INFLUENCE OF TRAJECTORY AND AGENCY ON STRATEGIES OF INCORPORATION AND IDENTITY OF IMMIGRANT YOUTH:
A CASE STUDY OF NEW LIFE HIGH SCHOOL

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Abstract

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INFLUENCE OF TRAJECTORY AND AGENCY ON STRATEGIES OF INCORPORATION AND IDENTITY OF IMMIGRANT YOUTH: A CASE STUDY OF NEW LIFE HIGH SCHOOL (139 pp.)

Director of Thesis: Hector Perla Jr.

This thesis shifts the hegemonic assimilationist framework used to research and theorize immigrant youth incorporation and identity development to focus on the experience of the immigrant, the immigration trip, and his/her agency. Using Feminist of Color Thought and Social Identity Theory, it theorizes immigrant identity as multifaceted, constantly negotiated, and fluid. In doing so, it introduces, trajectory as a research concept, redefines agency as the decision-making and negotiation power of immigrant youth, and tests the influence both have on the strategies of incorporation and identity of immigrant youth at New Life High School. This thesis seeks to deconstruct the image of powerless immigrant youth by highlighting their power to decide and negotiate their incorporation and identity in the host country, and to create resistance, resiliency, and hope from challenging situations.

Approved: 

Hector Perla Jr.

Assistant Professor of Political Science
Acknowledgments

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To survive in the Borderlands
   you must live sin fronteras
   be a crossroads.
   ~ Gloria Anzaldúa

"I guess you could say my mother and I were international swimmers -
   from México to the U.S."
   ~ Nadia Casaperalta

A mi mamá, mi hermana, y la emigrante que todos llevamos dentro.
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CHAPTER ONE: AN IMMIGRATION STORY

Cuando llegas aquí te das cuenta que hay una pared, no hay donde que de a poco para poderla derrumbar, nada mas con las ganas que tienes de salir adelante

When you arrive here you realize there is a wall, and there is nowhere from where to demolish it a little, only your will to succeed

~ Reyna, age 17, immigrant youth

After my parent’s divorce, my mother decided that she, my sister, and I would emigrate to the United States in order to begin life anew. I did not think about what immigrating would mean as we boarded a bus headed towards the South Texas-Mexico border, or as we floated across the Rio Grande River on top of an inflated tire tube pulled by a coyote\(^1\). I had just turned twelve years old, and my main concern was leaving behind my family, my friends, and my stuffed animals - everything I had known and loved until that point. Hidden by the night, we arrived at New Life, Texas.

A few days after our arrival, I was enrolled in English as a Second Language classes (ESL) at New Life Junior High. To my surprise, classes, new friends, sports, lunch, everything was in English…and I did not speak English! Every day, non-ESL students shouted insults my way – “mojada!” “wetback, go back to México!” Undoubtedly, my first year of residence in the United States was the most challenging year I have lived so far.

However, the most confusing aspect of my immigration experience was that the students screaming the insults looked like me! They had brown skin but did not speak

---

\(^1\) Coyote is a Spanish slang term for someone who smuggles undocumented immigrants into the United States.
Spanish, last names pronounced in Spanish yet called themselves “American,” and were of Mexican descent. Adding to my confusion was the fact that most people spoke a mix of Spanish and English. I asked myself if the students harassing me had forgotten where they came from, and why people had the audacity to butcher our Spanish language? My attempts to rationalize my initial observations were the beginning of my own understanding of immigrant identity theory. Without knowing, at the age of 12, I had begun to formulate my research interests.

It is from my intimate immigration experience, which continues to pose new challenges and opportunities to this day, that I research and theorize immigrant incorporation and identity development.

Not all the students of Mexican descent that I met were hostile to my recent immigrant status. In fact, some were welcoming and helped me understand social school life in the United States, while others were simply indifferent to my nationality. The diverse attitudes I encountered raised questions about diverse immigration experiences, strategies of incorporation and identities. My first objective in writing this thesis is to address the diversity I observed. Because immigrants are a diverse group who arrive at diverse places, and in diverse contexts, not all immigrants live the same experience, incorporate using the same strategy, or identify in the same manner – all the time.

My observation of diversity introduces my second objective: to re-define who and how someone is considered “immigrant.” I re-define immigrant as someone who voluntarily immigrated to the land currently considered the United States, and their descendants, regardless of generational distance. This definition excludes all indigenous
peoples and their descendants, who are the original citizens of this land and were stripped of this privilege through European colonization, genocide, and hegemony. This definition also excludes all enslaved Africans and their descendants, who were forcibly relocated to this land through the European institution of slavery. However, it is important to state that excluding indigenous peoples and descendants of enslaved Africans from my definition of immigrant, does not exclude them from the xenophobia and prejudice these groups experience as a result of being labeled as Other, as different and undesirable from the hegemonic nativization of “American” identity.

In contrast, my definition of immigrant includes all people of European descent, who have immigrated and settled on this land since the “discovery” of the New World, but through genocide and the institutions of colonialism, slavery, racism, capitalism and hegemony have constructed, defined, and controlled immigration discourse in order to establish themselves as the original citizens and “American” as the native identity. A component of the hegemonic attitude at the foundation of the United States is establishing the national identity as “American.” America is a continent (or three to some) not a country. The United States is not America, but one of the countries on the American continent. Therefore, referring to the United States as America and its citizens as “American” is a strategy of hegemony. Because I wish to deconstruct the hegemonic practice of referring to the United States as America and its citizens as “American,” I refer to U.S. citizens as UnitedStatesian. Re-defining who is considered immigrant also challenges how someone is considered immigrant.
Research conducted on the so-called second generation, referencing the children of immigrants, (Portes, 1993, Portes et. al, 1994, 1996, 2001; Rumbaut, 1999; Zhou, 1997) indicates that immigrants are defined by generational position. Therefore, anybody who is a descendant of someone who immigrated at any point is an immigrant of \( X \) generation. However, the hegemonic establishment of UnitedStatesian identity as a native identity instead of an immigrant identity, places the descendants of European immigrants outside of immigrant identity and immigration discourse. And it also introduces my third objective: to challenge and re-frame the discourse on immigration. I challenge immigration discourse by considering UnitedStatesian an immigrant identity constructed by European immigrants. By placing UnitedStatesian inside the immigration discourse, I re-frame the U.S.-centric, assimilationist understanding of immigrant incorporation and identity to an understanding centered on the experience of the immigrant. Thus, instead of asking “how UnitedStatesian are you?” and using assimilation into UnitedStatesian identity to measure the identity and “successful” incorporation of immigrants, I explore diverse identities and strategies of incorporation that immigrants negotiate influenced by their particular experience. The objectives I have outlined shape the arguments I present in this thesis and how I construct them.

---

\(^2\) The current frame of immigrant incorporation discourse centers “American” as the native identity to which all immigrants aspire to assimilate to. The idea of “the American dream” is the hallmark of a successful “American” life that can only be attained by being “American” and living in “America.” I have present two criticisms: 1) America does not equate the United States, and 2) American does not equate success. First, America is not a country, but a continent (or three – South, Central, and North). The fact that citizens of the United States of America are recognized as “American” demonstrates the colonialist, hegemonic mentality that created this country and continues to shape its relations with other nations and peoples. Secondly, another symptom of this hegemonic mentality is equating being American with being successful. In immigrant incorporation research, American is placed as the native identity immigrants assimilate to. The ultimate goal for the immigrant is to become American and stop being immigrant in order to receive all the glory of being American. For example, researchers often understand the success of immigrants by measuring their level of Americaness. This understanding of immigrant incorporation establishes other immigrant identities as unsuccessful and undesired.
I argue that UnitedStatesian is an immigrant identity, that immigrant identity and strategies of incorporation are diverse beyond the assimilationist and acculturationist processes of becoming UnitedStatesian, and that immigrant identity is influenced by trajectory, constantly negotiated by agency, and is fluid. This means that immigrants are not passive recipients of an assimilation process, but instead are agents with power to negotiate their identity and incorporation into the host country.

At the turn of the century, German, Italian, Irish, and Polish immigrants arrived at the shores of Ellis Island to settle in the fast growing industrial cities of New York, Boston, Chicago, and Detroit (Portes, 1997; Simons, 1901). The first studies of immigrant incorporation and identity development featured these populations who, in the racist United States of the early 20th century, incorporated into mainstream society helped by their light skin complexion. Thus, assimilation emerged as the theoretical model explaining the “successful” incorporation of the “old immigration wave” predominantly composed by European immigrants (Denmark, et. al, 2003, p. 73). Assimilation proposes that over time, the immigrant will renounce his or her ethnic identity and culture in order to embrace the identity and culture of the host country (Deaux, 2000). For example, immigrants stop speaking their native language and only speak English. However, assimilation did not take into consideration the incorporation of non-European immigrants who were unable to assimilate because of racist and xenophobic beliefs at the core of UnitedStatesian identity.

As early as 1919, researchers acknowledged the possibility that assimilation perhaps did not work for all groups. Although I have established that descendants of
enslaved Africans are not immigrants, an article addressing the “Negro American” population in Louisiana presented the theoretical model of the “acculturation process” (Park, 1919). Acculturation refers to “the immigrant’s adoption of the cultural practices, values, and symbols of the host society” without having to abandon ethnic identity and culture (Deaux, 2000, p. 425). In this case, the immigrant speaks English in addition to speaking his or her native language. For the descendants of Africans, acculturation was the only viable form of incorporation into a racist U.S. society.

In contrast to previous scholarship, I theorize immigrant incorporation and identity beyond the models of assimilation and acculturation. I argue that scholars working within these models have discussed assimilation and acculturation as processes that happen to immigrants, instead of strategies negotiated by immigrants. Consequently, they have neglected to expand upon diverse strategies of incorporation such as biculturalism, and have failed to explicitly recognize the power immigrants exercise in making decisions about incorporation and identity. I argue that immigrant strategies of incorporation and identity are diverse, constantly negotiated, and fluid. In this study, I propose to understand the strategies of incorporation and the identity development of immigrant youth by analyzing the negotiated interaction between the trajectory and agency of immigrant students. I present the concept of trajectory as a method that helps researchers understand diverse immigration experiences and their influence on strategies of incorporation and identity.

I define trajectory as the immigration trip an individual makes from the home country to a settlement destination, which is composed of seven factors: Country of birth,
Duration of travel, Method of entry, Status at entry, Age at entry, Duration of settlement, and Location of settlement. The term *mojado(a)* helps me illustrate this concept. *Mojado(a)*, or “wetback,” literally means wet man/woman, and is a derogatory Spanish slang term commonly used in South Texas to stigmatize undocumented immigrants. The term derives from the practice of immigrating illegally into the United States by swimming across the Rio Grande River. *Mojado(a)* highlights two specific factors of the trajectory of the immigrant – *status at entry* and *method of entry*. These two factors can shed light into the socio-economic position of the immigrant in the home country and the socio-economic position she/he is likely to have available in the host country. For example, it is likely that the immigrant did not have the economic means to immigrate legally; as a result, little resources will be available to him/her in the host country. Thus, I argue that by studying these and other factors of trajectory we begin to understand immigrant experiences and how they can contribute to incorporation strategies and identity. However, trajectory is not the sole determinant of incorporation and identity. Agency, or the power to make decisions, also plays an important role.

In addressing the experience of missionary activists, Sharon Erickson Nepstad (2004) argues that:

> Agency is shaped by the social attributes of activists, their structural position in mobilizing organizations, their cultural knowledge and ability to creatively transform it, historical conditions, and biographical experiences that instill moral commitments and provide organizing skills...and...although many people may attempt to transform cultural schema to generate protest, not everyone will be perceived as having the legitimate right to do so. (p. 161)
Although I agree that agency is influenced by the “constrains and opportunities” imposed by “social traits, structural location, and historical context,” (Nepstad, 2004, p. 158), I argue that an agent does not have to be in a privileged social position to possess power and transform cultural schema. Instead, I argue that it is precisely from a constrained position that immigrants construct knowledge, resiliency, spaces of resistance, and hope.

Therefore, I define agency as the power immigrants develop from membership in stigmatized social groups to make decisions and negotiate strategies of incorporation and identity in the host country. I use the concept of shifting consciousness from feminist of color thought to argue that it is precisely from a position in “stigmatized group memberships” that immigrants “resist structures of oppression and create interstices of rebellion” from where to negotiate incorporation and identity (Hurtado, 1996, p. 386). Thus, immigrants negotiate structural constrains in order to identify and incorporate using strategies such as assimilation, acculturation, biculturalism, retention, or rejection. Because not all immigrants have the same trajectory, constrains, and opportunities to negotiate in the same context, at all times, diverse strategies and identities are negotiated at different times – making immigrant identity not permanent or static. Therefore, I theorize immigrant identity as multifaceted, constantly negotiated, and fluid (Anzaldúa, 1987; Davidson, 2000; Hurtado, 1996; Suarez-Orozco, 2000; Zaytoun, 2006).

This proposed conceptualization of identity draws on the work of Dr. Carola Suarez-Orozco on Identities and Styles of Coping chosen by immigrant students. According to Suarez-Orozco (2000), immigrant students incorporate using three coping
strategies: “ethnic flight style,” “adversarial style,” and “bicultural style” (p. 29). In the strategy of “ethnic flight,” as in assimilation, the student “mimics the dominant group and may attempt to join it, leaving their own ethnic groups behind” (Suarez-Orozco, 2000, p. 29). Conversely, an “adversarial” strategy is characterized by rejection of the institutions and practices of the dominant host culture (Suarez-Orozco, 2000, p. 30). Finally, the “bicultural” strategy is similar to acculturation in which the student incorporates by learning to negotiate and interact in two cultures (Suarez-Orozco, 2000, p. 31). In contrast to the previous literature, these coping styles do not outline a rigid, fixed identity adopted by an immigrant student. Instead, they present flexible ideal types for immigrant identity. I use the assimilation, biculturalism, and adversarial coping styles as ideal types to analyze diverse strategies of incorporation and identity negotiated by immigrant youth.

The present thesis is a case study about immigrant youth from New Life High School, located in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas. The study was inspired by observations from my personal immigration experience, my criticisms to the literature, the love for my community, the hope to better inform social programs and policy aimed at immigrant youth across the United States, and the need to create a space where our immigrant stories are told and written – a space that instead of victimizing, focuses on our resilient spirit and ability to decide our own incorporation into this country. It is from this perspective that I study the negotiation of trajectory and agency and its influence on the identity and strategies of incorporation chosen by immigrant students at New Life High School. My research is driven by three questions:
1) Does trajectory influence the strategies of incorporation and identity of immigrant students?
2) How and why do immigrant students incorporate themselves into society?
3) What is the role of agency in the identity development of immigrant students?

Based on these questions, I theorize:

1) Trajectory does influence the strategies of incorporation and identity of immigrant students at New Life High School.

2) Immigrant students incorporate by constantly negotiating strategies of incorporation and identity.

3) Precisely because of structural challenges, immigrant youth develop a sense of agency, the power to make decisions and negotiate their situation.

In order to answer these questions holistically and evaluate my theories, I collected and analyzed data using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. I designed a survey questionnaire that would measure the presence of trajectory factors in the strategies of incorporation and identity of students at New Life High School. In addition, I also conducted interviews in a semi-structured, narrative format to learn about student’s identity and possible immigration experience. The interviews were used as the main research tool to learn about why students identify and incorporate in a given way, and understand the role of agency in their identity development. Interview transcripts were analyzed using Grounded Theory principles that allow themes to emerge from the data and form categories even late into the analysis process (Lindlof et. al, 2002, p. 218).

With the help of the New Life Independent School District, 85 high school students completed a survey questionnaire and 9 were interviewed. Questionnaire data was analyzed using SPSS crosstabulations and correlations. However, statistical analysis does
not provide the whys of student’s actions. Therefore, I combined the survey questionnaire with interviews to triangulate data, and to give breadth and depth to the project; thus allowing me to approach immigrant incorporation and identity formation in a more holistic manner.

Based on a fluid conception of identity in which the process of identity formation does not happen to immigrant students, but is instead negotiated by them, the purpose of this thesis is three-fold, 1) to include the experiences of immigrant youth - in our own voice – into the national immigration discourse, 2) to highlight the resilient spirit of immigrant youth, and to 3) challenge and re-frame immigration discourse by redefining “immigrant”. By focusing on the diverse voices of immigrant youth, academia, social programs, and the national discourse on immigration tap into the most valuable resource for understanding immigrant incorporation and identity – the individuals who live the challenges and opportunities of immigration. Reconsidering the history of this country as an immigrant country through a critical perspective on who and how someone is immigrant, I hope to alleviate social stigma placed on immigrants by recalling a shared story between those who founded this country and those who voluntarily immigrated here – the story of emigration and immigration. It is invaluable to the social and cultural patrimony of this country, the national education system, and the growth of all students we educate, that we research, theorize, and learn about immigration experiences beyond assimilation and acculturation. Particularly, it is my hope that the findings presented on this thesis help inform social programs and public policy designed to benefit immigrant youth in the U.S. education system.
In the following chapter, I connect the literatures employed in formulating the arguments I present in this thesis: Assimilation and Acculturation, Social Identity Theory and Feminist of Color Thought. I begin Chapter Two by providing a brief history of immigration patterns to the United States and how these gave rise to the literature on Assimilation and Acculturation. Secondly, I challenge the assimilation/acculturation framework by introducing concepts from Social Identity Theory and Feminist of Color Thought. Lastly, I close the chapter by providing a conceptualization of multiple, negotiated, and fluid identity based on Feminist of Color Thought.

Because this thesis is designed as a case study, an elaborate explanation of the research site is due. Furthermore, because the research site is grounded on the history of Mexico-U.S. immigration, I dedicate Chapter Three to the illustration of New Life High School in the context of the Rio Grande Valley’s political, economic, and cultural history. I begin the chapter with an essential description of the intricate Mexico-U.S. relations and how they have shaped the identity of Mexicans as immigrants, and the perception of immigrants in the area. To illustrate the influence of this history on the identity of immigrant youth in the area, I present examples of language use, culinary taste, and cultural traditions. I conclude the chapter by establishing my reasons for working with New Life High School.

In Chapter Four, I detailed the mix-methods design of the study. I begin by presenting the concepts of Trajectory and Agency and addressing how they influenced the selection of methods and the creation of research instruments. I continue to describe the Student Trajectory Questionnaire, and the Narrative-Style, Semi-Structured
Interviews, how these measure incorporation and identity, and test the hypotheses I present. Finally, I discuss special concerns posited by conducting research with minors, immigrant youth, and high school students, and how I address these concerns.

Chapter Five features the results derived from the analysis of questionnaire data and interview transcripts. Because the analyses are different in nature, one is quantitative and the other is qualitative, I present them separately. First, I present the results from the statistical analysis of trajectory, and then the results from the analysis of interview transcripts. I close the chapter by discussing how the results complement each other and give rise to the themes discussed in the following chapter.

In Chapter Six, I discuss the presence of agency, negotiation, and fluidity in the strategies of incorporation and identity styles of the immigrant youth I interviewed. In this chapter, I make the argument that the results of the study support my last two hypotheses: 2) immigrant youth incorporate by constantly negotiating incorporation and identity, and 3) precisely the challenges posed to immigrant youth by belonging to the stigmatized immigrant group identity makes them develop the power to make decisions and negotiate their situation. I conclude this chapter by providing four examples from the interviews of agency, negotiation, and fluidity.

Finally, in the concluding chapter, I begin by providing a brief reiteration of previous research, my arguments and the results of the study. Then, I discuss the possible contributions of trajectory and agency to the literature on immigrant incorporation and identity development. I conclude by presenting closing thoughts about the implications of research on the education of immigrant youth in the United States education system.
CHAPTER TWO: CONNECTING AND CHALLENGING LITERATURES

In this chapter, I connect the literatures I engaged in formulating my arguments for immigrant incorporation and identity. I open up with a brief account of the written history of immigration patterns to the United States and how this account has shaped understanding and research about immigrant incorporation and identity. Then, I present my criticisms to the assimilation and acculturation literature that emerged from this understanding. I conclude by offering a multiple, negotiated, and fluid conceptualization of immigrant identity based on Social Identity Theory and Feminist of Color Thought.

