

Olde Towne, New Townspeople: An Anthropological Analysis of the Life Stages of 1.5 Generation Latino Immigrants in Gaithersburg, MD

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Abstract

The history of Gaithersburg has been documented in detail from its founding in 1765 up until the 1970s, with multiple references to the growth of Olde Towne Gaithersburg into a largely populated city. However, with the direct arrival of newly undocumented and documented immigrants beginning in the 1980s, mainly from Central America's Northern Triangle countries— Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras— an important story still needs to be told about the newer residents of this town. With Jeanine Cummins, a Gaithersburg native, having caused quite a country-wide divide over her 2020 novel *American Dirt*— which tells the story of a Mexican woman and her son's journey to the United States to escape a drug cartel after many members of their family are murdered— it is necessary now more than ever to analyze the real lives and daily frustrations of an important demographic in Gaithersburg: the Latino 1.5 generation. The term 1.5 generation, or 1.5G, refers to individuals who immigrate to a new country before or during their early teens, having been educated in their home country as well as their new country. Therefore, they become bi-cultural— incorporating beliefs, customs, and traditions from both cultures they have been exposed to. I describe three main stages of life for the 1.5G Latinos immigrating to the United States: temporary independence/semi-independence, adolescence and dependence, and adulthood and (stalled) permanent independence. Each stage brings about its own learning curves and challenges regarding confidence, future aspirations, feelings of fitting in, and day-to-day struggles living life in between connections to one's country of origin and their new country. My methods consist of individual interviews with nonprofit organization coordinators and community leaders serving the 1.5G and 1.5G Latino students in Gaithersburg, one focus group session with 1.5G students from Gaithersburg high schools, and a 42-question survey for 1.5G Latinos in Gaithersburg. In taking an anthropological approach in focusing on this recently classified gateway city¹, I hope to shine a light on the younger generation and their growing need for documentation and opportunities to begin the next stage in their lives: citizenship.

¹ Gateway City: midsize urban centers that anchor regional economies around the state ("What Is", 2021). For generations, these communities were home to industry that offered residents good jobs and a "gateway" to the American Dream ("What Is", 2021). For more information, visit: <https://gatewaysmag.org/what-is-a-gateway-city/>.

Introduction

Divide Over ‘American Dirt’

Almost immediately after Oprah Winfrey chose the realistic fiction novel, *American Dirt*, for her “Oprah’s Book Club” in January of 2020, critics came forward and protested the well-respected celebrity’s decision, arguing that Jeannine Cummins’ book does not accurately portray the Mexican immigrant experience. Cummins’ description, critics claim, is a stereotypical, generalized, tone deaf version of the struggles of immigrant life (Vargas, 2020).

Jeannine Cummins, who is of Puerto Rican heritage, never lived the experience she wrote about, so critics argue she should not be the one to tell the story. The criticism is that the book uses stereotypical depictions of Mexicans and generalizations rather than highlighting the perspectives of diversity and unique experiences (VanDenburgh, 2020). Councilmember Nancy Navarro tweeted, “As a Latina, I prefer to read Latino(a) authors who write from a place of authenticity. It’s uplifting and inspiring. There are so many talented writers that deserve the spotlight. So @jeaninecummins no gracias!” (Navarro, 2020). Respected Latino writers have described it using curse words, in English and Spanish, especially after learning that in a 2015 interview, Cummins describes herself as “still breaking in her Latinx-ness” (Vargas, 2020). On the other hand, Cummins’ novel, which has brought a seven-figure sum from the Flatiron Books publishing company, has been met with enviable reviews by critics and novelists such as Oprah, Stephen King, and Sandra Cisneros. Don Winslow even compared it to John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* (Vargas, 2020). Perhaps something so highly endorsed by celebrities and famous authors since the beginning caused people to ignore the fact that *American Dirt* is a shallow portrayal of the immigrant experience.

