me.

As Camille has adjusted to her new life in Guatemala, she has reflected on the hurt she has felt as a result of her “deportation” from the United States, and it has ultimately led her to decide that, “If we can't come back to the US, then I don't want to be a citizen.” If the United States is not willing to facilitate what is most important to her—the ability to live in her country with her family—then citizenship in the United States no longer holds value for her: “I can't owe loyalties to a place that never fought for me, never fought for my family.” Though Camille and her family would go to great lengths to be able to live together in the United States, she has come to terms with the fact that forces beyond her control will most likely not permit such an outcome. US law has rendered her family an “impossible” one, legally united through marriage but legally unable to remain together on American soil.

IMPOSSIBLE FAMILIES

While it seems natural to want to talk about diminished rights in the context of mixed-citizenship families, as Schueths (2012) and Thronson (2006) do, the individualistic framework of citizenship and the rhetoric of rights ignore the effects of citizenship and rights (or lack thereof) that extend beyond the individual to the family. For citizen spouses of immigrants, a focus on rights actually reveals that none of the citizens' rights have technically been violated or removed. Even though interviewees often used the language of rights in their explanation of the barriers they have faced, none of their individual citizenship rights have been withdrawn in the eyes of the law. Carlos has full access to his citizenship rights, but as a member of a mixed-citizenship family, he cannot fully enjoy those rights with his family until his immigrant wife has been “approved” for entry into the country. Vicente and Camille could still live and work in the United States, along with their citizen children; they are still entitled to the same social welfare benefits and protections of the state. None of their individually granted citizenship rights have been revoked. Yet,

because of their spouses' deportations resulting from previous undocumented status, Vicente and Camille cannot enjoy those rights alongside their spouses, despite the fact that their marriages were legally administered within the United States. Only the rights and benefits extended to the least entitled family member (the noncitizen, legal or undocumented) are applicable to the family as a whole. If, as Ngai (2004, 5) suggests, many immigrants have become "impossible subjects, [. . .] person[s] who cannot be and a problem that cannot be solved," it appears that the law has made these immigrants' families into *impossible families*, created under the law and yet unprotected from its harshest consequences.

Though some families are more "impossible" than others, each mixed-citizenship family represents a kind of impossible unit, at least for a time, in the eyes of the law. While the US citizens in these relationships maintain their individual citizenship status and the benefits associated therein, they are members of "immigrant" families, whose access to rights and benefits are limited. For US citizens who marry outside the United States and then sponsor their spouse for a visa, they become impossible families until they are able to prove to the US government that their relationship is legitimate. And for those sponsoring a fiancé(e) to be married within the United States, their potential American family is equally impossible until the government approves their future union (with the government maintaining the power to later withdraw its consent if the marriage does not prove to be legitimate enough). For citizens with undocumented spouses, at the moment their marriage was legally solemnized by the state, they became members of an illegally-present family unit without the legal claim to live as a family together in the United States and thus subject to the threat of deportation. Given that current immigration laws penalize the individual immigrant at the expense of the family unit, most of these "illegal" families have little recourse to adjusting to legal status without enduring years of separation or relocation outside the United States (Mercer 2008; Chacon 2007). In the eyes of the law, these are impossible families that are and yet cannot be.

These findings suggest that citizenship and illegality should be considered as two sides of the same coin, at least within the context of the family. Family reunification policies that form the backbone of US immigration law stand as a testament to the long-accepted belief that citizenship should not be a barrier to family. These policies extend the benefits of citizenship beyond the citizen to her immediate family—spouse, children, parents, siblings—enabling those relatives to access some of the benefits of citizenship and, ultimately, acquire citizenship for themselves. But, building on works by Dreby (2012), Gonzales (2012), and Menjivar and Abrego (2012), the findings presented here demonstrate that the opposite also holds true: noncitizen status reaches beyond individuals to affect their family members both physically and emotionally. Maintaining the pretense that the criminalization of immigration punishes immigrants while "protecting" citizens denies the known links between citi-