2.1 A Brief Written Historical Account of Immigration and How it Shaped Knowledge

Immigration is precisely the creation-story of the United States. Although the Pilgrims are romanticized as some of the first settlers (Mann, 2005), they were no different from subsequent immigrants in their search for a “land of opportunity” where to pursue a better way of life. Fleeing religious persecution, the Pilgrims can be considered as part of the first wave of European immigrants that settled in this land and eventually established the United States as a nation. However, U.S. history text books omit the genocide and colonization of indigenous peoples (with already established governments) that took place at the hands of European immigrants in order to create the United States. Similarly, immigration scholars seem to ignore this history when discussing immigration patterns to the area. The general consensus amongst immigration scholars is that there are two waves of immigration: the pre-1965 wave and the post-1965 wave. Although the phenomenon of mass immigration is not constrained to “waves” but is an “ongoing flow that can be expected to be sustained indefinitely,” (Massey, 1995, p. 648), it is important
to understand the characteristics of these two waves because they provided the framework from which immigrant incorporation and identity has been theorized.

1) **Assimilation and the Pre-1965 Wave**

According to Douglas S. Massey (1995), the “classic era” of immigration which began circa 1880, is the first wave of mass-immigration to the United States (p. 633). Over a period of 50 years, about 28 million immigrants entered the U.S., with the largest concentration entering during the early decades of the 1900s (Massey, 1995, p. 633). At the turn of the 20th century, European countries such as Germany, Ireland, Italy, Russia, and Poland “pushed” emigrants fleeing famine, religious and political persecution (Deaux, 2006; Massey, 1995; Portes, 1997). Most immigrants were phenotypically white, a characteristic of great importance to the incorporation strategies of this wave and their “success” in the new land. Because of their similar racial characteristics, immigrants of the first wave were able to identify (at least physically) with the white majority (Anglo-Saxon, protestant), incorporate, and attain upward mobility. The belief of pulling yourself by the bootstraps and myth of making it with only five dollars in the pocket were born out of the economic success attained by some white European immigrants. Thus, assimilation became both the theoretical model used to describe the incorporation of immigrants from this wave and the ideal mode of incorporation immigrants should strive for.

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3 This does not mean that incorporation was easy for phenotypically white immigrants. In fact, according to Alexander DeConde, a hierarchy of white exists (DeConde, 1992). This hierarchy is evident amongst white immigrants, particularly in the case of Irish immigrants who were derogatorily called “white negroes” (Ignatiev, 1995). However, in comparison with non-phenotypically white immigrants, incorporation was more attainable.
Assimilation assumes that over time, the immigrant will renounce his or her ethnic identity and culture and embrace the identity and culture of the host country (Deaux, 2000, p. 424). The assimilation model explained the “successful” incorporation of the “old immigration wave” predominantly composed by European immigrants (Denmark et. al, 2003, p. 73). For this wave, assimilation often resulted in upward mobility, economic success, and fulfillment of the immigrant dream in the Land of Opportunity. As the first theoretical concept explaining immigrant incorporation, assimilation is still widely used by immigration researchers but in updated versions such as segmented assimilation.

**Segmented Assimilation**

Sociologist Alejandro Portes proposed the theory of Segmented Assimilation, which has been favored by immigration researchers such as Ruben Rumbaut and Min Zhou. This theory emerged from interest in what Portes calls the “new second generation” (Deaux, 2000, p. 425). According to Portes, the diverse new second generation of immigrants from the new wave confronts different demographic environments than the old wave. Immigrants are no longer arriving and settling in mainstream homogeneous United Statesian communities. Instead, they are entering different segments of a multicultural society. Thus, the segmentation of U.S. society influences immigrants to incorporate into different segments using different strategies. Portes and colleagues propose three different strategies of incorporation within segmented assimilation:
1. Assimilation – the traditional model of linear assimilation. Immigrants using this strategy, assimilate into mainstream “American” culture.
2. Selective Acculturation or Selective Assimilation – the immigrant can preserve selective aspects of his or her cultural and ethnic identity and also adapt selective aspects of the host culture, thus becoming bi-cultural.
3. Downward Assimilation – the immigrant assimilates to a “minority” subculture of the United States. According to Portes, this can lead to poverty and moving downward in the economic ladder. (Gibson, 2001, p.21)

To this day, assimilation into mainstream white UnitedStatesian identity continues to be commonly perceived as the marker of immigrant success. Researchers propose that assimilating into a “minority” subculture (i.e. Latino or African-American) is downward assimilating and leads to “joining the masses of the dispossessed, compounding the spectacle of inequality and despair in United States’s [sic] inner cities” (Portes et. al, 2001, p. 45). This conceptualization of immigrant incorporation has three problems:

1) The hegemonic, racist understanding of immigrant incorporation characteristic of social conditions during the old immigration wave is still widely applied in current research. 2) Assimilation assumes that all white immigrants have and will, by right of being white, achieve upward mobility. This assumption ignores the current marginalization and low economic status of some white groups such as communities in Appalachia. 3) Assimilation associates white with UnitedStatesian, UnitedStatesian with assimilation, and assimilation with success. Thus, by default, non-white immigrants cannot achieve success. However, even as early as 1919, researchers acknowledged the possibility that assimilation perhaps did not work for all groups, and proposed the “acculturation process” (Park, p. 111).
2) **Acculturation and the Post-1965 Wave**

Although acculturation was theorized during the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century by sociologists such as Robert E. Park, it is popular with researchers explaining the incorporation strategies of non-white, non-European immigrants that characterized the post-1965 wave (Gibson, 1998; 2001).

Massey (1995) states that after a “long hiatus” of limited immigration flow from the 1930s to 1970, a “new regime” of large-scale immigration began in 1970 and continues today (p. 633). The immigrants entering the country during this new wave are mainly non-European originating from Latin America, Asia, and the Caribbean (Massey, 1995, p.635). Immigrants from this new wave are ethnically, linguistically diverse, and phenotypically non-white, characteristics that influenced the reconsideration of assimilation theory (Suarez-Orozco et. al., 2001, p.vii). Because the new immigrants are not physically able to mirror the mainstream white population, assimilation, and upward mobility were not easily attainable. The myth of making it with five dollars in the pocket was no longer appropriate for these immigrants and assimilation gave way to the concept of acculturation.

Acculturation refers to “the immigrant’s adoption of the cultural practices, values, and symbols of the host society” without having to abandon ethnic identity and culture (Deaux, 2000, p. 425). For example, and immigrant can speak English in addition to his or her native language. In this sense, acculturation is the theoretical concept for being bicultural, but it has not been predominantly framed as biculturalism. Nevertheless,
immigration scholars have theorized new and nuanced versions of acculturation that I outline in the following section (Gibson, 1998, 2001; Suarez-Orozco, 2000, 2004).

**Accommodation and Acculturation Without Assimilation**

Margaret Gibson’s research with immigrant students dates back to the 1970s. However, her longitudinal study of Punjabi immigrant children in the school district of “Valleyside,” California conducted in the early 1980s, is the basis for her theory of Accommodation and Acculturation Without Assimilation (Gibson, 1998, p. 617). Gibson noticed that the parents of the Punjabi children wanted them to retain their Indian culture, and so they advocated accommodation⁴. On the other hand, the prejudice, racism, and xenophobia the Punjabi children experienced in the school environment influenced them to lean more towards acculturation. Thus, balancing the act of retaining a strong Indian identity and incorporating a mainstream UnitedStatesian identity, the Punjabi children incorporated by accommodating their Indian identity and acculturating aspects of the UnitedStatesian identity, but without having to assimilate. From her research with Punjabi immigrant youth, Gibson also proposes two more strategies of incorporation:

**Additive Acculturation**

The theory of assimilation has been favored because it presumes that the immigrant will attain upward mobility and success if he or she assimilates into the host culture. However, Gibson found that Punjabi immigrant students who are often successful at school do not owe the success to assimilation, but instead to Additive Acculturation. Additive Acculturation proposes that “the acquisition of knowledge and

⁴ Gibson defines accommodation as “acquiring competence in the dominant culture but not at the expense of Indian identity” (Gibson, 1998, p. 622).
skills in the new culture and language are viewed as an additional set of tools to be incorporated into the child’s cultural repertoire rather than as a rejection or replacement of old traits” (Gibson, 1998, p. 623). Thus, the immigrant student will add a new set of skills to his/her already established set of skills in order to increase his/her chances of succeeding by using both sets. The basic idea is: the more skills, the better.

*Dissonant Acculturation / Subtractive Acculturation*

In addition, Gibson also found a trend of incorporation that she terms Dissonant Acculturation or Subtractive Acculturation. Also derived from her research with Punjabi immigrant students, Gibson (1998) noted that often “the children of immigrants are expected to leave behind their foreign ways” (p. 623). This expectation was not only manifested in the hostility of their peers, but also in the encouragement of teachers to act more UnitedStatesian. Thus children do not assimilate, but subtract from their identity the aspects of their native culture. For example, although a student might retain her native culture, she may stop speaking her native language and only speak English at the urging of teachers and school administrators. Contrary to Additive Acculturation, Dissonant/Subtractive Acculturation diminishes the immigrant student’s set of skills available to attain success, in this example that skill would be bilingualism. Gibson believes that this strategy can create intra-generational conflict with co-ethnics, such as parents or older siblings, who do keep their cultural skills, and even encourage an adversarial attitude towards the host culture (1998, p. 623).
Identities and Styles of Coping

Acculturation could be framed as biculturalism, but its point of reference is assimilation into UnitedStatesian culture instead of fluency in both host and home cultures that characterize biculturalism. Nevertheless, some researchers explore biculturalism and other flexible frameworks of immigrant identity. One of the more flexible frameworks on strategies of incorporation is proposed by Psychologist Carola Suarez-Orozco. Her theory on Identities and Styles of Coping derive from the Longitudinal Immigrant Student Adaptation Study (LISA) co-directed and co-investigated with the Harvard Immigration Projects. Although the results from this study are still under analysis, Suarez-Orozco provides a framework from which to begin thinking about incorporation and identity formation beyond assimilation and acculturation. According to Suarez-Orozco (2000), immigrant students can incorporate in three ways: “ethnic flight style,” “adversarial style,” and “bicultural style” (p. 29).

1. Ethnic Flight Style – the student “mimics the dominant group and may attempt to join it, leaving their own ethnic groups behind” (2000, p. 29). This strategy of incorporation can be represented by any variation of the traditional paradigm of assimilation.

2. Adversarial Style – is characterized by rejection of the institutions of the dominant culture (2000, p. 30). Although Adversarial incorporation styles, or identities of resistance, are discussed in immigrant identity literature, the emphasis on acculturation and assimilation has traditionally overshadowed them.

3. Bicultural Style – students “emerge as ‘cultural brokers’ mediating the often conflicting cultural currents of home culture and host culture” (2000, p. 31). Bicultural Style is similar to additive acculturation in that students incorporate successfully by learning to manage two cultures.
Suarez-Orozco makes novel and important contributions to the literature by re-defining strategies of incorporation. Instead of talking about acculturation and assimilation, she talks about biculturalism and ethnic flight. Suarez-Orozco even introduces a third strategy not previously considered – adversarial incorporation. “Adversarial” addresses immigrant youth who do not desire to assimilate into the host culture, and make a deliberate effort of rejecting it. However, adversarial can also be framed as a strategy to retain home culture without intentionally rejecting host culture. Although Suarez-Orozco’s Identity and Coping Styles provide flexibility to address diverse strategies of incorporation and identities, they are still grounded on assimilation into UnitedStatesian culture and identity. Nevertheless, her framework reflects the shift in demographics from pre to post 1965 waves and how they influence understanding of immigrant incorporation and identity.

3) 1965 Amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act

Although Massey provides dates of large-scale immigration that are not restrained to 1965, immigration scholars use this year as a reference point because of the important changes made to immigration policies, and their impact on immigration patterns. In 1965, significant changes were made to the Immigration and Nationality Act. Acts that limited and discriminated against the influx of certain immigrants based on nationality such as the Chinese Exclusion Acts of 1882 and 1884, were abolished (Massey, 1995; Deaux, 2006). One of the most significant events was the passage of the Hart-Cellar Immigration Act in 1965 which allowed the reunification of families that had been separated by immigration. Some scholars claim that the Hart-Cellar Act spurred chain migrations as
immigrants in the U.S. began to bring their families (Suarez-Orozco et. al., 2001, p. vii). Even though the amendments made to the Immigration and Nationality Act were not implemented until 1968, the changes approved during 1965 mark this year as the turning point of the new wave of immigration. However, Massey believes that immigration legislation is given too much credit for the changes in new immigrations. He calls attention to the significant contribution of political, social, and economic phenomenon in immigrant-sending countries in shaping the patterns of immigration (Massey, 1995, p. 638).

2.2. Criticisms to the Written History

Undoubtedly, an interaction of push from home countries and pull from host countries influences patterns of immigration (Hamilton et. al, 1997). Immigration flow from Latin American countries rose significantly in the 1950s and continued to increase surpassing immigration from European countries in the 1970s (Massey, 1995; Rumbaut, 1997; Hamamoto & Torres, 1997).

Economic decay and political instability in Central America during the 1970s that erupted into the civil wars during the 1980s were major factors pushing Salvadorans, Guatemalans, Nicaraguans and Hondurans out of their homelands (Hamilton et. al, 1997). U.S.-financed conflict further pushed Central Americans out of their countries and inadvertently pulled them into the U.S. (Hamilton et. al, 1997). Furthermore, transnational networks established by early immigrants continue to pull Central Americans to this country (Hamilton et. al, 1997).
In the case of Mexico, push and pull factors date back to the U.S.-Mexico War of 1848, and also include the *bracero* guest worker program of the early 1940s and the North American Free Trade Agreement implemented in 1994 (Deaux, 2006, p. 19). Social, political, and economic factors pushing towards host and pulling from host countries contribute to the emigration and immigration of peoples. These factors illustrate the context in which emigrants leave their home country and immigrants are received in host countries. Furthermore, they can also provide insight into the attitudes, beliefs and goals about home and host country that emigrants and immigrants depart and arrive with – which contribute to the incorporation and identity formation of immigrants in relation to the host and home country.

However, the pre-1965, post-1965 immigration waves discussed in previous literature do not include the entry of undocumented immigrants present throughout the history of the United States (essentially the Pilgrims were undocumented immigrants as well) and assume that each wave was composed of a homogeneous population whose incorporation is best described by a single strategy of incorporation. Lack of research focused on the undocumented immigrant population allows scholars to separate immigration into two main time periods and theorize about incorporation. This separation ignores the reality of thousands of Chinese and Mexican immigrants that entered the United States during the first wave to work in railroad construction and the agricultural industry. Thus, diversity in strategies of incorporation is overlooked. For example, (non-phenotypically white) Chinese immigrants entered the United States during the old immigration wave did not fully assimilate, as demonstrated by the establishment of
Chinatowns across the country. The contribution of undocumented immigrants to the complexity of immigrant incorporation and identity throughout history has been substantially unexplored by scholars. Although research with undocumented communities is difficult to conduct for legal, ethical, and access reasons, we can no longer ignore the complexity and diversity these populations bring to immigrant incorporation and identity research.

Theories of assimilation and incorporation have been attached to a specific wave precisely viewed as products of the characteristics of two distinct waves of immigration. The exclusion of the undocumented immigrants in immigration research is a fundamental flaw in the study of immigration waves and the basis of immigrant identity and incorporation theories. It is from the incomplete discourse of pre/post 1965 immigration that theories of assimilation and acculturation are born, thus establishing incomplete frameworks from which new theories emerge.

Furthermore, the current application of the immigrant label is attached and embodied differently by pre/post 1965 immigrant populations. As mentioned earlier, everyone in the United States with the exception of First Nations peoples and descendants of enslaved Africans are immigrants. However, the contemporary representation of the term immigrant connotes a stereotypical brown (especially Mexican) Latino/a face. Although the grandchildren of Irish immigrants who fled the potato famine can be considered fifth generation immigrants, their face is not attached to an immigrant identity, and they are not currently studied as immigrants. Scholars of the so called old-wave conducted extensive research on the assimilation of European
immigrants, but research concerning the new wave focuses almost exclusively on non-European immigrants. The difference in subjects addressed by scholars demonstrates a change in perception of who is an immigrant. In the following section, I present a framework for understanding immigrant identity based on Social Identity Theory and Feminist of Color Thought.

2.3 Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory is a “social psychological theory of intergroup relations, group processes, and the social self” originating from Henri Tajfel’s work in the late 1950s (Hogg, Terry, White, 1995, p. 259). According to this theory, the self is composed of social categories that assign the self to a group (Hogg, Terry, White, 1995, p. 259). For example, under the social category of gender, an individual can belong to the male or female group. Figure 2.1 illustrates some of the categories where an individual holds membership. Membership in social groups help the individual define how to feel, think, and behave in relation to the same group (in-group) and other groups (out-group). For instance, being a female teaches women how to interact with women and men. In learning how to engage with “in” and “out” groups, social identity theory emphasizes sociocognitive processes such as categorization. Categorization defines group boundaries and situates people by producing “stereotypical and normative perceptions” about groups (Hogg, Terry, White, 1995, p. 260). For example, women are the care-giving, kind group in the gender category. According to social identity theory, in order to explain the categorized behavior of group members, individuals use subjective belief structures. Subjective belief structures are “people’s beliefs about the nature of relations between
their own group and relevant out groups” (Hogg, Terry, White, 1995, p. 260). For example, a stereotypical perception about women is that because we are by nature the birth-givers, we are also by nature the caregivers. This perception shapes relations between women and men - placing parenting responsibilities primarily upon women, and women and women - stigmatizing women who do not happily embrace full parenting responsibilities.

Social identity theory defines identity construction based on the “nature of the self as constituted by society” (Hogg, Terry, White, 1995, p. 255). Social categories such as nationality, gender, race, etc., form the self within the context of the larger society and highlight the complexity of the self through the interconnections of its multiple identities. When social identity theory is applied to immigrant identity, nationality is a category that situates the self within a native or immigrant group based on the individual’s relation to a nation. In the context of the United States, UnitedStatesian has hegemonically been established as the native group; however, this is problematic because the native group is supposed to be non-immigrant and UnitedStatesian is an immigrant group. Figure 2.2
illustrates my definition of nationality groups. According to social identity theory, categorization and subjective belief structures help us understand how to interact with groups. For example, an immigrant student may learn how to interact with immigrant and non-immigrant students by categorizing himself/herself and others as immigrant or non-immigrant, thus forming a self-defined (and socially influenced) immigrant identity. However, our position within a category, as determined by our membership in a group, also instructs us how to relate to members of our own group and other groups. Placing the UnitedStatesian within the immigrant group complicates the challenges and opportunities immigrants face based on their position within the immigrant group.

Figure 2.2: Nationality

2.4 Feminist of Color Thought

In feminist of color thought as in social identity theory, social identity is composed of an individual’s membership in multiple socially constructed categories (Anzaldua, 1986; Hurtado, 1996; Zaytoun, 2006). These categories position individuals within multiple social groups, but not every group has the same value. As Hurtado states,
Structural forces have such an important influence on the development of social identity precisely because not all social groups are valued equally and not all groups are allocated the same amount of material resources, like education, jobs, and choices for determining one’s life. (1996, p. 374)

Feminist of color emphasize the importance of positionality within categories and how it contributes to the opportunities available to individuals (Hurtado, 1996, p. 375). For example, an individual’s position within the category of nationality, as non-immigrant or immigrant, contributes to the structural challenges or opportunities available to him/her. Traditionally, the non-immigrant group would be a “consensually dominant group” and the immigrant group a “consensually subordinate group” (Hurtado, 1996, p. 374). However, because nationality in the U.S. is based on UnitedStatesian identity (which is established as the non-immigrant group) and I consider UnitedStatesians as members of the immigrant group, the immigrant/non-immigrant binary of the nationality category is problematized, and position within the immigrant group becomes just as important in relation to structural opportunities and challenges presented to different immigrant groups. That means that there are immigrants with more systematic opportunities (i.e. UnitedStatesians) than others (i.e. Mexicans).