Cummins grew up in Gaithersburg, Maryland, is a graduate of Gaithersburg High School, and has participated in the Gaithersburg book festival multiple times. The author’s fame grew so much that mayor, Jud Ashman created a citywide reading program as an opportunity for the community to read her book (Ashman, 2019). Although this planning happened months before the controversy over the book began, even afterwards, Ashman said he disagrees with the book’s critics (Powers, 2019). In my research, there is nothing more that I want to avoid than creating another Dirt situation. I have been careful to quote or very closely paraphrase exactly what my participants told me about their own experiences. I look to this research essay and its anthropological methods as a way to describe the real stories and feelings of those in the Latino immigrant community in Gaithersburg, MD, rather than create an entertaining fictional narrative about a community I am not a part of.

In this paper, I include a literature review on related scholarly journal articles and how my paper seeks to improve upon their discussion of Latino immigrant youth. I provide background information about Gaithersburg, Maryland to introduce readers to the city of focus and why it is relevant to immigration. I build upon this foundation by discussing the perspectives of nonimmigrant Gaithersburg residents from the Online City-Data Forum and how these views create a negative context of reception. I then discuss my methods and begin analyzing my findings, which include interviews with nonprofit coordinators and community leaders who seek to help my focus community as well as the three life stages I identify through an in-depth analysis of interviews, a focus group session, and a survey of 1.5G Latino immigrants in Gaithersburg. I conclude by explaining the three main stages of life for a 1.5G Latino immigrating to the United States: temporary independence/semi-independence, adolescence and dependence, and adulthood and (stalled) permanent independence. Each stage brings about its own learning curves and challenges regarding confidence, future aspirations, feelings of fitting in, and day-to-day struggles living life in between documentation in the U.S. Finally, I discuss this country’s immigration policy and suggest that urging local lawmakers to support immigration reform may be the best way to make real change.

Literature Review

Local Contexts of Reception: The Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Area

The undocumented and documented immigrant population in various counties in Maryland and the metropolitan area has been growing with little recognition from the research community. Political scientists Renée Daamen and Jeroen Doornik (2014) focus on public policy and its solutions to questions about the unresolved immigration policy dilemmas at the federal level, giving a plethora of research about the unauthorized immigrant community in Montgomery County, which includes my town of focus, Gaithersburg, and diving into the growing public concern about unauthorized migrants as perpetrators of violent crime, which is a topic I come across in local forums about the city of Gaithersburg. They find that the most positive and quick change to immigration policy in this country will come from the local government. Relating to positive change, history professor, Dr. Jorge Hernandez-Fujigaki (2017) summarizes interviews of current Latinos in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area. He finds that there are more positive experiences and standards of living for immigrants in this area than U.S. Census data reveals. It is also important to analyze the non-Latino residents' perspectives of the new arrivals in this area. Therefore, geographer and international affairs specialist, Marie Price and immigration policy specialist, Audrey Singer (2008) discuss the increase in immigration to the Washington D.C. metropolitan area and the forms of reception immigrants have received as a result of their settling in "ethnoburbs" rather than ethnic enclaves in the city. They find that the suburban landscape of this area causes immigrants to establish edge gateways rather than ethnic enclaves. Finally, Price et al. (2005) present an ethnic geography study done by the Metropolitan Policy Program on Washington D.C. as a new immigrant gateway by the year 2000, using Immigration and Naturalization Service data to map the residential decisions of immigrant newcomers by zip code to determine that the best way to understand immigrant settlement patterns and networks in this city is through a pattern of *heterolocalism*. These articles establish Gaithersburg, Maryland's relevance as a focus city.