zenship and family that led to the creation of family reunification policies in the first place. This denial has forced many US citizens to live the immigrant experience, distancing them from American society both figuratively and, in some cases, literally. For these US citizens, the promise of the family-level benefits of citizenship is replaced with the suspicion and punishment that accompany their increasingly criminalized immigrant family member(s). The atomization of immigrants may facilitate harsher political rhetoric and tougher enforcement policies, but it blatantly disregards the reality that immigrants and citizens are intimately linked in American society. This conflict between approaches to citizenship and illegality renders many mixed-status families “unworthy” of the benefits of citizenship in the eyes of the state. More importantly, it contributes to the ongoing failure of immigration policy in accomplishing its long-established goals of supporting family reunification, immigrant incorporation, and economic growth.

These results also reveal the continued relevance of social units such as the family in an increasingly individuated modern world. Though “family and community influences have been weakened” with the rise of the “individualization of behavior” (Thomas 1923, 70, quoted in Levine 2005, 151), those influences have not been removed altogether. The vast majority of individuals in society are still organized into families, and family relationships continue to shape the lives of those individuals in ways both mundane and profound. Though the law is based on categories and separations of groups and individuals, our social order inherently defies almost all of those categories, making it impossible for laws to be exclusively applied to one group without having spillover effects in the lives of others who associate with them. The trend of individuation, specifically as it has been incorporated into the law, has overlooked the enduring importance of social relationships, particularly the legally formalized relationships of the family. By legally privileging certain interpersonal relationships while simultaneously limiting status and rights to the individual, the law itself generates the contradictions that lead to the dissimulation of citizens married to immigrants and result in some families becoming “impossible.”

* * *

Mixed-citizenship couples embody the convergence of immigration and citizenship law and provide a unique example of how those laws interact and conflict in everyday practice. The experiences of these couples underscore the reach of immigration laws beyond immigrants into the lives of US citizens and reveal the limits of citizenship protections when studied from the familial, as opposed to individual, perspective. As the experiences described above have shown, many US citizen spouses and children of immigrants become “immigrants” themselves as they are subjected to the consequences of immigration laws applied to their noncitizen family members. This is an underacknowledged phenomenon, as most immigration literature focuses

exclusively on the experience of the immigrant moving toward citizenship without considering the secondary effects noncitizen status can have on pushing citizen family members away from the mainstream into immigrant, or outsider, roles. While familial and other social ties have been deemed less important with the rise of individuation, they remain relevant, bringing with them significant emotional, social, and legal consequences in individuals' lives and in society as a whole.

NOTES

1. Though current citizenship law purports to be gender neutral, gender continues to be an important factor in determining access to the rights and benefits of citizenship (Salcido and Menjívar 2012). While I do not have sufficient data to explore gender disparities in detail in this analysis, my data suggest that such gender-specific inequalities persist for modern mixed-citizenship couples.
2. The repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act in 2013 has now extended these privileges to married same-sex couples; unmarried couples are still denied access to these family reunification benefits (Oberbauer 2013).
3. My study focused on legally married, heterosexual couples due to the official eligibility requirements to sponsor a spouse for a US visa at the time I commenced research in 2012.
4. The participant pool was limited to couples with a Latino immigrant spouse, as migrants from Latin America compose the largest group of immigrants living in the United States and are the targets of most anti-immigrant sentiment and enforcement measures. Concentrating on this subpopulation, who represent the majority of mixed-citizenship couples, minimized the influence of cultural and linguistic differences between couples while providing variety with regard to legal immigration status and exposure to immigration enforcement.
5. While I would have preferred to interview more couples for this project, identifying and recruiting eligible participants proved to be very difficult. Given the invisible nature of citizenship, the mixed-citizenship status of many couples is unknown to even their close friends. Additionally, many individuals were reluctant to discuss their experiences due to ongoing concerns regarding their spouses' legal status or discomfort with sharing the details of their personal lives. While my sample size does limit my ability to make subgroup comparisons and explore important variations in gender, class, and national origin, which I hope will be examined in future research, I feel strongly that the data collected for this project are sufficient to support the arguments I put forth.

JANE LILLY LÓPEZ is a graduate student in Sociology at the University of California, San Diego.

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