Combining my definition of immigrant with positionality and trajectory, I argue that nationality, legal status, and generation are the main components of an immigrant’s structural position in the United States. Please see Figure 2.3 for an illustration of the components.
In the United States, immigrants from European nations have historically had more structural opportunities than immigrants from non-European nations. For example, because of the Chinese Exclusion Acts of 1884 and 1886, immigrants of Chinese descent were illegible for citizenship until 1965 (Deaux, 2006). Similarly, immigrants that reside in this country legally versus illegally enjoy more support from the societal structure. For example, documented immigrants have access to purchase necessary goods such as a car, while undocumented immigrants cannot apply for a driver’s license. Finally, immigrants that have resided for longer periods of time tend to know more about the structure of the United States, which gives them an added advantage over recent immigrants who are barely learning. For instance, immigrants who have lived here longer may have had more opportunities to learn English than immigrants who just arrived. The six trajectory factors I presented earlier in this thesis can be considered examples of how nationality, legal status, and generation create an opportunity or constrain for the immigrant group in the
larger society. Figure 2.4 below illustrates how trajectory factors relate to the three components of position within the immigrant group.

![Figure 2.4: Immigrant Structural Position: Components and Trajectory Factors](image)

However, because immigrant structural position is far more complex than I have outlined, it is important to highlight that nationality, legal status, and generation are not divorced from one another or that they only represent the experience of immigration.

As social beings, we are members of multiple social groups that posit multiple identities. As complex beings, it is practically impossible to separate our identities. Instead, all of our identities (group memberships and within group positions) interconnect within us. We are a crossroads – the borderlands of socially constructed borders. Having multiple identities does not mean we are confused between choosing one over the other, but that we have multiple ways of experiencing and understanding ourselves and the world. This is the idea behind the concept of “shifting consciousness” presented in the benchmark publication of *This Bridge Called My Back* (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981).
A *shifting consciousness* is the ability of many women of Color to *shift* from one group’s perception of social reality to another, and, at times, to be able simultaneously to perceive multiple social realities without losing their sense of self-coherence (Hurtado, 1996, p. 384).

The ability to shift from one social group and consciousness to another and to remain fully functional in multiple groups enhances our understanding of the world. Furthermore, having structurally challenging, “stigmatized,” social identities (i.e. woman, undocumented immigrant, black, poor, etc.) teaches us to negotiate because the conflict they produce “has to be negotiated” (Hurtado, 1996, p. 375). I define identity negotiation as the strategic use of identity, the individual’s decision to make a specific identity more or less salient than others in a given form and context. Thus, it is precisely from a position in stigmatized social group identities that feminist of color generate knowledge, resistance, resilience, and hope (Hurtado, 1996, p. 375). This understanding can also be applied to the often challenging immigration experience(s).

The act of emigrating/immigrating places the individual at a border, physical and social, that he or she has to negotiate in order to survive. An immigrant learns to see the world from two different perspectives, and with time, a third perspective where the two initial ones coexist. Immigrant multiple identities expand what some scholars call *social and cultural capital*. Social and cultural capital is “a single concept that includes the cultural knowledge needed to function effectively within a given ethnic group and society” (Trueba, 2004, p. 47). Immigrant youth possess additional cultural capital to negotiate the world because of their multiple identities that encourage a shifting consciousness. Thus, in addition to the influence of structural position (nationality, legal
status, and generation), the identity of an immigrant is also defined by agency, the immigrant’s ability to make decisions and negotiate (refer to Figure 2.5). To illustrate how agency contributes to immigrant identity, I introduce Aida Hurtado, a second generation Mexican immigrant who constantly negotiated her incorporation into college classes.

Figure 2.5: Immigrant Identity Components

2.5 Epistemological Argument: Agency and Negotiation

Aida Hurtado attended the University of Texas Pan-American in Edinburg, South Texas, during a time when students of Mexican descent were asked to take language classes to improve their speech. Her defiance of racist comments in the classroom earned her a reputation amongst professors who feared having her in class. During one these confrontations, a professor said that “people educated in a language other than their first
language would forever be deficient because they could not conceptualize higher-order concepts” (Hurtado, 1996, p. 379). After asking the class how many had started speaking Spanish at home before they began school, Aida stated:

So, we are cognitively deficient because we are bilingual and we have achieved so much already, so if we had grown up like you, knowing only one language, imagine what geniuses we would all be! (1996, p. 379)

In her article entitled, “Strategic Suspensions: Feminist of Color Theorize the Production of Knowledge,” Dr. Aida Hurtado shares this story and mentions that whenever such a confrontation would ensue, she would “make it a point never to get less than a perfect score in all of [my] her exams” (Hurtado, 1996, p. 379). Contrary to what her professor might have expected capable by an immigrant, Dr. Hurtado is currently a professor of Social Psychology at the University of California at Santa Cruz, and a respected scholar on Social Identity, Chicana Feminist Theory, and Chicana/o issues.

Historically, the oppressed, the “underprivileged,” the “powerless,” have been kept at the margins of the production of knowledge (by function of being labeled underprivileged and powerless). Their perspectives are presented through the hegemonic lens of the “knowledgeable,” the editors and interpreters of the Other. The knowledgeable establish the processes through which knowledge is to be produced, understood, and disseminated. Thus, by default, those who are not considered knowledgeable have no access to these processes. According to Aida Hurtado (1996), “the differences in value attached to significant group memberships to a large extent determines what access individuals have to knowledge, what is considered knowledge, and ultimately how it is that one comes to perceive oneself as knowledgeable in spite of one’s group
membership” (p. 374). Structural inequality organizes a power hierarchy of social groups. Groups perceived to have less social value like women, ethnic and racial minorities, the illiterate, some immigrants, etc. are normally maintained outside of the production of knowledge. In the occasions when the groups manage to gain access, their knowledge is further confined to the margins by the processes themselves – processes that have not been created with the epistemology of these groups as a foundation. The exclusion of these groups from the production of knowledge and the negligence of their ways of knowing denies their very existence and sustains a hegemony of knowledge.

However, writings by indigenous scholars and feminists of color have resisted imperialistic processes of knowledge and re-conceptualized knowledge itself. Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s Decolonizing Methodologies, Gloria Anzaldúa’s Borderlands, Audre Lorde’s Sister Outsider, and Manulani Aluli Meyer’s ground breaking thesis Our Own Liberation: Reflections on Hawai’ian Epistemology, to name a few, have not only challenged the very notion of knowledge, but theorized their own ways of knowing. Their multiple memberships in social groups as an Other, has informed their construction, understanding and dissemination of knowledge – their own epistemology. Instead of focusing on the disadvantages imposed upon their identities by colonization, racism, homophobia, and formal education (amongst other structures of oppression), they have re-framed their “past, stories local and global, [their] present, communities, cultures, languages and social practices as spaces of resistance and hope” (Smith, 1999, p. 4). From these spaces, from the intersections of multiple stigmatized social identities, their epistemologies are constructed, understood, and disseminated. These are the intersections
that immigrant youth negotiate every day. Our ability to negotiate our membership in diverse stigmatized social groups, our agency, is that space of resistance and hope.

Instead of focusing on the stigmatization, language barriers, demonization, and lack of opportunities amongst the many hardships immigrant students face in U.S. society, this thesis focuses on re-conceptualizing the image of immigrant youth from an epistemological perspective. Although there are certainly very difficult challenges immigrant youth face, we are not completely subject to a social structure; we have agency in deciding how to incorporate and negotiate identity. By re-framing the understanding of immigrant youth incorporation and identity development through the negotiation of agency and trajectory, this thesis seeks to challenge the image of underprivileged, powerless, immigrant youth, and include our voice into immigration discourse.
CHAPTER THREE: THE HISTORY OF MEXICAN IMMIGRATION AND NEW LIFE HIGH SCHOOL

Because this thesis is designed as a case study, an elaborate explanation of the research site is required. Furthermore, because the research site is grounded on the history of Mexico-U.S. immigration, I dedicate Chapter Three to the illustration of New Life High School in the context of the Mexican Immigration and the Rio Grande Valley’s political, economic, and cultural history. I begin the chapter with an essential description of the intricate Mexico-U.S. relations and how they have shaped the identity of Mexicans as immigrants in the United States. I continue by discussing the influence of the agricultural history and transnational economy of the Rio Grande Valley on the identity of immigrant youth in the area. I illustrate examples of language use, culinary taste, and cultural traditions, and I conclude the chapter by establishing my reasons for working with New Life High School.

3.1 Making the Border

_We must prepare to receive an incongruous mass of Spaniards, Indians, and mongrel Mexicans – a medley of mixed races, who are fitted neither to enjoy nor to administer our free institutions: men of different blood and language, who cannot dwell and mingle with our people on a footing of social or political equality. They must be governed as a colonial dependency, under provincial laws, or else be incorporated into our federal system, to become an eternal source of strife, anarchy, and civil commotion._

~ Washington Hunt, New York Whig Congressman

_Beneath the United States_

This section of the Case Study chapter details the creation of the Mexico-United States border and how a people were made immigrants in their own land.
Relations between México and the United States are heavy with political, economic, and cultural baggage dating back to the early periods of both republics. Under the colonialist spirit of Manifest Destiny, the U.S. purchased the territory of modern day Louisiana from France in 1803 (Schoultz, 1998). The unclear boundaries of the Louisiana Purchase alerted the Viceroyalty of New Spain of U.S. intentions to expand west – into Mexico. However, the dispute over the border was appeased with the ratification of the Adams-de Onis Treaty in 1819 which established the Sabine River as the boundary between the two territories. In an attempt to populate its northern territory, the Mexican Government authorized Stephen Austin to plan the settlement of 300 Anglo\(^5\) families in Mexican Texas – the first legal Anglo settlement (Schoultz, 1998). Americans had already begun to immigrate and settle in the Mexican Texas territory by the time the Coahuila-Texas legislature proposed an irresistible offer for settlers: “each married male settler could purchase up to a league of land (4,428 acres) for less than $200 on an easy credit and exempt from taxation for seven years” (Schoultz, 1998, p. 16). The Mexican government, worried about the sudden flow of Anglos to Mexican territory mandated the “Mexicanization” of settlers requiring them to be Catholics, to settle 60 miles away from the border, to conduct all transactions in Spanish, and making additional land available for those who married a Mexican (Schoultz, 1998, p. 18). Not only did the new settlers ignore the policy of “Mexicanization,” but seeing that they were now the majority in the territory, they maintained their language, religion, slave-based economy, and declared independence from Mexico in April 1836 (Schoultz, 1998, p. 21).

\(^5\) In this chapter, Anglo is used interchangeably with UnitedStatesian.
Although the U.S. had deceitfully asserted disinterest in annexing Texas, it provided the territory with “substantial private support” and recognized its independence (Schoultz, 1998, p. 22). On the other hand, México did not recognize Texas’ independence and attempted to recover its “rebellious territory” (Schoultz, 1998, p.21). The conflict over Texas turned México-U.S. relations sour. President Polk pressured the renewal of negotiations with México for the annexation of Texas and sent envoys with covert instructions to obtain as much Mexican territory as possible, but negotiations were not an option for México. Frustrated by México’s rejection, Polk sent General Zachary Taylor to occupy the contested territory between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande, shamelessly provoking an attack by Mexican troops who believed U.S. had begun an invasion (Schoultz, 1998, p. 28). Eleven U.S. soldiers died, five were wounded, and the rest were captured. Using this conflict as an excuse, Polk submitted a war declaration to Congress stating:

> After reiterated menaces, México has passed the boundary of the United States, has invaded our territory and shed American blood upon the American soil. She has proclaimed that hostilities have commenced, and that the two nations are now at war. As war exists, and, notwithstanding all our efforts to avoid it, exists by the act of México herself, we are called upon by every consideration of duty and patriotism to vindicate with decision the honor, the rights, and the interests of our country. As cited in (Schoultz, 1998, p. 28)

Consequently, the Mexican-American War of (1846-1848) began. As the war was being fought, a heated debate about the possible annexation of Mexico was taking place in U.S. Congress. There were those who favored all-México and others who opted for a limited acquisition of the land. On February, 1846, Texas was officially annexed as the 28th state of the union. Issues such as the implementation of slavery were key in the debate.
However, the issue that all parties of Congress agreed upon is best expressed by the question posed by Florida’s Congressman Edward Cabell:

Shall we by an act of Congress, convert the black, white, red, mongrel, miserable population of Mexico— the Mexicans, Indians, Mulattoes, Mestizas \textit{sic}, Chinos, Zambos, Quinteros— into free and enlightened American citizens, entitled to all the privileges we enjoy? As cited in (Schoultz, 1998, p. 36)

To which the proslavery Southern Democrat, John C. Calhoun replied:

We have never dreamt of incorporating into our Union any but the Caucasian race – the free white race. To incorporate Mexico would be the first instance of the kind of incorporating an Indian race; for more than half the Mexicans are Indians, and the other is composed chiefly of mixed tribes. I protest against such a union as that! Ours, sir, is the government of a white race. As cited in (Schoultz, 1998, p. 36)

Blatant racist attitudes were at the core of U.S.-México relations, the Mexican-American War, and have since been present in the creation and development of the border.

Finally on February 4, 1848, the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo by the Mexican and United States governments put an end to the Mexican-American War securing the creation of the U.S.-México border and the identity of Mexicans as immigrants in our own land. Although Article 8 of the treaty stated that “Mexicans established in territories previously belonging to Mexico, and which remain for the future within the limits of the United States…shall be free to continue where they reside, or remove at any time to the Mexican Republic, retaining the property which they possess in the said territories,” the reality deviated far from honoring this statement (Holden & Zolov, 2000). Mexican families were removed from their homes and deported, while others fought to remain in the land that used to be Mexican. The Texas Rangers, the first
government sponsored border patrol, foreshadowed today’s militarization of the border. The established political border physically divided families, but even government laws could not keep families apart and relatives continued traveling across the political division. The historical, political, and social backdrop of this man-made division established the identity of Mexicans in the United States as immigrants, and created what is the modern day U.S.-México border – an area where cultures, traditions, languages, and people dismiss the boundaries that politically separate them. In the following section, I address the creation and decline of the citrus-based agricultural industry in the Rio Grande Valley, how it helped create the image of Mexicans as undocumented immigrant farmworkers, and its influence on the attitude of Mexican-Americans towards people of Mexican descent in the area.

3.2 The Agricultural Rio Grande Valley

In South Texas, the border did not have to be physically constructed since the Rio Grande River, or *Rio Bravo* as it is known on the Mexican side, served as a natural division between the U.S. and México. However, in an effort to remain connected, families fragmented by the Rio Grande maintained relationships that have intimately interwoven Mexico and South Texas culturally and economically. Commuting across the border to visit family members was common and helped sustain cultural exchange between people south and north of the river. Furthermore, the development of the citrus industry in South Texas banked on these relationships to attract manual labor from south of the border inadvertently strengthening cross-border economic dependency.
In the mid 1920s, the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas became a hub for the promising citrus industry, and hundreds of investors were attracted to the fertile lands of the “magical Rio Grande Valley” (Trueba, 2004, p. 21). Continuing his father’s interest in agriculture, John C. Engelman Jr. moved to Edinburg, Texas in 1915 and began the development of Engelman Gardens – and operation of 11,000 acres dedicated to the citrus industry (Trueba, 2004). When Engelman Jr. passed away, his wife placed Austin LeRoy Cramer in charge of the operation. Cramer was a well known leader in the community. He sat on various boards of local school districts and institutions of higher education; led various water improvement, health, and workers associations; and had strong relationships in Washington D.C. Cramer served as manager for the J.C. Engelman Company until 1968 (Trueba, 2004). The demand for farm labor in the agricultural industry across the United States (citrus in South Texas) and the growing number of drafted young men to fight in World War II, contributed to the recruitment of *braceros*, Mexican laborers who migrated to the United States for months at a time, to fulfill the work that young citizens left behind. These conditions created the image of Mexicans in the United States as immigrant farmworkers.

Recognizing strength in cross-border relationships, one of Cramer’s most significant contributions during his work with Engelman Gardens was his collaborative work with immigration and labor relations authorities from México and the U.S. in providing humane working conditions for Mexican laborers who came to work in South Texas (Trueba, 2004). Cramer negotiated contracts with established working hours, salary, length of work, and legal working permits (Trueba, 2004). With the help of
Mexican laborers, Engelman Gardens prospered until a severe freeze in 1949 destroyed about 80 percent of the citrus industry causing investors to leave and laborers to find work elsewhere. In his attempt to salvage the industry, Cramer urgently needed more workers. However, he found that “unlicensed recruiters” were taking laborers beyond Texas borders to other states in clear violation of the contracts (Trueba, 2004, p. 22). In a letter written to state Senator Rogers Kelly on June 1949, Cramer recognizes that the government contracts were no longer sufficient to attract Mexican laborers (Trueba, 2004). Therefore, unable to compete with illegal recruiters, Cramer also began contracting undocumented workers. Cramer’s decision to contract undocumented workers highlights an important change in the image of Mexicans in South Texas: after the 1949 freezes, Mexicans became undocumented, immigrant farmworkers.

An industry of clandestine nature such as the illicit trafficking of undocumented workers harbors conditions for exploitation and abuse. For example, Cramer’s Mexican laborers were frequently raided and brutalized by the Texas Rangers (Trueba, 2004). Furthermore, the segregated, racist environment of South Texas (and around the country) at that time contributed to the abuse Mexican laborers experienced. Elders of the community recount stories of railroad tracks marking the division between Anglo and Mexican neighborhoods, being corporally punished in school if they were caught speaking Spanish, and few doctors willing to provide medical care to Mexicans.\textsuperscript{6} Aggravating ill social conditions, the failure of the citrus industry to recover caused the flight of Anglo residents. Because the economy was largely run by Anglos, businesses

\textsuperscript{6} Information obtained from a conversation held with my stepfather and his friends who grew up in segregated New Life. The conversation took place on April 21\textsuperscript{st}, 2007 in New Life, Texas.
and job opportunities left when they did. New Life, Texas used to house packing companies, movie theaters, a shopping strip along its main road, and a chemical plant. Today, successful businesses are simply memories of a prosperous New Life. Mexican-Americans were left to manage a ruined economy and towns without job opportunities using a structurally racist system that enforced internalized oppression and had already indoctrinated them in the profitable exploitation of Mexican workers.

Although revolutionary attitudes of the Chicano Movement also impacted the Rio Grande Valley with the organizing of farmworkers and student walk-outs (Trueba, 2004, p. 26), it is common to hear Mexican-American elders complain about the corruption and inability of Mexicans (including Mexican-Americans) to effectively perform in positions of power and sigh for the return of Anglo leaders. Manifested by a single fact - no Anglos, no jobs - the decline of the citrus industry enforced attitudes of internalized oppression and anti-immigration amongst Mexican-Americans. My own step-brother, a Mexican-American man in his mid thirties, stated that he rather live in a racially segregated, economically prosperous, Anglo government (in New Life that is), than a corrupt, incompetent, Mexican-led government. In New Life High School, some youth of Mexican descent do not speak Spanish at the urging of their grandparents who were corporally punished in school and deprived of educational opportunities for speaking Spanish. Mexican immigrant men are commonly referred to as backward “mojados” who do not have to be paid a lot, and Mexican immigrant women as lazy “cantineras,” tavern-workers, who have as many children as possible for the sole purpose of claiming welfare.

\[\text{City’s real name has been changed.}\]
benefits. Mexican farmworkers are still exploited (including Mexican-American
farmworkers), but now Mexican-Americans contribute to the abuse.