Latino Immigrant Experience and the 1.5 Generation

A difficult demographic to study in the Latino immigrant community is the 1.5G because these immigrants are youths, whom are difficult to contact for research studies. Sociologist, Dr. Cecilia Menjivar (2006) examines the effects of uncertain legal status on the lives of immigrants. The article introduces the term "legal liminality"—the gray area of legal status in the United States between conceptualizations of documented and undocumented status and how one's legal existence, or nonexistence, has a strong impact on an individual's social networks and family. Menjivar draws from ethnographic fieldwork to speak on subjects besides citizenship and visas. Instead, she discusses religion and artistic expression to demonstrate the daily struggles that Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Washington D.C., and Phoenix go through from 1989 to 2001. Regarding youth, Roberto Gonzales and Leo Chavez (2012) are two of the most famous names in the field of anthropology and research regarding immigration, and they provide multiple theories regarding the daily struggles in the young Latino community, claiming that this generation of Latinos lives in a form of "abjectivity", a term that combines abject and subjectivity to describe how less fortunate undocumented youth are treated as the abject or the 'Other' in U.S. society, expelled from the body of the nation because of their undocumented status. Focusing more on youth education, Gonzales (2011) provides a combination of qualitative and quantitative research to help readers understand what it is like to go from being protected, included, and de facto legal in America's K-12 schools to graduating and suddenly being unprotected, excluded, and illegal as this generation now needs legal status in order to work and contribute to society like other adults. Somewhat similar to the structure of my research, immigration specialist, Dr. Leisy Abrego (2011) uses ethnographic methods and in-depth interviews of Latino undocumented immigrants from 2001 to 2010 to examine how illegality is experienced differently based

on social position. The authors find that life stages and age are important determinants of how an immigrant lives out their daily life, also comparing first generation immigrants to 1.5G immigrants. Finally, Gonzales and sociology professor, Dr. Edeline Burciaga (2018) find that the experiences of undocumented children differ from those of undocumented adults, but they discuss this observation in the form of illegality being a “master status”, meaning that the placement of persons in the “illegal” social category constrains the characteristics attributed to them by other possible categories.

My research fills in the gaps of all this literature by creating a cohesive discussion of 1.5G Latino immigrants in Gaithersburg, Maryland- combining the previous themes of local, Latino, and 1.5G into one article.

Gaithersburg, Maryland and the Metropolitan Area

Before I dive into the history of immigrants in Gaithersburg, it is important to highlight that immigration to the surrounding metropolitan area is relatively newer, coming from the “fourth wave” of immigrants, than in typical immigrant gateway cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Miami (Price et al., 2005, 61). Even though 2000 Census data ranks the Washington, D.C. region as having the seventh largest immigrant population among all U.S. metropolitan areas, “Washington has merited scant attention in contemporary literature concerned with immigrants and cities” (Price et al., 2005, 62). It is especially imperative to focus on the Washington, D.C. metropolitan region because it may be a prototype of a new postindustrial, post-WWII, immigrant gateway that is not characterized by existing conceptualizations of immigrant settlement such as tight-knit ethnic enclaves. In fact, there are few historically ethnic immigrant neighborhoods or enclaves (Price et al., 2005, 63). Instead, immigrants are significantly dispersed upon their arrival, which contradict the spatial assimilation model, a model by Massey and Denton (1985) maintaining that upon entry, immigrants cluster with fellow ethnics in less desirable neighborhoods, and over time, with higher levels of education and income, they seek to leave their ethnic neighborhoods, bring their residential status into line with their improved socioeconomic status, and undergo a process of integration (Alba and Logan, 1991; Logan and Alba, 1993). The fact that immigrants in the D.C. metropolitan area are dispersed upon their arrival suggests that spatial dispersion does not equate with social and economic integration, and that many immigrants are able to maintain a sense of community with their fellow ethnics that relies less upon residential proximity and more upon the practice of heterolocalism (Price et al., 2005, 64). Gaithersburg exhibits specific examples of heterolocalism, and I will discuss those in a later section.