The once thriving agricultural communities in the Rio Grande Valley like New
Life plummeted economically as a result of the freeze and subsequent Anglo flight. The
sour experience enforced internal oppression and anti-immigration attitudes in the
Mexican-American population, and communities were left to search for new pathways to
economic stability and growth within racist structures of power. Yet, an alternative was
not too far. With a convenient location immediately linking the area to Mexico, the Rio
Grande Valley once again banked on century-old relationships to develop a promising
industrial, agricultural and technological, trade-based, transnational economy.

3.3 The Transnational Rio Grande Valley

In a very real sense the border is its own country, ‘Amexica’.
~ Enrique (Henry) Trueba, The New Americans

The Rio Grande Valley stretches four counties across the southernmost Texas
border with Mexico: Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr and Willacy. Major cities in the area
include Mcallen, Brownsville, Harlingen, and Edinburg. Although the Rio Grande serves
as a natural division, there are several international ports of entry: Pharr-Mcallen-Hidalgo
/Reynosa, Progreso/Nuevo Progreso, and Brownsville/Matamoros. A total of seven
international bridges facilitate north-south traffic flow, yet local authorities seem to not
build additional bridges fast enough. In the past decade, most of the bridges have been
expanded and renovated to alleviate congested traffic and expedite trade. Locals know
better than to cross any bridge on a Friday afternoon when workers and relatives from
both sides of the border return home or visit for the weekend, causing long lines and frustrating bumper-to-bumper waiting hours. Traffic is so congested that radio stations religiously broadcast traffic reports, and under the hot Texas sun, cars often overheat. But precisely this relentless international activity illustrates the promising transnational border economy – and its consequences.

After the agricultural decline in the Rio Grande Valley, the trade-based transnational economy posited new issues to Mexico-U.S. immigration and immigrant identity. With the signing of NAFTA (The North American Free Trade Agreement) by the governments of Canada, Mexico, and the United States in 1994, the Rio Grande Valley should have experienced economic growth linked to the nearby free trade zones, but unemployment rates continue to grow. No longer needing to outsource overseas, UnitedStatesian companies settled factories popularly known as \textit{maquilas}, along the Mexican side of the border – creating resent between Mexican-Americans and Mexicans who are seen as a threat to jobs (because the jobs are relocated to Mexico). In addition, UnitedStatesian businesses like WalMart, McDonalds, and H-E-B (a grocery store chain) also poured south, enforcing the idea of UnitedStatesian prosperity that influences Mexican immigrants to migrate north. Furthermore, the arrival of the UnitedStatesian businesses and their imports put Mexican \textit{campesinos} out of their own business \textit{forcing} them to migrate, often undocumented, north. Thus, the convenient location of the Rio Grande Valley made it a hub for Mexican immigrants looking for work.

According to the Department of Homeland Security, a total of 1,171,428 apprehensions of individuals residing illegally in the U.S. were made in 2005 at the
Southern border. 86.8% of those apprehensions were of Mexican nationals (Wu, 2006). If immigrants get caught on the first try, they stay on the Mexican side working at the maquilas to save enough money and try again. However, not all immigrants arrive at the Rio Grande Valley with intentions to settle there. For some, it is merely a pit stop on the way elsewhere, while some commute daily across the border with a visa laser or local visa, and others get stuck in the area and eventually settle.

While thousands of Mexicans left their rural towns, the opening of the border also poured manufactured products north. Every day, “a million barrels of crude oil, 432 tons of bell peppers, 238,000 light bulbs, 166 brand-new Volkswagen Beetles, 16,250 toasters, $51 million worth of auto parts, everything from the little plastic knob on the air conditioner to your cell-phone charger” flows across the border from Mexico (Gibbs, 2001). In order to facilitate the use and repair of all these products, and to help UnitedStatesians run the country while they are busy managing the transnational economy, an entire labor force is necessary. Gardeners, brick-layers, house-cleaners, nannies, cooks, plumbers, construction workers, janitors, farm workers, dish-washers, meatpackers – immigrants – come to relieve UnitedStatesians of the jobs they do not want. Such economic intimacy blurs the line where the border starts or where it stops.

In the Rio Grande Valley, maquila supervisors and nannies crisscross everyday what seems to be an invisible line. United States citizens frequent Mexican border cities for affordable and reliable medical, dental, and eye care. Mexican children commute across international borders daily to attend U.S. public schools. Partying in Mexican bars seems to be a high school graduation pre-requisite for Mexican-American youth. Cars
with Mexican license plates fill the parking lots of the Plaza Mall, the largest shopping center in the area. On a Saturday or Sunday, it is practically impossible to walk the streets of Las Flores, Mexico because they are packed with UnitedStatesian tourists. In addition, the opening of new outlet malls, modern furniture stores, and trendy new night clubs attract affluent Mexicans who would have otherwise driven eight or more hours to larger cities such as San Antonio, Austin, or Houston. These examples illustrate the transnational trade atmosphere of the once agricultural-based Rio Grande Valley.

However, the transnational reality of the RGV is not new. It is both based and enforced by centuries of cultural exchange between Mexico and the United States. As a former Mexican territory, the Rio Grande Valley has a well-established Mexican populace and a strong Mexican cultural background. Given that it has been U.S. territory for over 150 years, it also has a strong UnitedStatesian presence. However, instead of a clashing juncture, the border is the physical manifestation of a borderless culture. People on both sides depend on each other economically by providing or fulfilling jobs, sending or receiving money, and selling or buying products and services. The signing of NAFTA marked the beginning of a trade-based transnational ear that stimulates economic dependency and cultural fusion found at the borderlands. Local authorities know this better than anyone. As an example, consider the following statement found on the main page for the website of the city of Pharr, Texas:

Welcome to Pharr, Texas, a community rich with bi-cultural diversity, beauty, and history. Pharr is strategically located in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas, only minutes from the Mexico border. Today, with a healthy economy and steady growth, Pharr is the hub of transportation for the region and a major gateway for NAFTA-oriented businesses. It is strategically located to reap the benefits of explosive growth in commerce
and trade and reaches more than 10,000,000 people. The Pharr area offers a top-quality workforce on both sides of the border.

With an economy that reaches more than ten million people, NAFTA created a new context for immigration, immigrant incorporation and identity. Displacing increasing numbers of Mexicans from their jobs, hauling them north to work at the *maquilas* (where especially women workers are as disposable as a napkin), while simultaneously eliminating jobs once available to the Mexican-American population of the RGV, is bound to create resentment and anti-immigration attitudes that result in increased xenophobic border militarization and deaths of undocumented workers. However, even with conditions that position a people against their own (the old divide and conquer), the cultural fusion between Mexico and the U.S. is inevitable.

It is essential to understand the intimate and intricate historical, political, and economic relationship between the U.S. and Mexico in order to understand the transnational culture of the Rio Grande Valley, and its influence on the identity of its people. In the RGV, locals are not only expected to be fluent in some form of English and Spanish, but to also speak with a mixture of both – Spanglish, TexMex, etc. Almost everyone has family on both sides of the border, and even high school football teams have Mexican *corridos* as theme songs. The Valley is a place where people live in two countries at once without having to physically leave either. The valley is indeed its own country.
3.4 Identity in the Rio Grande Valley

For a people who are neither Spanish nor live in a country in which Spanish is the first language; for a people who live in a country in which English is the reigning tongue but who are not Anglo; for a people who cannot entirely identify with either standard Spanish nor standard English, what recourse is left but to create their own language?

~ Gloria Anzaldua, Borderlands

About 87%\(^8\) of the population living in the Rio Grande Valley is of Hispanic\(^9\) or Latino descent. Considering the complex historical, political, and economic background of the area, it is not surprising that not all 87% identify as Hispanic or Latino; however, the blending of both U.S. and Mexican cultures is undeniable. In this section, I pull from my own experience as a Valley resident to present three examples of the bicultural culture of the Rio Grande Valley, and how biculturalism shapes the identity of immigrant youth in the area – this contributes to my argument for theorizing immigrant incorporation and identity beyond assimilation and acculturation.

1) Spanglish

Gloria Anzaldua developed her consciousness of societal borderlands based on her life and experiences at the borderland – the Rio Grande Valley. Only a native of a linguistic borderland like Anzaldua could state in simple terms the experience of constantly crossing back and forth between languages, cultures, identities, and instead of

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\(^8\) Percentage approximated by author’s own calculations aggregating the percentages of the four counties that constitute the Rio Grande Valley. Data obtained from the official Census Bureau Home Page retrieved from the World Wide Web: http://www.census.gov

\(^9\) I use the terms Hispanic and Latino to remain consistent with Census Bureau data, which uses these terms officially to refer to people whose ancestors are from Latin American countries. However, from my own observations, in contrast to other areas with large populations of people of Latin American descent (such as Los Angeles, California, where a large population of people of Mexican descent consider themselves Chicana/o), the term Hispanic is most frequently used in the Rio Grande Valley.
being confused or victimized by the lack of clarifying limits, celebrate her ability to create a third language, culture, and identity, where all of her could fit – without borders. Anzaldua writes about the reality of people living at the borderlands, the reality of people in the Rio Grande Valley.

In the valley, or el valle as most people call it, people are expected to know some degree of Spanish, English, and Spanglish. While language purists might consider Spanglish, TexMex, Chicano Spanish (etc.), an atrocity and the bastardization of both Spanish and English, in the valley, Spanglish is a survival strategy - a way of life. Anzaldua (1988) states,

But Chicano Spanish is a border tongue which developed naturally. Change, evolución, enriquecimiento de palabras nuevas por invención o adopción have created variants of Chicano Spanish, un nuevo lenguaje. Un lenguaje que corresponde a un modo de vivir, Chicano Spanish is not incorrect, it is a living language. (p. 55)¹⁰

Born out of over a century of linguistic exchange between Spanish and English, Spanglish is not merely the union (or clash) of two languages, but a third language that emerges out of the mixture of both. In the valley, we not only speak in both languages simultaneously:

**example:** “vamos para tu casa” = “let’s go to your house” = “vamos para tu house”

It becomes second nature to switch languages between words. We Spanish-ize English words and English-ize Spanish words, often creating our own words:

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¹⁰ Translation: “But Chicano Spanish is a border tongue which developed naturally. Change, evolution, enrichment of new words by invention or adoption have created variants of Chicano Spanish, a new language. A language that corresponds to a way of living, Chicano Spanish is not incorrect, it is a living language.”
**example:**

- camioneta = truck = *troca*
- fijate = watch it = *wachale*
- Edinburg = *Edinburgo*

Adding common Spanish endings such as *oca, ale, o*, we pronounce English words in Spanish. Although people do pronounce Spanish words in English, the general trend is to switch words to Spanish. This practice is a survival strategy used by Mexican workers who need to communicate in English with their bosses. This strategy also influences our names. Although most people are of Mexican descent, and have traditional Mexican names such as *Maria, Juan, Miguel*, and *Esperanza*, the English version is mostly used: *Mary, Johnny, Mike, Hope*, respectively. However, if the last name is in Spanish, it remains pronounced in proper Spanish.

Furthermore, because everything around us is in two languages, we possess cognitive abilities, analytical skills, and responsibilities that monolinguals do not. For example, young children often claim not to speak Spanish, but know exactly what *papita* (slang for food) means. They understand that they must speak to their grandparents in Spanish, and English to their teachers. Some children also take on the important responsibility to act as translators between English speakers and their parents, especially in school-related contexts such as a parent meeting or in financial endeavors such as the management of utility bills. The ability to switch between languages, to critically analyze to whom to speak in what language, to negotiate communication, and to fulfill translating responsibilities becomes second nature. *En el valle* (in the Valley), we speak:
A language which they can connect their identity to, one capable of communicating the realities and values true to themselves – a language with terms that are neither español ni inglés, but both. We speak a patois, a forked tongue, a variation of two languages. (Anzaldua, 1998, p. 55)

2) Tex-Mex Food

Worldwide, *tacos* have become the quintessential symbol of Mexican food. *Tortillas* (a flat, round, flexible corn bread) have been in Mexican cuisine since pre-colonial times (before México was México) and are essential in all Mexican meals. A taco is simply any main dish wrapped in a tortilla – which means you can make tacos out of anything! In the United States, the controversial fast food franchise Taco Bell has given fame to tacos and other Mexican food that is better labeled as disappointing misrepresentations of Mexican dishes. However, the presence of Taco Bell is indicative of the influence and level of visibility Mexican culture has in the U.S. Whether culturally accurate or not, Taco Bell has pushed United States to learn about Mexican food, and has introduced a fast food version of Mexican food that is palatable to the lifestyle and taste of mainstream United States.

Although the proximity of the RGV to México has helped maintain *tortillerias* (tortilla factories), *panaderias* (bakeries), and *taquerias* (taco restaurants) open all across the valley, Mexican food has also undergone changes due to the influence of UnitedStatesian food. Consequently, the Mexican food found in the Rio Grande Valley is better labeled as Tex-Mex food. Tex-Mex food uses less fiery spices than authentic Mexican food, and it also incorporates typical UnitedStatesian ingredients into Mexican recipes. As with language, the food of the Rio Grande Valley does not represent a
cultural clash, but instead a cultural blend of aspects from two cultures that would please both crowds. Two words come to mind to provide the perfect example of the Tex-Mex food traditions characteristic of the Rio Grande Valley: *enchilada Wednesdays.*

In my high school, everyone loved Wednesdays because on those glorious days, the school cafeteria would serve cheese or beef enchiladas. Traditional Mexican enchiladas are a very hot and spicy dish made with rolled-up tortillas stuffed with goat cheese or minced chicken and covered in a spicy hot sauce made with either green or red *chiles* (hot peppers). Well, these are not the enchiladas my high school served on Wednesdays. The enchiladas my school would serve were Tex-Mex. They were still rolled up tortillas, but stuffed with cheddar cheese or beef chili, dripping on a cheese and chili sauce, and with saltine crackers on the side (I have no clue where the saltine idea originated). Although schools in the Rio Grande Valley serve mostly Mexican food for lunch like *tacos, tamales,* and even *barbacoa* (meat cooked with hot stones underground), the food is an UnitedStatesian version of Mexican food. It is delicious, but not “fully” authentic. Nevertheless, students, staff, and faculty would always round up for seconds on enchilada Wednesdays. In the Rio Grande Valley, schools are essential, yet informal, agents in teaching students how to live in a bicultural world as demonstrated by school meals, and in the next section, by school sports.

3) **Football, Corridos, and Mr. “Ni Fu Ni Fa”**

Football is the quintessential UnitedStatesian sport. There is no bigger sports event than the annual Super Bowl Sunday. As a fanatical football state, Texas takes football seriously: the Dallas Cowboys are sacred, the University of Texas at Austin is
considered a football powerhouse, and high school football stadiums are big enough to sit over 10,000 fans. Similarly, in the Rio Grande Valley, high school football is not just a sport – it is a way of life.

Children grow up surrounded by locally glorified images of football players and cheerleaders. If in high school you were not a football player or a cheerleader, you did not exist. During football season, fans line up for days if necessary to buy season passes, teachers sport football jerseys to demonstrate their school spirit, football players are pulled out of classes to be taken on “speaking tours” around local schools, and pep rallies and bonfires become a weekly ritual. On Friday nights, the streets are eerily quiet because entire communities gather at their local stadium to support the local team. Although this may seem like typical United Statesian fanaticism and glorification of football, there is something different about high school football traditions in the Rio Grande Valley – their Mexicaness.

Even though the demographics of the Rio Grande Valley produce predominantly Mexican football teams, the main difference between RGV teams and non-RGV teams lies in the traditions surrounding football culture. The bicultural context of the Rio Grande Valley results in peculiar football traditions. For example, most football teams have a **corrido** as a theme song. A **corrido** is a traditional Mexican folk song that tells the life story of a heroic character, in this case, a football team. **Corridos** often recount battles and rivalries the hero of the song overcame victoriously. In this way, football team **corridos** recount the rivalries between teams in the Rio Grande Valley, often boasting about victories and detailing the ways in which a team will defeat a rival. Even though
football is UnitedStatesian, *corridos* are sung entirely in Spanish. In the RGV, not even the quintessential UnitedStatesian sport escapes the area’s blend of traditions and cultures. In addition, most teams are also known by a Spanish nickname. For example, one of the strongest football teams in the area is known as “la maquina amarilla,” or “the yellow machine,” and supporters of this team can be heard chanting at the football games: ¡Viva La Maquina!11

A discussion of Rio Grande Valley high school football cannot be complete without addressing “Mr. Ni Fu, Ni Fa.” Hugo de la Cruz, a local radio personality, hosts a valley-wide radio show immediately after games on Friday nights. The show reports on the progress and scores of each game, and is conducted entirely in Spanish. Listeners call in to make a short comment, request a “niño chillon” or “cry baby” for the loosing team, or ask to play their team’s *corrido*. As de la Cruz provides updates on each team, his catch phrase for the losing team is “ni fu, ni fa” which roughly translates to “not bad, not good” or “nothing.” Although de la Cruz’s radio show ends the Friday night football traditions in the Rio Grande Valley, the following day, newspapers provide full coverage of the week’s results and make predictions for the season. Like Spanglish and Enchilada Wednesdays, high school football in the Rio Grande Valley is as UnitedStatesian as it is Mexican. Even though the public school system functions as the main agent in the indoctrination of immigrant students into UnitedStatesian culture, no matter how many times students recite the Pledge of Allegiance in the classroom, RGV schools meals and sports will informally continue to fly an invisible Mexican flag on the background.

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11 Long Live the Yellow Machine!
3.5 New Life High School\textsuperscript{12}

New Life, Texas, is an example of the paradoxical Rio Grande Valley area – of its agricultural-based yet international-trade economy, and its rural communities rapidly developing into suburban-transnational areas. Although the demographic characteristics amongst valley schools vary depending on their proximity to the border and socio-economic level, New Life High School, located in New Life, Texas is representative of the immigration reality of the area. Schools in the RGV constantly receive newcomers while maintaining the traditions of an already established Mexican-American community. The political, economic, and cultural traditions previously discussed are present in New Life.

I chose to work with the New Life Independent School District for two reasons: 1) as an alumna of New Life High School and resident of New Life, Texas, I am well-acquainted with the institution, its population, and its environment, and I seek to write from this experience; 2) New Life, Texas is a historical destination for immigrants which assured a sizable and diverse immigrant population ideal for research inquiry. Although this research was designed as a case study of what seems to be a unique area in the United States, the historical, political, economic, and cultural context of the Rio Grande Valley and New Life High School resonate with communities around the country and world. I believe that the results obtained from the case study of New Life High School can uncover trends present in other high schools in the Rio Grande Area. More

\textsuperscript{12} The real name of the school district, the school, and the town have been changed in order to protect the identity of the participants.
importantly, I invite scholars to use this work as a way to create links from this rural, transnational community in South Texas, to their own communities across the world.

The intricately woven cultural, political, and economic histories of the United States and Mexico described in this chapter have produced the transnational setting of the Rio Grande Valley. In the RGV, high school football teams have their own *corridos*\(^{13}\), *maquiladora*\(^{14}\) employees commute daily across the international border, and fluency in Spanish, English, and Spanglish is expected – these characteristics posit an interesting context for the development of identity. Upon arrival to the Rio Grande Valley, immigrant youth do not enter the mainstream UnitedStatesian culture exemplified in MTV. Instead, they enter a third culture, Mexican and UnitedStatesian, where there are no set boundaries, and where what seemed UnitedStatesian is Mexican, and what seemed Mexican is UnitedStatesian. This may sound very confusing, and from personal experience I can say that it is. As a Mexican immigrant coming into Texas, I was knowledgeable of the Mexico-U.S. history and that I was entering stolen land, and I expected support from fellow people of Mexican descent. However, I experienced both discrimination and support from people who looked just like me, but did not consider themselves Mexican. To some, I represented a connection to their homeland, to others; I was the image of everything they were trying so desperately to leave behind. Learning to engage in such contradictory and fluid conditions placed challenges (it was really difficult to fully follow conversations since most people switched between English and Spanish and I really needed them to stick to one or the other), and also presented

\(^{13}\) A corrido is a Mexican folk ballad.

\(^{14}\) American-owned transnational factories set up along the Mexican side of the U.S.-Mexico border.
opportunities (Spanglish in fact, helped me loose fear of making mistakes while speaking English since most students often made mistakes in Spanish). To survive in the paradoxical Rio Grande Valley, I had to learn to negotiate between three cultures: UnitedStatesian, Mexican, and Mexican-American culture. As Maxine Hong Kingston (1976) stated in her influential book, *The Woman Warrior*, “I have learned to make my mind large, as the universe is large, so that there is room for paradoxes”.
CHAPTER FOUR: METHODS

This chapter details the mixed-methods design of the present study. I begin by presenting the concepts of Trajectory and Agency and discussing how they influenced the selection of methods and creation of instruments used in the study. I continue by describing the instruments, 1) Student Trajectory Questionnaire, and 2) Narrative-Style, Semi-Structured Student Interviews; how they measure and evaluate trajectory, agency, strategies of incorporation, and identity, and what hypotheses they were designed to test. Then, I address the influence of the research site on the external validity of the study results, and selection of participants. I conclude by discussing special concerns posited by conducting research with immigrant youth, minors, and high school students, how I address them.

From my initial observations, the Rio Grande Valley has a population diverse in immigration experiences specifically when considering the diversity in immigration trips. Some of its residents are descendants of people who settled in the area before the border existed, some arrived years ago, some reside in the area until job opportunities take them elsewhere, and some constantly alternate between homes in Mexico and the United States. Diverse arrival and settlement methods imply that not all immigrants have the same immigration experience, and indeed they do not. I propose that studying the factors that constitute the immigration trip could contribute to our understanding of immigration experiences, immigrant incorporation and identity development. This thesis proposes and uses trajectory as a convenient research concept that facilitates the collection of
quantitative data and contributes to the analysis of immigration experiences by focusing on the immigration trip.

4.1 Trajectory

Trajectory is the immigration trip an immigrant takes from his or her home country to a settlement destination. It is composed of seven factors (not an exhaustive list): Country of birth, duration of travel, method of entry, legal status, age at entry, location of settlement, and duration of settlement.

1) Country of Birth - Refers to the native country of the immigrant student.

2) Duration of Travel - Refers to the length of the immigration trip from the country of birth to the location of settlement. For example, usually there is a significant difference in travel time between the journey of an undocumented immigrant and the journey of a documented immigrant from Peru. Duration of travel is closely linked to method of entry and country of birth.

3) Method of Entry - Refers to the method employed by the immigrant in order to enter the United States. The method can be documented or undocumented although there are several variations of both. For instance, swimming across the Rio Bravo and presenting a false tourist visa at an immigration office are both undocumented methods of entering the U.S.

4) Legal Status - Refers to the immigrant’s legal permission to be in the United States. Because the legal status of an immigrant can vary at different times during the immigration trip, there are two time periods considered for legal status:
a) **Legal status at entry**  
This status is addressed by the method of entry employed. Was the immigrant documented or undocumented at the time of entry?

b) **Current legal status**  
This status addresses the current legal situation of the immigrant. Is the immigrant currently documented or undocumented?  
For example, an immigrant can enter with an official student visa; however, once the visa expires, he or she can choose to remain in the country without documents.

5) **Age at entry** - Refers to the age of the immigrant at the time of entrance. The age of the immigrant at the time of entry greatly influences the way in which he or she can incorporate into the new society. For instance, it might be easier for a two year old child to learn English than it would be for a 15 year old adolescent.

6) **Location of Settlement** - Refers to the city, state, country where the immigrant settles. It is important to point out that many immigrants constantly move, thus, there might be more than one location of settlement. For future research, I suggest including two sub-categories to location of settlement: 1) initial location, and 2) current location.

7) **Duration of Settlement** - Refers to the length of time the immigrant has resided in the United States. The more time the immigrant has in the settlement country, the more information and experience he or she has about that country and how to interact in it. Because there might be more than one location of settlement, future research should include as many duration of settlement response spaces as necessary.
The trajectory factors I have outlined are not exhaustive. Researchers using this concept may find additional relevant factors, or some of the ones presented unnecessary. Whatever the situation, the concept of trajectory will be most beneficial to research if used and revised.

Although the trajectory of an immigrant plays an important role, it does not solely define the immigration experience. Therefore, the diversity of immigration experiences cannot be fully understood by simply collecting trajectory data. Furthermore, if immigration trajectories are diverse, then perhaps so are the meanings attached to those trajectories. In the next section, I present my definition of the concept of agency, the decision-making and negotiation power that immigrants develop.

4.2 Agency

Scholarship on immigrant incorporation and identity formation dominated by the assimilation and acculturation literature failed to explicitly address the agency of immigrant students. The absence of the discussion of agency (inadvertently) presents an image of disadvantaged powerless immigrant youth. Consequently, assimilation and acculturation have been presented as processes that happen to immigrants, instead of strategies negotiated by them.

I define agency as the power immigrants develop from membership in stigmatized social groups to make decisions and negotiate strategies of incorporation and identity. In the current United States political climate (and as it has always been constructed in immigration discourse), being an immigrant is synonymous with being “alien,” “illegal,” “terrorist.” Thus, students labeled as immigrant have to learn to negotiate the challenges
and opportunities posed by this stigmatized social identity. It is precisely from the challenging position of being immigrant that immigrant youth develop a sense of agency – the power to make decisions and negotiate their incorporation and identity in the host country. It is precisely from living challenging experiences that immigrant youth learn to be resilient, to construct spaces of resistance against the pitiful indicators of their “disadvantaged” “powerless” existence, and from these spaces, to create hope.

This thesis uses the concept of *agency* to learn about the reasons why immigrant youth incorporate using the strategies that they do, and to challenge the powerless image of immigrant youth by emphasizing their power to make decisions and negotiate their incorporation and identity in the host country.

### 4.3 Research Instruments

To answer the three questions and hypotheses about trajectory and agency I posited in the introduction chapter, I used two research instruments: a survey questionnaire and narrative-style, semi-structured interviews, each designed specifically to address trajectory and agency, respectively.

1) **Student Trajectory Questionnaire**

The concept of trajectory collects data about the immigration trip that can be statistically analyzed and correlated to strategies of incorporation and identity. To collect this data in large numbers and conduct such analysis, a survey questionnaire is the most suitable research instrument. The *Student Trajectory Questionnaire* was designed to collect quantitative trajectory information and measure the relations between trajectory, strategies of incorporation, and identity. The questionnaire included three types of
questions: Trajectory Questions, Strategies of Incorporation Questions based on language and activities, and Identity Questions referencing UnitedStatesian national symbols. Please see Appendix A for a complete version of the Student Trajectory Questionnaire.

**Measures**

To measure trajectory, the questionnaire asked one question per trajectory factor. Thus, allowing me to study the trajectory trends of students at New Life High School, and to correlate trajectory factors with language use, activities, and identity.

Language use and involvement in activities (leisure, school, community, etc.), were considered measures of incorporation strategies. For language, students answered questions about the languages they speak with family, friends, and at school. I considered predominant use of English to be an assimilation/acculturation strategy, predominant use of Spanish an adversarial/retention strategy, and equal use of both languages a bicultural strategy.

In respect to involvement in activities, students were asked to list, in order of importance, all the activities in which they participate (about ten spaces were provided). The instructions made it clear to include all leisure, church, community service, job, sports, academic, household – related activities. *Assimilation/acculturation activities* were defined as activities that are stereotypically associated with U.S. culture and identity; for example, football, prom committee, and JROTC (Junior Reserve Officer Training Corp). On the other hand, *adversarial/retention activities* were defined as activities stereotypically associated with Mexican culture and identity; for instance, soccer, Spanish club, and *folklorico* (traditional Mexican dance). Finally, *bicultural*
activities are those that combine aspects of both UnitedStatesian and Mexican culture and identity; for example, estudiantina. Estudiantina is a music club that teaches students to play the mandolin, guitar, and other instruments found in traditional Mexican music; however, estudiantina clubs are not typical in Mexico, making it an entirely bicultural activity. Because bicultural activities are not so easy to identify, I expanded the meaning of bicultural activity to include students who engaged in both assimilation/acculturation and adversarial/retention activities.

Finally, as a measure of identity, participants were asked to rate their agreement or disagreement with several statements about their national identity. Using a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being “strongly disagree,” 2 “somewhat disagree,” 3 “indifferent,” 4 “somewhat agree,” and 5 “strongly agree,” students rated their sense of identification with the U.S. flag, Star Spangled Banner, Pledge of Allegiance, as American15, and as Bicultural.

Variables

Trajectory Questions operate as the independent variable, while Strategies of Incorporation and Identity Questions function as the dependent variables. The questionnaire was designed to answer the first two questions posited in the introductory chapter:

1. Does trajectory influence the strategies of incorporation and identity of immigrant students (at New Life High School)?

2. How do immigrant students incorporate into society (New Life)?

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15 In the survey, I used the term American so as to not confuse students with my use of the term UnitedStatesian.
By running correlations between the independent variables (trajectory factors) and the dependent variables (strategies of incorporation and identity), I will be able to analyze if in fact trajectory influences strategies of incorporation and identity, and how it influences incorporation. Given these questions, I theorize:

Theory #1: Trajectory does influence the strategies of incorporation and identity of immigrant youth.

However, the interaction between trajectory and agency cannot be fully understood by simply collecting trajectory data. Close-ended questionnaire answers do not provide the “whys” of a student’s negotiation and decision making process, and do not address the agency of immigrant youth. Thus, data collection was triangulated by conducting interviews that explore the role of agency in strategies of incorporation and identity development.

2) Narrative Semi-Structured Interviews

Narrative-style, semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to answer the “whys” that statistical analysis could not, and explore the agency of immigrant youth. Thus, the interviews focused on answering the last two questions:

2. How do immigrant students incorporate into society (New Life)?

3. What is the role of agency in the identity development of immigrant youth (at New Life High School)?

Previous immigrant identity research does not explicitly recognize the agency of immigrant youth. Researchers present incorporation and identity theories as processes that happen to immigrants, instead of strategies negotiated by immigrants. In this thesis, I
seek to explicitly recognize the *agency*, the decision-making and negotiation power of immigrant youth; therefore, I theorize:

**Theory #2**: Immigrant youth incorporate by constantly negotiating strategies of incorporation and identity.

**Theory #3**: Precisely because of membership in a stigmatized social group, immigrant youth develop agency - the power to make decisions and negotiate – thus agency is an important component of the immigrant youth identity.

*Interview Styles*

The narrative interview style was selected as the principal method for conducting interviews. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002), the “narrative [can be used] as a way of studying people’s identity work and conflicts in their self representations” (p. 180). In order to understand the meaning of the immigration experience in the larger context of the student’s life, a general knowledge of the life of the participant is necessary. The narrative style encourages the participant to narrate their life from their own perspective allowing the elements most important to the participant to emerge. However, because one of the objectives for conducting interviews was to explore the role of agency, the interviews were also semi-structured. While allowing the interviewee to narrate his/her story, I used the themes the student focused on to also pose guiding questions about agency and identity. Because I expected each interview to be different, I did not have a script with questions, but I have created a list of questions asked during the interviews. Please find a list of *Interview Guiding Questions* in Appendix B.

The combination of narrative and semi-structured styles offered an effective approach for a holistic analysis of the student’s immigration experience, incorporation, identity, and his or her agency from their own perspective.
4.4 The Research Site Influence

1) External Validity

Although not all cities in the Rio Grande Valley are the same, the transnational characteristics of the area allow for a general level of similarity in the region and contributes to the external validity of the study. All four counties in the valley have a well-established Mexican population, an agricultural-NAFTA-based economy, and a continuous flow of immigrants. Across the RGV, being fluent in English and Spanish is an expected linguistic ability, and Friday night high school football is the entertainment activity of choice. Because of the area’s proximity to the border, all schools have a continuous influx of immigrant students as demonstrated by the percentage of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students enrolled in RGV schools. In the Progreso Independent School District, located two miles from the border with Mexico, 51.8% of students enrolled are considered LEP, while in the Sharyland Independent School District, only 23.8% of the students are considered LEP (Academic Excellence Indicator System Summary Report, 2006; Progreso Independent School District, 2006).

The socio-economic status of immigrant students also varies depending on the school district. For example, 92.4% of students enrolled in the Progreso Independent School District (ISD) are considered economically disadvantaged, while only 55.4% of students enrolled in the Sharyland ISD are considered economically disadvantaged. The demographic make-up of schools also varies across the valley. While Progreso ISD is composed of 99.8% Hispanic students and only .2% White students, Sharyland ISD is

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16 Limited English Proficient is the official term schools in South Texas use to refer to students enrolled in bilingual education programs or English as a Second Language classes.
composed of 85.4% of Hispanic students and 11.3% of White students (Academic Excellence Indicator System Summary Report, 2006; Progreso Independent School District, 2006). Taking into consideration the differences and similarities in immigration and diversity in socio-economic and ethnic characteristics of schools in the area, students at New Life High School were chosen as an average sample of students across the Rio Grande Valley.

2) Sample Size

A total of 94 students from New Life High School participated in the study. 85 students answered the Student Trajectory Questionnaire, and 9 students participated in an in-depth narrative semi-structured style interview.

3) Participant Selection

Based on Suarez-Orozco’s styles of coping, my criticisms, and the concept of trajectory, I created the Incorporation Typologies outlined below, and used them to select 9 student interviewees.

![Figure 4.1: Incorporation Typologies](image-url)
Incorporation Typologies are not hypotheses of student identity, but instead serve as ideal types of the diversity of trajectories and the complexity of strategies of incorporation. I paid particular attention to gender and ideal types in order to select a gender-balanced, diverse group of interviewees. During my first stay at the research site from August to December of 2006, I identified students that reflect a diversity of trajectories and the diversity in the general student body of New Life High School. However, I interviewed all participants during my second stay in April 2007. Although I had originally decided to interview 10 students to achieve gender balance, I was unable to obtain an interview with one of the participants. Each participant was interviewed once, with each interview lasting approximately 1 hour. Interviews were conducted in Spanish, English, and Spanglish, and sometimes alternating between the three, depending on the comfort of each participant. To protect the safety of the interviewees, questions about the legal status were omitted from the interview; however, some students mentioned this aspect of their experience. All interviews were voice-recorded and transcribed. Because trajectory posits special concerns about the safety of participants, I will discuss the selection of questionnaire participants in the Special Concerns section.

4.5 Special Concerns

1) Undocumented Students, Safety, Anonymity, and Honesty

A central factor in the concept of trajectory is the experience of undocumented immigrants. Because disclosing trajectory information can pose serious legal risks, the safety and anonymity of participants was paramount in the collection of data. Furthermore, because of these risks, few individuals are likely to participate or be honest
in their responses if the process is not anonymous. To address safety, anonymity, and honesty concerns, participation in the questionnaire process was designed to be entirely anonymous.

The relationships I established with “gatekeepers”: school administrators, faculty, and staff during my first stay in the research site, allowed me to simply get to work during my second stay in April. During my second stay – the data collection stay – I visited 10 randomly selected English classes (because all students take an English class), and 2 deliberately selected ESL (English as a Second Language) classes, where prospective student participants could learn about the research project. Students interested in participating were given a take-home questionnaire package containing two parent consent forms, two student assent forms, a questionnaire, and a plain return envelope. Students were asked to take the package home, discuss their possible participation with their parents, and decide, in the comfort and privacy of their home to participate or not. Students were also asked to return to their respective teachers the completed questionnaire, a copy of the parent consent form, and a copy of the student assent form sealed inside the return envelope. Instructions were attached to the questionnaire packets so students could know how to proceed if interested in participating. Although this process is not the most effective in securing student participation (as having students fill out the questionnaire during class time would have been), its anonymity allowed for the collection of trajectory data without jeopardizing the safety of the participants (especially undocumented students) and created a comfortable environment where they could provide honest answers.
2) **Underage Participants**

Conducting research with high school students who could potentially be minors posited specific concerns about the consent for participation. Because minors are not legally accountable for themselves, consent from their parents or legal guardian was a requisite for participation. However, the Internal Review Board of Ohio University agreed that the anonymity of students was paramount in the data collection process, and granted permission to wave parent signatures. Waving parent signatures posited a special concern for the participation of underage students. To address this conflict, during my visits to the classes, I stressed the importance of discussing participation with parents and obtaining verbal permission from parents *before* actually answering the questionnaire. This important issue was also the first step on the instructions attached to the questionnaire packages. Although these procedures are not the best method for securing parental consent, they secure the anonymity of the participant.

3) **Talking About Identity**

The concept of identity could be challenging to understand. Thus, in order to have students talk about their identity without having to use academic language and explain theories of identity, I simply asked interviewees the following question: Who are you? Varying on their responses, I posed guiding questions asking students to expand on certain topics they discussed. To remain consistent with the survey collection of data, I asked students about their identity in relation to language use, engagement in activities, and U.S. national symbols, but attempted to remain within the topics interviewees themselves discussed.
To recap, the concepts of trajectory and agency presented and used in this study helped me design research strategies that would test their influence on the identity development and incorporation of immigrant youth. By conducting a survey questionnaire focused on the immigration trip, I was able to address the diversity of immigrant experiences I initially observed via my own immigration experience. By conducting narrative interviews, I was able to explicitly highlight the power immigrant youth have in deciding and negotiating their incorporation into the host country. I hope that combining a quantitative-research strategy with a qualitative-research strategy resulted in a holistic approach to the study immigrant incorporation and identity development that addresses the complexity of the subjects.
CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS

In this chapter I present the results derived from the analysis of the questionnaire data and interview transcripts. Because the nature of each analysis is different, one is quantitative and the other is qualitative, I present them separately. First, I present the results of the statistical analysis of trajectory based on crosstabulations and correlations between the independent variables (trajectory factors) and dependent variables (strategies of incorporation and identity). Secondly, I present the results of the analysis of the interview transcripts by providing short bios of the interviewees and describing how each falls within the outlined ideal types of immigrant identity previously. I conclude this chapter by discussing how the statistical results and the interviews complement each other, which introduces the themes addressed in the following chapter.

5.1 Statistical Analysis of Trajectory

The Student Trajectory Questionnaire was designed to measure the influence of trajectory on the strategies of incorporation and identity of students at New Life High School. The analysis of the data collected with this research strategy aims to answer the following questions:

Does trajectory influence the strategies and identity of immigrant students at New Life High School?

How do immigrant students identify and incorporate into New Life High School?

In order to answer the first question, crosstabulations were performed using SPSS. Crosstabulations analyze group differences within the independent variables (trajectory factors) in relation to the dependent variables (strategies of incorporation and identity). A
statistically significant difference between two groups within a sample is assumed to be generalizable to the entire population. In this case, the difference between two groups means that trajectory influences strategies of incorporation and identity differently. In order to expand on the “how” of the second question correlations were performed between the factors of trajectory and the strategies of incorporation and identity. Correlations analyze the relationship between two variables, the strength of the relationship, and whether the relationship is positive (variables move in the same direction) or negative (variables move in opposite directions). Interpretation of the correlation results was guided by my modified version of Incorporation Typologies based on the Styles of Coping proposed by Suarez-Orozco (2000):

- **Assimilation / Acculturation** – the student “mimics the dominant group and may attempt to join it, leaving their own ethnic groups behind” (p. 29).
- **Adversarial / Retention** – is characterized by rejection of the institutions of the dominant culture (p. 30), or retention of the traditions of home culture.
- **Bicultural** – students “emerge as ‘cultural brokers’ mediating the often conflicting cultural currents of home culture and host culture” (p. 31). Bicultural can be negotiating two separate cultures successfully, or interacting in the blending of two cultures.

The ideal types provided a framework from which I could analyze how trajectory influences incorporation strategies and identity formation. The use of language (at home, in school, and with friends) and the kinds of activities (assimilation/acculturation, adversarial/retention, bicultural) students engage in were analyzed as strategies of incorporation, and students’ agreement or disagreement with statements about U.S. national symbols was analyzed as a measure of identity.
1) **Evaluation of Language Use, Activities, and Identity**

Predominant English use, participation in stereotypically UnitedStatesian activities, and strong identification with U.S. national symbols were considered to be indicative of assimilation/acculturation strategies and identity. Similarly, predominant Spanish use, participation in stereotypically Mexican activities, and weak identification with U.S. national symbols were considered to be indicative of adversarial/retention strategies and identity. However, evaluation of bicultural strategies and identity is not as clear cut as the previous ideal types. Equal use of both English and Spanish, participation in stereotypically UnitedStatesian and Mexican activities, and strong identification with bicultural identity, and UnitedStatesian national symbols were considered indicative of bicultural strategies and identity.

5.2 **Trajectory Results**

Out of the 150 surveys distributed, 85 completed surveys were returned. Sixty-three point five percent (54) of the participants were female, 34.1% (29) were 17 years old, 68.2% (58) identified as Hispanic, 34.1% (29) were high school juniors, 34.1% (29) reported an annual parental income of $10,000–30,000, 69.4% (59) were born in the United States, and 21.2% (18) were born in Mexico.
## Table 5.1. Summary of Demographic Results

**Source:** From primary data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Majority</th>
<th>% of total</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>63.5%</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>18 yrs or more</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17yrs</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16yrs</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15yrs or less</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>68.2%</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>United Statesian</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Seniors</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Juniors</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sophomores</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frosh</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Income</td>
<td>above $50,000</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$30,000-$50,000</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$10,000-$30,000</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>below $10,000</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
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<td>11.8%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country of birth</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>69.4%</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1) **Crosstabulations**

After running crosstabulations, significant differences between groups were found for every single factor of trajectory in relation to the strategies of incorporation and identity. The factors of trajectory and their respective groups measured in this study are: country of birth (Mexico, United States), duration of travel (not applicable, 1 day or less, 1 week or less, 1 month or less, more than 1 month), method of entry (not applicable, documented, undocumented), legal status (not applicable, documented, undocumented), age at entry (not applicable, 0-5 years, 5-12 years, 13-16 years, 17 or older), and duration of settlement (less than a year, 1-5 years, 5-10 years, 10 years or more, not applicable).
Since the only research site is New Life High School, in this study there is only one location of settlement, New Life, Texas.

*Trajectory Factors and Language Use*

The groups within country of birth, travel duration, entry method, entry age, entry status, current status, and settlement duration all differ significantly in relation to languages spoken at home, in school, and with friends. This means that depending where students were born, how long they traveled, how they entered the U.S., how old they were at the time of entry, what their legal status was when they entered, what their current legal status is, and how long they have lived in this country, students speak Spanish, English, or Spanish and English to their family, teachers, and friends. For example, as illustrated in Figures 5.1 and 5.2, students born in Mexico speak Spanish at home and with friends more than 50% of the time, while students born in the United States speak English at home and with friends more than 50% of the time. However, both groups speak English more than 50% of the time at school. And although, most of students born in Mexico speak Spanish only, most students born in the U.S. speak English and Spanish.
Figure 5.1: Language Use by Mexico-Born Students
Source: From primary data

Figure 5.2: Language Use by United States-Born Students
Source: From primary data

Trajectory Factors and Activities

All trajectory factors differ significantly in relation to assimilation/acculturation and adversarial/retention activities, but travel duration differs significantly in relation to assimilation/acculturation, adversarial/rejection, and bicultural activities. This means that depending where students were born, how they entered the U.S., how old they were at the
time of entry, what their legal status was when they entered, what their current legal status is, and how long they have lived in this country, students engage in assimilation/acculturation or adversarial/rejection activities. For example, as Figure 5.3 shows, most students who are currently undocumented engage in adversarial/retention activities, while the majority of students who are documented, or whose status is “not applicable” (which means that either they are documented or did not answer the question) engage in assimilation/acculturation activities.

![Figure 5.3: Activities by Current Legal Status
Source: From primary data](image)

*Trajectory Factors and Identity*

While only age at entry and settlement duration differ significantly in relation to Bicultural identity, all factors (except travel duration) differ significantly in relation to UnitedStatesian identity. For instance, Figure 5.4 shows that most students who entered at a young age consider themselves bicultural, while Figure 5.5 shows that most of the students born in the United States consider themselves UnitedStatesian. This confirms the
hypothesis that depending on the trajectory of each student, she or he will strongly agree or strongly disagree with their sense of UnitedStatesian identity in relation to the Star Spangled Banner, the U.S. Flag, and Pledge of Allegiance.

**Figure 5.4: Bicultural Identity by Age of Entry**  
Source: From primary data

**Figure 5.5: UnitedStatesian Identity by Country of Birth**  
Source: From primary data
The differences between the groups within the trajectory factors indicate that there is not one trajectory, but several trajectories that can be experienced differently since not all respondents speak the same language, engage in the same activities, or identify in the same manner.

2) Correlations

Correlations measure the relationship between two variables, the relationship’s strength, and whether the variables change together positively (in the same direction) or negatively (in opposite directions). Correlations were performed between the factors of trajectory, strategies of incorporation, and identity variables. In an attempt to present statistically significant correlations in an easy-to-understand manner, I address language use, activities, and identity separately, and list the trajectory factors with which it has a significant relationship.

*Trajectory Factors and Language Use*

Language use in general, as measured by the languages the student speaks, at home, in school, and with friends, has significant negative relationship with the following factors: country of birth, travel duration, age at entry, status at entry, and current status. This means that students born in Mexico, who traveled for longer periods, were undocumented at the time of entry, and are currently undocumented speak more Spanish than students who were born in the United States, traveled less time, were younger and documented at the time of entry, and are currently documented speak more English. However, language use ins positive correlated with settlement duration, meaning that the longer the student
has lived in the United States, the more he/she speaks English at home, in school, and with friends.

*Trajectory Factors and Activities*

Country of birth, travel duration, age at entry, status at entry, and current status have a significant negative relationship with activities in general (assimilation/acculturation, adversarial/retention, bicultural). Thus, students born in Mexico, who traveled more time, were undocumented at the time of entry, and are currently undocumented, tend to engage more in adversarial/retention activities, while students born in the U.S., who traveled less time, entered at a young age, were documented at the time of entry and are currently documented tend to engage in assimilation/acculturation and bicultural activities. Similarly as in language use, activities are positively correlated with settlement duration; thus, students who have lived longer in the United States, tend to engage more in assimilation/acculturation activities.

*Trajectory Factors and Identity*

Country of birth, age at entry, status at entry, and current status have a significant negative relationship with identity in general (as measured by the association of students to the U.S. flag, Star Spangled Banner, Pledge of Allegiance, to being UnitedStatesian and being Bicultural). This means that students born in Mexico, who were undocumented at the time of entry, and are currently undocumented identify less with the U.S. national symbols and being UnitedStatesian or Bicultural, while students who were born in the United States, entered at a younger age, were documented at the time of entry and are currently documented tend to identify more with U.S. national symbols and as being
UnitedStatesian. Finally, the only positive relationship of identity is with settlement duration meaning that the longer the student lives in the United States, the more he/she identifies with U.S. national symbols and as UnitedStatesian.

5.3 Interviews

Over the period of two weeks, I conducted nine interviews with students from New Life High School. All interviews were conducted using a narrative-style, semi-structured method, audio recorded, and transcribed. In this section, I introduce the interviewees and their self-defined identity in short bios by separating them into two groups: those born in Mexico, and those born in the United States. In the following section, using the interview transcripts, I describe the identity of interviewees as assimilation/acculturation, adversarial/rejection, or bicultural. To protect the identity and anonymity of all interviewees, I have changed their names. Because the scholarly concept of identity could be challenging to understand for high school students, all interviewees answered the following question: *Who are you?*

1) **Born In Mexico**

As the statistical analysis indicated, students born in México are more likely to adopt adversarial/retention incorporation strategies and identity styles. The interviews also support this finding since all the interviewees born in México display adversarial/retention characteristics. However, not all identify as Mexican.

*Maria*

Maria was born in México, but she has lived in South Texas since her parents decided to move when she was three years old. Her family was able to enter the U.S. legally thanks
to a *tarjeta local*\(^{17}\), a local visa, that later expired and left the family living illegally. Her family experienced great economic and emotional difficulty in this country, until her father began working with a Baptist church and became a pastor. Faith is the most important aspect in Maria’s life. As a self-described pastor’s daughter, she is very conscious and careful of her image. She is currently a senior in high school and faces the challenge of not being able to continue a college career due to her undocumented status. Nevertheless, Maria is full of energy, wit and aspirations, and devotes her time to activities in her church. Our conversations took place mostly in Spanish and Spanglish. Maria explicitly stated that she did not belong in México or the U.S. She identified as being “from another world,” “*yo pertenezco en otro mundo.*”

*Esperanza & Reyna*

Esperanza and Reyna are sisters born and raised in México until their mother decided to move to the U.S. when they were 10 and 11 years old, respectively. Their mother made that decision in order to secure their education. Esperanza and Reyna were also able to immigrate legally thanks to a *tarjeta local* which they still use for monthly weekend-long visits to México. However, their visa will soon expire leaving them without a choice for renewal. Although their situation is grim, their contagious smiles do not fade away, and they do not fail to find something good in everything. Reyna is a senior in high school this year and faces the same challenge as Maria to continue a college education. Esperanza will be a senior next year, and hopes that her sister’s experience helps her understand how to better navigate the higher education system. The interview was

\(^{17}\) *Tarjeta local* is a local visa designed to enhance commerce in the border area. Local Mexican citizens (living in México) can qualify for this visa if they can prove that they will return to their home no later than 30 days after their entry. The visa allows permission to travel only within a limited area.
conducted mainly in Spanish, with Esperanza, the youngest, sprinkling some Spanglish. Esperanza and Reyna identified as “Mexicanas,” and if they were documented, they would be “Mexicanas con documentos,” “Mexicans with documents.”

Juan

Juan was born and raised in México until his family relocated to the U.S. when he was five years old. As with the other immigrant students, his family was able to immigrate legally thanks to a tarjeta local. Having a visa local has allowed Juan to regularly visit México during the weekends, where he claims to “feel free.” Juan works at various “flea markets” around the area to help support his family since none of them can have a legal job. As a graduating senior, Juan also faces the challenge of having to halt his education due to his undocumented status. This situation makes Juan feel hopeless at times, but he manages to gather strength from his dedication to soccer, whether playing for his high school varsity team or with friends. Our conversation took place entirely in English. Juan identified as “Mexican,” and if he was documented he would still be “Mexican.”

2) Born in the United States

The questionnaire results also indicated that students born in the U.S. are more likely to identify as UnitedStatesian or bicultural. Indeed all the interviewees born in the U.S. display UnitedStatesian and bicultural strategies of incorporation and identity, but not all identify as such.

Sofia

Sofia is a second-generation Mexican immigrant since her parents immigrated illegally from México at an adolescent age looking for work in order to help sustain their families
in their respective rural towns. Sofia was born and raised in Houston until she was five years old, when her parents decided to move to South Texas and settled in New Life. Her parents eventually obtained residency and were able to visit México whenever they wished. Thus, Sofia grew up speaking Spanish and frequently visiting her family in México. Sofia did not learn English until she moved to South Texas, where she was stigmatized by classmates and teachers for not speaking English. Far from discouraging her, this experience along with the close guidance of her mother, has helped Sofia become the driven, determined, positive, and successful young lady she is today. Sofia is a member of New Life’s varsity volleyball, softball and track teams; she is active in student government, a leader in community organizations, and has been recognized numerously for her academic performance. The interview was conducted mostly in English and Spanglish. Sofia identified as having a “diverse identity, kind of split into two” and as a “Mexican from la raza.”

Austin

Austin was born and raised in New Life, Texas until his mother decided to relocate the family to Michigan for about a year when he was in 9th grade. Both his parents were born and raised in South Texas, making his grandparents the first to immigrate to the U.S, and him a third-generation Mexican immigrant. While in Michigan, Austin was automatically placed in English as a Second Language classes (to help him improve his English skills) for being Hispanic. Although this experience bothered him and forced him to think about his identity, Austin managed to flip this discriminatory assumption by benefiting from his

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18 The phrase “la raza” refers to the idea of the cosmic race that emerged out of the Chicano Movement in the 1960s.
image as *the* Spanish speaker in school. Austin’s family eventually returned to New Life, where he pursued his dream of playing with the New Life H.S. varsity football team (amongst the top in the Rio Grande Valley). Austin is currently a senior and looks forward to begin his college career at the local university. Our conversation took place exclusively in English. When asked who he was, Austin identified with New Life’s mascot and replied: “well…of course I’m a Longhorn.”

**Fernando**

Fernando was born and raised in South Texas. His parents were also born and raised in South Texas, and his grandparents were the first to immigrate to the United States, making him third-generation Mexican immigrant. Fernando is the Battalion Commander (highest position) for the Junior Reserved Officer Training Corps (JROTC) program in New Life High School. He is looking forward to beginning his college career at a university a few hours away from home. Fernando aspires to be an FBI or border patrol agent to prevent drug traffic. Although his mother deliberately taught him English only as a child so he would not struggle in school the way she did, he is now aware that speaking Spanish would help him further his career. Our conversation took place completely in English. Fernando identified as “Mexican American” but sees these two identities as separate “Mexican” and “American,” and when asked who he is, he responded: “I am me.”

**Gracie**

Gracie was born and raised in a very small rural town close to New Life, Texas. Although she recognizes her heritage as an immigrant, Gracie struggled to say she was third-
generation immigrant. Gracie’s name is actually Graciela, a common Spanish name; however, in the RGV many people choose to Anglicize their name. Gracie is passionate about theater and has participated in plays at New Life H.S. landing leading roles. She will be graduating from high school this spring and will begin college in a few months. Her main concern about this next step in her life is hurting her parents with the news that she is going out-of-state for college. The interview was conducted exclusively in English. Gracie identified as an “everyday, average, female teenager” and as a “Mexican-American,” but only after talking about her experience of applying for college scholarships.

_Santana_

Santana was born and raised in South Texas. In a “briefing” conversation I had with his mother, she identified as a second-generation Mexican immigrant which makes him third generation. Santana is an extremely talented drummer. His experience inside and outside of high school is mainly composed of his love for music and drumming. Through his involvement in music, he has had the opportunity to learn about different cultures and travel across the country. He is currently a junior in high school, but looks forward to graduating next year and beginning his college career. He aspires to be a music professor. Our conversation took place exclusively in English. However, as Santana pointed out, his speech does not include what he calls “Valleyisms” or “high vocal inflections at the end of a sentence.” When asked who he was, Santana identified as a “dude that is human.”
5.4 Interview Results

Although some of the interviewees can be classified as adversarial/retention, bicultural, or assimilation/acculturation, their own definitions about their identity blurs these styles.

In this section, I analyze and present the answers to this question consistent with my modified version of Suarez-Orozco’s styles of coping and identity.

1) Adversarial / Retention

Juan, Reyna and Esperanza are the most adversarial/retention of the group as established by their own definitions. However, their language use challenges their claim. For example, Juan spoke in English only and Esperanza often spoke in Spanglish. Even though their actions and words appear contradictory, it is important to understand the root of their self definition. When asked why she considers herself a Mexican, Reyna answered:

I consider myself Mexican because that is where I have received an education without being discriminated...I can receive aid without a social security number, and I know that people won’t discriminate against me the way people do it here, especially in a classroom.

Similarly, Esperanza expressed a sentiment of injustice tied to her identity:

at any moment that I return to Mexico...I won’t be discriminated against...I’m not going to be labeled with a name or a number or a thing, I’m going to be treated like a person, I’m going to have my rights, as a Mexican, which I do not have here. I think that’s why I consider myself a Mexican because here, I don’t have the benefits, I don’t have that...America doesn’t give me the confidence that I need to keep on going most of the time...America doesn’t consider me a person, a citizen. And México does. In México, I am a citizen.

Juan echoed:
Even if I were to get my residency or my citizenship here, I would be a Mexican because I was born in México, I was raised in México for the first part of my life. Mexico is my home. Most of my family lives in México, so it doesn’t really matter how many years I live here, my heart’s over there. When I am there, I feel free.

The rejection, neglect, and injustice that Juan, Reyna, and Esperanza have experienced due to their undocumented status, creates a wall between their identity and the United States. Thus, their experience of discrimination in the U.S., and memories of citizenship privileges, family, and civil rights in Mexico influence their decision to deliberately identify as Mexican.

2) Bicultural

Although Gracie and Fernando claimed to be bicultural, they could not explain clearly what that means (to them) because it does not seem to be a salient part of their identity. Nevertheless, it is an identity that expresses in part who they are and how they interact in the world. For Gracie, biculturalism was also the answer to scholarship essay questions:

I went to the scholarships that aimed for Latinas and Mexican-Americans because you have more chances of getting scholarship money, and I don’t…I think I’ve learned, but have not learned completely and I don’t think I’ll learn completely until I go to college because I’ll be around people who are not Mexican-American and I think after college I will learn completely what it means to be a Mexican-American.

Fernando also seemed to be confused about what being Mexican-American means to him:

I’m considered Mexican-American, I’m both. I still go to my Mexican side, but I’m also American, I live with these rights, I’m proud of both sides…but we do want to be more American than we
want to be Mexican because of how it is down there [in México]. American traditions are like the mall, material things...mainly that would be American stuff and the Mexican side would be more family and stuff like that...I'm not sure how to explain it.

Because of their language use (English only) and activities (assimilation/acculturation), Gracie and Fernando’s seem to fit more an assimilation/acculturation style identity. However, their responses reflect a stage of searching for a relation to their ancestors and questioning how that impacts their identity. While Gracie and Fernando struggle with defining their identity, Sofía has a quick answer for what it means to be Mexican, UnitedStatesian, and Mexican-American.

When you’re Mexican you’re from the *raza* (laughs). Well, you just have so much heritage in you, it’s like being proud of who you are, like a lot of people here don’t even speak Spanish, I mean, how can you say you are Mexican and you don’t know your own language? You need to know Spanish because that’s who you are, off the bat. You should know how to make *tortillas* (laughs). But basically if you’re Mexican, the tradition is, you should get married young, you cook, you clean the house, and then you don’t leave the house unless your husband goes with you, that’s the Mexican tradition. That’s why here we mix it up with American. (laughs) Like my mom works and my dad lets us [Sofía and her sister] go out and have boyfriends. I kind of have a diverse identity, because I’m split into two, like two different cultures, the U.S. and México, because my parents are from over there and I was raised here in the United States, and although I was raised here I feel like I was raised in México because we would spend a lot of time over there because my parents missed it so we would travel a lot to México growing up.

What is the difference between Sofía’s, Gracie’s, and Fernando’s biculturalism? Gracie and Fernando did not enjoy frequent travels to México while Sofía constantly engaged in both countries. In addition, Gracie’s and Fernando’s parents did not speak to them in Spanish or expressed positive connections for Mexico and Mexican identity. This
suggests that the more time the immigrants live in the United States, the less they identify with the culture of their ancestors. Although the factor of duration of settlement is central in these examples, the students exercised agency by strategically using Mexican identity to their benefit. Gracie received scholarships for Mexican-Americans, and Fernando’s Spanish ability makes him an excellent candidate for the FBI or Border Patrol.

5.5 Complementing Each Other: Combined Trajectory and Interview Results

In this section, I address how the statistical results of trajectory and the results from the analysis of the interview transcripts complement each other to provide a more holistic understanding of immigrant incorporation and identity based on the three ideal types.

1) Assimilation / Acculturation Ideal Type

According to the statistical results, the trajectory factors that are most likely to lead to assimilation/acculturation strategies of incorporation and identity style are: country of birth, duration of travel, age at entry, status at entry, current status, and duration of settlement. Students who: were born in the United States, traveled for a short period of time, were young at the time of entry, were documented at the time of entry, are currently documented, and have lived in the U.S. for a long time, are more likely to employ assimilation/acculturation strategies and engage in an assimilation/acculturation identity style. The interviews support these findings since Sofia, Austin, Fernando, Gracie, and Santana, students who have lived their entire lives in the United States, 19 I consider students born and raised in the United States to have a trajectory composed solely by the country of birth. Although other trajectory factors would not apply to U.S.-born immigrants, they can be deducted from their citizenship.
displayed assimilation/acculturation strategies of incorporation such as predominantly speaking English during the interview, and participating in stereotypically UnitedStatesian activities. However, it is important to highlight that none of the interviewees considered themselves solely UnitedStatesian. Although Austin, and Gracie may have struggled to talk about their biculturalism (Mexican-American) and Santana outright divorced himself from ethnicity (as it is the case with the “normalization” of UnitedStatesian culture and identity), neither of them considered themselves solely UnitedStatesian. This finding provides support for my argument about incorporation and identity beyond assimilation and acculturation, and posits a discussion on biculturalism that will be addressed in the bicultural ideal type section.

2) Adversarial / Retention Ideal Type

The data shows that the trajectory factors most likely to lead to adversarial/retention strategies identity style are: Country of birth, age at entry, status at entry, and current status. Students who: were born in México, entered the United States at an older age, were undocumented at the time of entry, and are currently undocumented, are more likely to engage in adversarial/retention strategies and identity style. If with time and experience, individuals develop a more solid concept of identity, it makes sense that the older an individual immigrates, the more challenging it will be to renounce that concept, “fit in” a new place, and engage in a new life style. Keeping in mind that not all immigrants want to fit in, some immigrants may decide to deliberately reject the host culture by using adversarial strategies of incorporation. This decision is logical especially if the individual is stigmatized and ostracized from participation in the host society due to
structural forces; for example, being undocumented. These results are supported by Reyna, Esperanza, and Juan, three of the Mexico-born interviewees who deliberately identify as Mexican (in spite of their predominant use of English) as a result of experiencing discrimination and having limited opportunities to interact in the United States.

However, the frame for adversarial can be shifted to retention. As described by Suarez-Orozco, an adversarial identity has a negative connotation of the immigrant’s rejection of the host culture. If instead of focusing on the rejection of the host culture, the focus is shifted to retention of home culture, an adversarial identity would connote a positive self-image and attachment of the immigrant’s home culture. Thus, students engaging in stereotypically Mexican strategies would not be necessarily rejecting the United States culture, but retaining their Mexican culture. They could still be welcoming of the host culture, but without having to abandon their home culture. For an immigrant (a stigmatized social identity in this country), a way to maintain a support network and obtain approval might be through engagement in adversarial/retention activities, which are not necessarily done in opposition to the host culture. This interpretation is supported by Maria’s case. While she has lived in the U.S. since a child and speaks English fluently, Maria mentioned that she chose friends who spoke Spanish only and played soccer precisely because she identified with those activities, felt comfortable and supported with her Spanish-speaking friends.
3) **Bicultural Ideal Type**

According to the data, only three factors are influential in the choice of bicultural strategies and adoption of a bicultural identity: Country of birth, age at entry, and current status. Students who: were born in the U.S., were older at the time of entry, and are currently documented, are most likely to use bicultural strategies of incorporation and identify in a bicultural style. Being born in the U.S. automatically gives students documented status, which encourages full participation in society and identification with national symbols. However, students who were born in the U.S., but lived in another country for an extended period of time, or were raised with strong ties to their ancestor’s culture, might not want to renounce their ancestral culture and identity. Thus, their structurally favorable position (citizenship) facilitates the adoption of a bicultural identity that allows them to enjoy the best of both worlds. This interpretation is supported by most participants since 54.1% “strongly agreed,” and 18.8% “somewhat agreed” with considering themselves bicultural (making a total of 72.9% students who agreed, at some level, with being bicultural). The interviewee that exemplifies this strategy and identity style is Sofia. Having been born in the United States, but raised speaking Spanish and with several trips a year to Mexico, Sofia grew up in two cultures simultaneously. Living in and between two cultures and countries, she learned to articulate what is Mexican about her, what is UnitedStatesian, and what is Mexican-American.

The responses of all interviewees complicate the concept of biculturalism – it is not a clear split. All interviewees spoke some degree of Spanish and English, and all were able to point out at least one characteristic of what it meant to be Mexican and
UnitedStatesian. From the experiences shared by Gracie, Fernando, and Sofia, we can observe that Biculturalism is a spectrum of the possible combinations of two cultures (Please see Figure 5.6). It can mean 1) being fluent in to distinct cultures, or 2) combining two cultures to a certain degree\(^\text{20}\) (any degree in the spectrum). Gracie and Fernando display a bicultural identity that is closer to UnitedStatesian identity, while Sofia embodies a bicultural identity that is more in tune with Mexican identity. This observation supports a fluid conception of identity consistent with contemporary theories of ethnicity and race (Anzaldua, 1987; Gupta, 1997; Hurtado, 1996; Suarez-Orozco, 2000; Zaytoun, 2006).

4) Diversity and Fluidity

From the results of the crosstabulations and correlations, we can observe that all factors of trajectory do have an impact on the strategies of incorporation and the identity of students at New Life High School. The results make sense given that: 1) New Life, Texas, and the Rio Grande Valley in general are popular destinations for immigrants, and that 2) not all immigrants enter the United States under the same circumstances. The immigrant population is diverse in country of birth, method of entry, travel duration, age at entry, status at entry, current status, and duration of settlement. Thus, the results of the

\(^{20}\) This idea of biculturalism can also be explored as a third identity, and culture. For example, Chicano/a identity in the United States. However, addressing this outcome of biculturalism is beyond the scope of my discussion section.
analysis and interviews reflect the diversity in strategies of incorporation and identity styles.

Although all of the three ideal types have been supported by the statistical analysis of trajectory and the interviews, not a single one fully describes the experience of the interviewees. When the students describe themselves, there is an overlap of assimilation/acculturation, adversarial/retention, and bicultural strategies and characteristics, as if their identity flows in and out of the varied strategies and cannot be contained within a single one. It is precisely this complexity and flow of identity is the main focus of the following chapter.
In this chapter I discuss the presence of agency, negotiation, and fluidity in the strategies of incorporation and identity styles of the immigrant youth I interviewed. This discussion is based on the concepts of multiple identities and shifting consciousness from feminist of color thought, and supports two of my hypotheses: 2) immigrant youth incorporate by constantly negotiating strategies of incorporation and identity, and 3) precisely because immigrant youth have to overcome structural challenges, they develop a sense of agency, the power to make decisions and negotiate their situation. Thus, I first discuss agency, negotiation, and fluidity from a feminist of color thought perspective. I conclude by presenting four examples, drawn from the interviews, that best illustrate the decision-making and negotiation power immigrant youth possess, and the fluidity of their identity.

6.1 Agency, Negotiation, Fluidity, and Feminist of Color Thought

I have learned to make my mind large, as the universe is large, so that there is room for paradoxes.
~Maxine Hong Kingston, The Woman Warrior

Any work that seeks to understand the experiences of individuals is incomplete without an in-depth, intimate exploration of those experiences. Quantitative methods are great for producing statistics that measure the presence of a phenomenon, but they are not suitable for explaining the subtle nuances tucked away inside a single phrase. From the conception of this research project, I knew that I needed to conduct interviews. Although it was unclear how I would actually execute them; I simply knew I had to hear stories.
Little did I know that the stories would take my research on their own path and into the ways of knowing of those who live them. The stories that I heard challenged my perception of knowledge, who is knowledgeable, and who is able to produce knowledge. In this section, through these stories, I challenge current “knowledge” on immigrant youth and our identity development. It is my intention to create a space where stories of resiliency and hope are told from the perspective of immigrant youth – a space where we see ourselves described in our own words.

As I analyzed the trajectory of each interviewee and tried to classify their language use, activities, and self-defined identity within the three ideal types of incorporation, I found myself confused. Clearly, some of the interviewees displayed characteristics of assimilation/acculturation identity style such as speaking only English, and engaging in stereotypically UnitedStatesian activities. Yet, they also spoke and advocated the speaking of Spanish, proudly talked about their Mexican traditions, and identified strongly as Mexican. According to the ideal types I had been referencing in the analysis, this combination qualified as strategies of a bicultural identity. However, labeling the interviewees as bicultural seemed like a simplistic way of addressing the complexity and flexibility of their identity, and did not take into consideration their agency. Moreover, their own understanding of their own stories was simply not so simple. Their identification with each of the strategies was simultaneous and not mutually exclusive. They displayed characteristics of each identity, yet neither identity by itself represented them holistically.
The presence of multiple strategies and identities is an experience familiar to feminists of color. In feminist of color literature, social identity is composed of an individual’s membership in multiple social categories (Anzaldua, 1986; Hurtado, 1996, Lorde, 1984; Zaytoun, 2006). Because everyone falls within multiple categories, every individual has multiple identities (Hurtado, 2006). Belonging to multiple identities, allows us to *shift consciousness*, to understand and interact in the world from multiple perspectives (Moraga & Anzaldua, 1981). Furthermore, the *position* that an individual occupies in these multiple categories, particularly membership in “stigmatized” social groups, such as immigrant, creates conflicts that *have to be negotiated* in order to survive (Hurtado, 1996, p. 375). Thus, it is precisely from a position in the stigmatized immigrant group that immigrant youth develop agency, the power to make decisions about strategically using identity and incorporation strategies and identities – given the context. Therefore, immigrant identity is fluid because it is constantly negotiated.

Social Identity as defined by feminist of color thought is not rigid, fixed, or permanent, but rather flexible, fluid, and evolutionary in nature. Over time, the identity of an immigrant can range from being adversarial/retention to becoming bicultural and eventually assimilation/acculturation. To illustrate this idea, refer to Figure 6.1, and consider immigrant identity as a spectrum of adversarial/retention, bicultural, and assimilation/acculturation elements. As the colors illustrate, a separation of these ideal types is not necessary. The ideal types can combine to some degree with the next one; thus creating variants of adversarial/retention, bicultural, and assimilation/acculturation identities. Immigrant identity can fall at any point within this spectrum.
However, even this spectrum does not fully illustrate the combination of all ideal types. Immigrant identity can include any combination of adversarial/retention, bicultural, and assimilation/acculturation elements without having to follow a sequence (as a spectrum does). To illustrate this point, consider Figure 6.2.

In the Venn Diagram of Immigrant Identity, all of the ideal types can interact with one another at some level without having to follow a time frame, sequence, or pattern. As depicted by this diagram, immigrant identity can be adversarial/retention, assimilation/acculturation, or bicultural – separately, or a combination of the three –
simultaneously. An individual can engage in these ideal types within the course of one day and without having to follow the sequence outlined by the Identity Spectrum (Figure 6.1). Thus, Figure 6.2 seeks to illustrate how immigrant youth can daily flow in and out of a given ideal type through the negotiation of incorporation strategies and identity. This diagram conceptualizes immigrant identity as fluid and flexible to the decision-making and negotiation power of the immigrant. In the following section, I present four examples of the fluidity of identity and the decision-making power of immigrant youth.

6.2 The Fluidity of Identity: Four Examples

Although Juan, Reyna, and Esperanza predominantly display adversarial/retention characteristics, some of their actions are also bicultural and assimilation/acculturation. Similarly, Gracie, Fernando, and Sofia are principally bicultural, but their actions also reflect assimilation/acculturation and adversarial/retention characteristics. Finally, no interviewees identified solely as UnitedStatesian, but Austin and Santana demonstrated predominantly assimilation/acculturation strategies of incorporation. This flowing in and out of adversarial/retention, bicultural, and assimilation/acculturation ideal types demonstrated by the actions and self-definitions of the interviewees, illustrates the fluidity of identity.

1) On Being from Another World

There’s a Christian song that says, ‘this world is not your home, your home is in the heavens.’ That’s how I identify, here…this is not my home, I can’t say this is my country and neither is that one because I simply don’t identify with either. I belong in another world.
Maria’s actions are characteristic of an adversarial identity, but she considers herself “not from here or there.” During our interview, mainly conducted in Spanish, she recalled a period of time when she refused to talk to teachers and peers in English. She understood and could speak the language, but strategically decided to only speak Spanish in order to force others to speak Spanish. She also participated in the girls’ soccer team, the Spanish Club, and was friends with “los mojaditos,” the wetbacks, because they spoke Spanish only. However, she stopped engaging in these activities because the girls at the soccer team and the events organized by the Spanish Club did not respect her faith, and los mojaditos “like to get drunk, they don’t worry about their work.” Thus, Maria felt like she “had to go with the other ones, the smart ones, the ones that speak English only and that have advanced classes, because they study and I can also identify with them, so that I wouldn’t get behind in my work.” Clearly, Maria has the ability to successfully engage with the Spanish-speaking Mexican students and the English-speaking UnitedStatesian students, but she deliberately chooses to befriend the group that, according to her ideals, will best respect and help her.

Maria was born in Mexico, but raised in the United States. She speaks English fluently, but chooses to speak Spanish most of the time. She loves to play soccer, but only plays at church events. When I interviewed Maria, she wore men’s shorts as she told me, “I have read the Bible and it tells us that a woman should not dress the clothes of a man and a man should not dress the clothes of a woman,” clearly contradicting herself. I use this example to illustrate how Maria is at the borderlands of many identities, which she strategically negotiates. It would be simplistic to say that Maria is a bicultural
adolescent simply because she speaks Spanish and English. Instead, the negotiation of her trajectory and strategies of incorporation, such as only speaking Spanish or befriending a specific group of youth, exemplifies the decision-making power she has in defining her own identity. Maria understands that she belongs to another world – and that is where she feels complete.

2) On Being a Longhorn

Most of my interview with Austin was about football. Indifferent to my ignorance of football rules and trivia, Austin spoke at length and in great detail about his best games, most memorable plays, most challenging opponents, pre-game motivational speaking, and all the things that “revolve around football because it is a really big deal in [my] his high school life.” Dressed from head to toe in Longhorn apparel, it was easy to see how important football is for Austin and the construction of his identity. When asked, who are you? he replied:

Well of course I’m a Longhorn…I guess you can say I’m also a motivational speaker you know, I try to do my best…I’m also a leader because in football I learned a great deal on how to lead, and I’m a fighter of course, if there’s something I need to fight for, that I believe in, I’ll go for it you know, I’m very optimistic.

Austin’s life revolves around football to the degree that his identity is closely tied to the sport. Because football traditions in the Rio Grande Valley are infused with Mexican-American culture, I asked him to expand on how his cultural background influences his identity, to which he replied:

Uh…well, that’s a tough question…I guess you can say that I’m Hispanic\textsuperscript{21}, when…I always try to revolve things around football

\textsuperscript{21} As mentioned earlier, in the Rio Grande Valley, people commonly use the term Hispanic to refer to their Mexican heritage.
because it is a really big deal in my high school life, but in the bigger teams that we know…is a different culture I guess, they would talk to us and tell us things, they would try to intimidate us you know, but us Hispanics tend to be fighters too, I mean, we’re not gonna let anybody, especially Longhorns, you know tell us anything, our culture’s taught us, don’t get confused, cause that is what they are trying to do, you take it on the field.

In this statement, Austin refers to the racially charged playoff games between Rio Grande Valley football teams and teams from larger Texas cities. Demographics differ outside of the RGV, and the racially diverse student bodies of northern schools reflect on their teams. Although the Longhorns often compete at the playoff level, their journey is always brought to an end by Northern High School. Last year, New Life H.S. for the first time ever had the lead in the game against Northern until a player, who happened to be Black, scored a touch-down that brought the score 27-26 marking the defeat of New Life. Shamelessly, Longhorn fans attacked Northern players with racial insults infested with the N-word. This year, as retaliation, Northern fans threw *tortillas* at the New Life players. From these interactions, Austin learned that RGV football culture is different from other areas in Texas, but could not articulate it clearly.

Well, maybe…I’m sure football is the same all around…maybe we don’t have to be Hispanic, well of course you don’t have to be in order to be in football, but I guess, you can say…like our…what’s it called again? Our *corrido* you know. That’s part of our culture, the other upstate schools they don’t even understand Spanish, but for us, we understand of course, and it tells us about us I guess, and every Valley team has one.

Because Austin is immersed in *the* quintessential UnitedStatesian sport, he could be considered to have adopted assimilation/acculturation identity style. However, in the RGV football is as Mexican as it is UnitedStatesian, and labeling Austin’s commitment to
football as assimilation/acculturation would be ignoring the reality of the sport in this region. In New Life, Austin’s identity is not questioned; he does not need to find words to articulate who he is because saying “I’m a Longhorn” is understood. However, in the predominantly Anglo-Michigan schools he attended for a year, the identity of being a limited-English student was automatically assumed and imposed on him.

I knew English of course but when I got there of course they, well I’m Hispanic so the color didn’t fit perfectly, but I didn’t like the idea that they put me in things because I’m Hispanic…so like you have to take classes for your English…counselors see how you’re doing, cause I guess they didn’t know I was a great speaker because of course in school I learned to speak English a lot, I consider English my first language.

During this challenging year, Austin transferred to a total of four schools and confronted the questioning of his identity as a member of a minority group – “Hispanic LEP” (Limited English Proficient). Nevertheless, Austin negotiated structural forces to turn the negative association with his Hispanic identity into positive experience.

But like when it came to Spanish class the teacher had me reading, ‘oh Austin do you want to read this?’ and I would say ‘sure, why not’ although I didn’t really like the idea of that you know cause I’m Hispanic, but I would tell my friends, ‘yes, I’m Hispanic, but if anything I can help you guys speak better Spanish’ cause when they would read it sounded horrible of course, I would laugh, I mean quietly because they can’t speak it well especially with the “r”s you know…so I became the expert in Spanish.

Austin knew an identity was being imposed on him, but he negotiated it by focusing on his assets. It would be a mistake to place Austin in the assimilation/acculturation ideal type simply because he plays football, or even in the bicultural ideal type because Austin is somewhere on an identity spectrum that best defines him as a Longhorn.
3) **On Being a Human**

When I think of Hispanic music, I think of *Tejano*, I think of going to a *quinceañera* and hearing *huapangos* and dancing in circles and stuff like that, mariachis, that’s what comes to my head.

Through music and his involvement in the drumming line of New Life High School’s marching band, Santana has enjoyed opportunities to travel around the country and learned about many cultures, which have in turn expanded his understanding of the world and himself. When asked what his musical style was, he responded:

I think I’m kind of a mixing pot of a lot of different things because I try to learn something new from everything whether it’d be something I want to do or don’t want to do.

Santana has played with Japanese musicians, studied West African and Celtic drumming beats, and recognized how these differ from his own Hispanic cultural background. Although Santana can articulate the differences and similarities between Japanese, West African, Celtic, and Hispanic drum styles, he does not identify as Hispanic. Instead, Santana identifies as:

a dude that is…human. Everybody is like, hey are you Hispanic? Are you White? Everybody gets me confused…are you whatever? Are you half and half? What are you? Man, I’m human. That’s what I am.

As a result of engaging in culturally diverse groups, Santana’s identity has been questioned. However, refusing to box himself into a cultural, ethnic, or racial identity, Santana chooses the universality of being human. Santana’s fair skin and Mexican heritage is not seen as a contradiction in the Rio Grande Valley, but it raises eyebrows in areas where the stereotypical image of Mexicans portrays a brown face. Nevertheless, his
identity is questioned in the RGV because, as Santana described, he does not use “valley-isms in speech.”

Most people when they end a sentence they end it going down, but a lot of people in the valley end it going up... ‘Reallyyyyyy? Whyyyyy?...and I don’t use the same vocal inflections.

Santana is conscious of how his speech and skin color are perceived by the various groups around him. However, instead of being pressured to speak or identify in a specific manner, he negotiates his speech (language use strategy) in accordance with his identity.

If I walk around the halls saying... (in stereotypical Anglo accent) ‘hey you wanna go and cut the lawn’, they’d think, ‘oh man that guy is a redneck’... so I try to keep it, to go along with my thing of I’m human, I try to go along with having absolutely no accent whatsoever, like a newscaster – just no accent whatsoever.

Santana knows that assumptions are made about him based on his skin color, speech style, cultural background, and musical style, but he refuses all of these and establishes an identity that represents to him, who he truly is – a human. The agency he demonstrates in defining who he is extends to Santana’s general life approach. He is not a passive receiver of structural forces, cultural frameworks, or life, but quite the contrary.

Look in the mirror everyday and say, ‘is what I am about to do today, and if I die today, would I want to do what I am about to do today?’ and if you say no too many times, then you’re probably gonna have to change something.

4) A Quinceañera of Her Own

Another example is the negotiation of the traditional quinceañera attire performed by Sofia. A quinceañera is a traditional Mexican celebration of the coming of age of a woman. To commemorate the 15th birthday of a young lady, a dance is organized to
introduce her to society. Usually a religious ceremony precedes the event to ensure God’s blessing of the new stage of the young woman’s life. Traditionally, this celebration symbolized the end of childhood for women and beginning of adult life and eligibility for marriage. In this event, a sign of the girl’s readiness for marriage is her ability to dance in high heels. Traditional beliefs indicate that a woman should not dance with any man until the waltz in her quinceañera. Thus, the waltz is the main event in the celebration. During the months leading up to the quinceañera, the young lady, the father, and the chamberlain along with a court of accompanying young men and women, usually friends or relatives of the birthday girl, practice a choreographed waltz to present during the celebration. An important ceremony before the waltz begins is the change of shoes. Traditionally, the quinceañera wears flat shoes that represent her childhood and when her father indicates to her that it is time to dance, she publicly trades the flat shoes for high heels. Before the waltz at her quinceañera, Sofia had been wearing pink converse tennis shoes – the current epitome of UnitedStatesian pop culture. When talking about the change of shoes ceremony, Sofia recalled her family’s surprise.

I told my mom, ‘I’m not going to change,’ and I just showed off my pink converse…I was like, ‘Look guys!’ and everybody noticed them. Everybody was so surprised! Their eyes were so big when they noticed when I was turning and the dress would go up a little bit, that I didn’t have the shoes, I had my converse, and everyone was whispering, ‘she’s wearing converse, she’s wearing converse’ and I was like, ‘yeah! I’m wearing converse!’ (laughs).

To say the least, Sofia’s mother was greatly disappointed with her daughter’s decision. (Often, a quinceañera is also a very important day for a mother who has dreamed of seeing her little girl in a fancy party dress and fancy high heel shoes). Sofia
remembered that her mother had brought out the heels they bought together, but at the last moment Sofia said, “I’m sorry mom, but I’m not going to wear my heels, I’m more comfortable with my shoes.” Sofia and her mom could have engaged in a dramatic mother-daughter fight over shoes and tradition after that statement, but it seems like even Sofia’s mother understood the bicultural identity of her daughter. Sure, Sofia dreamed of her quinceañera, but she would make sure her own personality came thru in the celebration, and that meant organizing a traditional Mexican celebration with her own twist.

6.3 Interpretation of Fluidity and Agency

Although Maria, Austin, Santana, and Sofia could have been categorized within an already established identity ideal type, their ability to negotiate and decide how to engage in multiple social groups demonstrates the agency that immigrant youth posses. The previous examples support the 1) decision-making and negotiation power immigrant youth posses, and 2) the fluidity of immigrant incorporation and identity. Maria deliberately chooses who to befriend in order to achieve academic success, Austin negotiates his language skills to redefine his perceived identity, Santana controls his tone of voice to establish himself as a human being, and Sofia recreates and redefines traditions to include her own identity. Maria, Austin, Santana, and Sofia negotiate the way in which they incorporate and identify, just as feminist of color shift consciousness – without losing sense of who they are. Instead, Maria, Austin, Santana, and Sofia establish themselves by crafting resiliency and a space where they can exist holistically from the challenging positions of their identities. As researchers we cannot underestimate the
decision-making and negotiation power youth possess even in the most challenging situations. To do that, would be to make them complacent, passive victims of structural forces and life. What a disservice that would be! What talent, strength, and hope we would be ignoring. How much richer we are by learning from their resiliency.
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

Ahorita me siento una persona nueva, ahora sí puedo decir que soy competencia. Todavía me considero mexicana, porque soy mexicana, no lo puedo cambiar, pero una mexicana que ha evolucionado, que ha aprendido a adaptarse a su alrededor, y que ha sobresalido poco a poco y ya me se defender.

Currently I feel like a new person, I can now say that I am competition. I still consider myself Mexican, because I am Mexican, I can’t change that, but a Mexican that has evolved, that has learned to adapt to her surroundings, and that has overcome little by little, and now I know how to defend myself.

~ Esperanza, age 17, immigrant girl

For the thousands of immigrant youth that enter the public U.S. education system every year, education could bring both a plethora of challenges and opportunities. Stigmatization, language acquisition, incorporation, and identity formation are some of the issues immigrant students face in the host country. However, these same issues can be turned into forces of positive impulse and sources of strength. As argued, tested, and supported by this thesis, the immigration trip and the agency of immigrant students influence how students experience and negotiate these issues.

7.1 Previous Research, Challenges, and Results

Previous research about immigrant incorporation does not address the diversity of trajectories present in immigrant communities. In order to measure the presence of factors that constitute the immigration trip, I administered a survey questionnaire to students in New Life High School. Simple frequencies ran on the data show significant differences between trajectory factors, meaning that there are diverse immigration trips. For example, out of 77 respondents, 59 were born in the United States and 18 in Mexico.
Respondents varied in time for travel duration, method of entry, status at entry, age at entry, current status, and duration of settlement. Thus, my first objective in writing this thesis, to address the diversity in immigration experiences, was achieved.

Furthermore, the influence that trajectory factors can have on strategies of incorporation and identity formation has also been absent from previous scholarship. Thus, I also measured the influence trajectory factors have on language use, activities, and identity as related to nationalistic symbols. Differences between groups within these factors demonstrate trajectory can influence incorporation strategies and identity styles, thus supporting my first hypothesis: Trajectory does influence the strategies of incorporation and identity of immigrant students at New Life High School. For instance, students who are born in the U.S. are more likely to consider themselves UnitedStatesian and Bicultural and speak both English and Spanish, while students born in Mexico are more likely to consider themselves solely Mexican and speak Spanish only. Although trajectory factors are important contributors to incorporation and identity development, they are not the sole determinants of how immigrant youth incorporate and identify.

Previous literature on the subject has referred to assimilation and acculturation as processes that happen to immigrant youth, instead of strategies negotiated by them. Although I modified the work of Dr. Carola Suarez-Orozco on Styles of Coping and Identity to create flexible ideal types that would allow me to analyze immigrant youth incorporation and identity, they were not flexible enough, and did not address the agency of the students. Absence of a discussion on agency, the decision-making and negotiation
power of immigrant youth, inadvertently portrays them as passive recipients of the immigration experience.

In order to explore the incorporation and identity decisions made by students, I conducted in-depth interviews with nine students. From these interviews, a theme of negotiating identity by deliberately choosing specific strategies of incorporation emerged. Students negotiated their incorporation and identity in order to achieve a given purpose at a specific time. Some examples are: choosing to speak Spanish-only to remain connected to Mexican identity, wearing converse shoes in a traditional Mexican quinceañera to make a statement about uniqueness, claiming Mexican-American identity in order to receive college scholarships, using a visa local to travel safely across the border, and maintain a monotone voice to sound as “just human” as possible. These examples support my second hypothesis: Immigrant youth incorporate by constantly negotiating strategies of incorporation and identity. While some interviewees demonstrated mainly assimilation/acculturation, adversarial/retention, or bicultural characteristics, all embodied elements of all ideal types. Thus, the identity of the interviewees as defined in their own words and derived from my analysis of their language use, activities, and identification with U.S. national symbols, was not entirely captured by a single ideal type, but a combination of the three. This does not mean that immigrant youth are adversarial/retention, bicultural, and assimilation/acculturation at the same exact time, but that they can negotiate their incorporation and identity given the context and their purpose. This finding supports the conceptualization of immigrant identity as fluid.
The concepts of “multiple identities” and “shifting consciousness” from feminist of color literature helped clarify the complexity and fluidity of identity. Social identity is composed by membership in multiple social categories. However, social identity is flexible and ever-evolving because Social categories are susceptible to society’s views and values. Belonging to multiple category groups enhances the ability to shift consciousness from one social group to another and still remain grounded. Particularly belonging to multiple stigmatized social groups foments this shifting consciousness because the structural challenge and conflict that membership in these groups pose has to be negotiated (Hurtado, 2006, p. 375).

Because immigrant is a stigmatized group susceptible to the social category of nationality, it is not rigid, fixed, or permanent. In the current political climate of the United States, being an immigrant is synonymous with being “alien,” “illegal,” and “terrorist.” It is precisely from this challenging position that immigrant students develop a sense of agency. In order to survive, to achieve a goal, immigrant youth have to learn to negotiate the conflicts posed by their stigmatized immigrant group membership. Thus, from places of struggle, resiliency and hope is created. Analyzing immigrant youth incorporation and identity development from this perspective inevitably re-frames the image of powerless immigrant youth to one of resilient agents with the power to successfully negotiate societal contexts to their own benefit.

7.2 Research Contributions: Trajectory and Agency

In this thesis, I presented and used trajectory as a convenient research concept that facilitates the collection of quantitative data and contributes to the analysis of
immigration experiences by focusing on the immigration trip. I define trajectory as the immigration trip an immigrant takes from his or her home country to a settlement destination, which is composed of seven factors (not an exhaustive list): Country of birth, duration of travel, method of entry, legal status, age at entry, location of settlement, and duration of settlement. With the concept of trajectory we can begin to learn about the experiences of immigrant students influenced by the immigration trip and better understand the structural challenges they face (i.e. being undocumented). Furthermore, in future research, the concept of trajectory can be improved by including a direct analysis of “push” and “pull” factors and how they contribute to the attitudes, beliefs, and goals immigrants have of the home and host countries.

In this thesis I also redefined and used the concept of agency. Although agency is not a concept I created (like trajectory) or unique to immigrant incorporation and identity development literature, I defined it specifically for use within immigrant identity. I defined agency as the decision-making and negotiation power immigrant youth develop as a survival skill derived from the stigmatized immigrant group identity. From the concept of agency we learn that immigrant students are active agents of their immigration experience and the structural challenges it poses. Although structural forces pose great challenges to them, they do have decision-making and negotiation skills that influence their incorporation strategies and identity formation. As demonstrated by the accounts of the interviewees, immigrant youth negotiate their identity in order to achieve a purpose that will help them succeed, in their own terms, and become productive members of
society. Contrary to previous literature, the incorporation strategies and identity of immigrant youth are not inevitable consequences of immigration.

Trajectory and agency provide a new perspective from where to research, understand, and theorize immigrant incorporation and identity development – the perspective of the immigrant. Instead of measuring immigrant incorporation and identity with the racist, hegemonic assumption that assimilation into United Statesian culture and identity is the only desirable form of incorporation, trajectory and agency place the experience of the immigrant at the core and attempt to understand incorporation and identity from that experience. This understanding shifts immigrant incorporation and identity paradigms from assimilation/acculturation into United States culture to immigrant experience in a host country; thus making immigrant identity theory generalizeable to other countries. Most importantly, perhaps, this understanding reframes the powerless image of immigrant youth that had been established through the assimilation/acculturation literature by recognizing the power that immigrant youth have in negotiating how to incorporate and identify to their benefit.

7.3 Closing Thoughts

Although I had been living and attending schools in New Life, Texas since 1995, it was not until 1998 that three teachers, Mrs. Lopez, my English teacher, Ms. Luna, my World History teacher, and Mr. Rodriguez, my counselor, asked me about my immigration experience. Sadly, I cannot say that I truly spoke until they asked me to speak. I had teachers before them who were helpful and supportive, but none seemed truly interested in hearing about my experience. They were not mean-spirited, on the contrary, the fact
that my situation was (and is still) quite common in public schools across the Rio Grande Valley led them to assume that they already knew.

A quick story illustrates the “well intended, and well ignorant” measures some teachers take in trying to help immigrant students. By law, students across the state of Texas must take standardized tests in order to demonstrate they are ready to advance to the following academic school year. Because I had been moved to “regular” classes (instead of “irregular” ESL classes), my second year of living in the U.S., I was scheduled to take the TAAS (Texas Assessment of Academic Skills). Without knowing, the previous year I had been exempt from taking the test by being classified as a special education student. This time, teachers were boldly advising me to once again take the exemption, but I refused. Mr. Saenz, my science teacher, proctored my test. Before handing the booklet to me, he said with concern, “you know, we can still get you exempt.” I politely refused and he walked away disapproval shaking his head. Mr. Saenz was not neglectful, he simply assumed that my experience was one of disadvantage and fear instead of opportunity and challenge; thus, he discouraged me from taking the TAAS. He ignored the negotiation of my position as an immigrant student and my desire to challenge myself.

However, Mrs. Lopez, Ms. Luna, and Mr. Martinez knew of and could relate to the power of story, and each asked me to share my experience in their classes. Ms. Lopez, having grown up in military bases around the world due to her father’s career in the service, was genuinely interested in my success in her English II Class and my

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22 According to the Texas Education Agency official website, beggining the 2002-2003 academic school year, students would take the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TASK) as mandated by the 76th Texas Legislature in 1999.
educational experiences in Mexico. I also remember the day we were discussing the limited presence of Mexican history in our World History textbook (three pages in a 1,000 page book) in Ms. Luna’s class, when Mr. Rodriguez walked in, camera in hand. He asked the class if he could videotape the discussion as he took the seat in front of me. Ms. Luna continued asking about our own family histories, but I remained quiet. After a few comments, Mr. Rodriguez stated, “I heard there’s a Peruvian student in class.” I was surprised! Nobody knew I was half Peruvian! Since I was not sure he was talking about me, I shyly raised my hand and said, “I’m half Peruvian, half Mexican.” At that moment, he turned around, faced the camera towards me and asked, “What’s your story?”

Teachers like Mrs. Lopez, Ms. Luna, and Mr. Rodriguez recognize the power of personal story. They learned as much from their student’s stories as the students learned from their lectures. They know that in order to best serve a student in his/her own personal growth, they have to familiarize themselves with the context in which that student attends school, views life, and learns – from the student’s own perspective. Unfortunately, the educational policies established by No Child Left Behind make it naïve and implausible to ask teachers to pay individualized attention and care to every single student. NCLB forces teachers and schools to teach standardized tests that are divorced from the histories and realities of immigrant students, and leaves little room for nourishing the growth of these students as responsible individual members of a social collective.

As researchers, the stories shared by the interviewees in this thesis urge us to stop viewing immigrant youth as powerless, passive recipients of the immigration experience. It is our responsibility to stop enforcing hegemonic, assimilationist views of immigrant
incorporation and identity development that victimize immigrant youth and inform patronizing initiatives to assimilate “them” into being United Statesian (that can support for example, the English Only movement). It is our responsibility to acknowledge, through our research, the power immigrant youth possess in negotiating the multiple and complex social identities imposed by structural forces. Until we begin to apply this understanding into the study of immigrant youth incorporation and identity development, the U.S. public education system, and social programs designed to aid immigrant youth, stories of struggle where adversity is transformed into opportunity and where resistance, strength, and hope emerge, will remain unwritten and inexistent. Until we stop victimizing immigrant youth, we will continue to see immigrant youth as “successful” or “incompetent” sheep of the assimilation/acculturation flock - enforcing racist, hegemonic beliefs of what is success and knowledge, and who is successful and knowledgeable. We cannot do this any longer. It is time to recognize the ways of knowing created by immigrant youth. It is time the version of our own immigration stories is written. Let us begin the process of writing our own story of who we are.


References


APPENDIX A

Student Trajectory Questionnaire

Please complete this questionnaire to the best of your ability and with total honesty. Any information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. Please DO NOT write your name, this is an ANONYMOUS questionnaire.

I. Demographic Information
Please check all that apply and fill in the blank.

Gender:
- Female
- Male

Current Age:
- 15 or younger
- 16
- 17
- 18 or older

Ethnicity: ________________

Class Year:
- Frosh
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior

Estimated annual income of parents:
- Below $10,000
- $10,000 - $30,000
- $30,000 - $50,000
- Above $50,000
- Not applicable

II. Trajectory
This section refers to the immigration trip you took from your country to the United States when you came to live here. Please fill out the blanks and check all that apply.

Age at entry
- 0 - 5 years
- 5 - 12 years
- 13 - 16 years
- 17 or older
- Not applicable

Country of Birth: ________________

Country of Origin: ________________

Duration of Travel
- 1 day or less
- 1 week or less
- 1 month or less
- More than 1 month
- Not applicable

Duration of Settlement
- Less than 1 year
- 1 - 5 years
- 5 - 10 years
- 10 years or more
- Not applicable

Immigrant Status at entry
- Documented
- Undocumented
- Not applicable

Current Immigrant Status
- Documented
- Undocumented
- Not applicable

Method of Entry
- Citizenship/Residency
- Tourist/Student visa
- Coyote/Smuggler
- False documents
- Swam across the Rio Bravo
- Other: ________________
- Not applicable
III. Incorporation

Please fill in the blanks, and check all that apply.

A. Language

Languages spoken:

Language predominantly spoken at home:
☐ Spanish or other more than 50% of the time
☐ English more than 50% of the time
☐ Spanish or other and English equally
If “other” language is spoken, please indicate ____________________________

Language predominantly spoken at school:
☐ Spanish or other more than 50% of the time
☐ English more than 50% of the time
☐ Spanish or other and English equally
If “other” language is spoken, please indicate ____________________________

Language predominantly (more than 50% of the time) spoken with friends:
☐ Spanish or other more than 50% of the time
☐ English more than 50% of the time
☐ Spanish or other and English equally
If “other” language is spoken, please indicate ____________________________

B. Extra-curricular Activities

List any school, community, work, leisure activities you participate in. Please rank them in order of importance to you.

1. ____________________________ 6. ____________________________
2. ____________________________ 7. ____________________________
3. ____________________________ 8. ____________________________
4. ____________________________ 9. ____________________________
5. ____________________________ 10. ____________________________

C. Identity

Please read each statement. On a scale from 1 to 5 with 1 being “strongly disagree” and 5 being “strongly agree” rate your opinion about that statement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 Strongly disagree</th>
<th>2 Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>3 Indifferent</th>
<th>4 Somewhat agree</th>
<th>5 Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1. When I see the United States flag, I feel like a part of the United States.
   1  2  3  4  5

2. When I hear the Stars Spangled Banner, I feel like a part of the United States.
   1  2  3  4  5

3. When I recite the pledge of allegiance, I feel like a part of the United States.
   1  2  3  4  5
4. I consider myself American (U.S.).

Please think about your country of origin for the following statements.

5. When I see the flag of my country of origin, I feel part of it.

6. When I hear the national anthem of my country of origin, I feel part of it.

7. I consider myself member of my country of origin.
   example: Mexican, Guatemalan

8. I consider myself both American and member of my country of origin
   example: Mexican-American

Please return completed questionnaire to evaluator. Thank you for your participation.
APPENDIX B
Interview Guiding Questions

Who are you?
What’s your story?
How has your immigration experience been? (if applicable)
Tell me about your family history.
Tell me about the activities in general that are most important to you.
Tell me about your friends.
What languages do you speak? With whom?
What influences who you are?
What does it mean to be Mexican?
What does it mean to be American?
What does it mean to be Mexican-American?
Do you consider yourself Mexican?
Do you consider yourself American?
Do you consider yourself Mexican-American?
Are there times when you consider yourself differently?
Can your identity change? How?
How does your culture (whatever it may be) contribute to who you are?
Do you travel to Mexico?
How do you feel when you are in Mexico?
Do you have any questions for me?