Gaithersburg, Maryland began in 1765 as a small agricultural settlement known as Log Town, located where Olde Towne Gaithersburg is now (“City History”, 2021). Gaithersburg, considered a suburb and a primary city within the metropolitan area near Washington D.C., spans 10.34 square miles (Bing, 2021). While the city has always been majority white, there is a clear growth in the Latino population over time. Gaithersburg’s statistics match the larger D.C. metropolitan area. For example, in 1970, only one out of every twenty-two residents in the metropolitan area was foreign-born; by 2000, one out of every six of the region’s residents was foreign-born because immigrants were drawn, by the 1980s and 1990s, to employment opportunities such as information technology, biomedical industries, and business services (Price et al., 2005, 65). The largest, and most attractive for migrants, industries in Gaithersburg are Professional, Scientific & Technical Services, Health Care & Social Assistance, and Public Administration (Data USA, 2021). For example, the National Institute for Standards and Technology (NIST) and other government institutions are located in or near the city (Price and Singer, 2008, 18). The “% Negro and other races” in Gaithersburg according to 1970 U.S. Census data was 2.3% (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1973, 40). Unfortunately, questions of race/ethnicity were not asked in the 1980 and 1990 U.S. Census. Without 1980 and 1990 U.S. Census data, it cannot be determined whether there was a steady growth of the Latino population from 1970 to 2000. However, there is evidence from local

newspaper articles in the 90s and 2000s that the Latino population had more than doubled between 1980 and 1990 in Gaithersburg, and Gaithersburg's total immigrant population rose by 125% (Bock, 1991; Price and Singer, 2008, 13). Moving forward to 2000 U.S. Census data, the % "Hispanic or Latin of any Race" had grown to 19.8%. In 2010, U.S. Census data recorded 24.2% "Hispanic or Latin of any Race" ("Demographics", 2021). Finally, in the most recent census, from 2020, the % "Hispanic or Latino" in Gaithersburg was 25% ("QuickFacts", 2021). While it is clear that there was a large "wave²" of Latino immigrants in the 1980s and 1990s, growth is still prevalent in this city, yet slowing. In addition, it is difficult to estimate the undocumented immigrant population in Gaithersburg because many may have been cautious with their personal information and neglected to fill out their census form, in fear of legal punishment for being undocumented.

A study done by Data USA in 2018 found that those who were foreign-born accounted for 39.1% of Gaithersburg's population, which is higher than the national average of 13.7%. While the median native-born age in 2018 was 30 years old, the median foreign-born age was 42 years old. This could support a theory that many Latino immigrants immigrated here at a young age decades ago. The % of the foreign-born population that had citizenship in 2018 was 77.9%, which is lower than the national average of 93.2%. Interestingly, in 2017, that percentage was 78.2%, meaning the rate of foreign-born Gaithersburg residents with citizenship could be decreasing over time (Data USA, 2021). In the larger metropolitan area, no single group dominated Washington's immigrant flow, but the largest flow of recent immigrants is from El Salvador (Price et al., 2005, 68). In 2019, the most common birthplace for foreign-born residents of the entire state of Maryland was El Salvador, followed by India and China (Data USA, 2021). Salvadorans comprised 33.3%, 302,000, of Latino immigrants in the metropolitan area in 2014 (Hernandez-Fujigaki, 2017). This helps to explain why there is a very large Salvadoran population in Gaithersburg (Bock, 2018).

Recent immigrants to the larger metropolitan area tend to bypass the central city and choose to settle in the suburbs because they are likely to have access to an opportunity structure and resources that may facilitate their prospects for upward social mobility, and, in turn, integration (Price et al., 2005, 79). The median household income is growing in the city, but it is economically diverse: \$86,427/year but with a 9.12% poverty rate. Latinos are the second largest population in Gaithersburg living in poverty, after white people (Data USA, 2021). Many Latinos write down that they are white because they don't believe Hispanic really represents them. Also, the largest population demographics is white, so it is likely that they would have the most people in poverty. Since Latinos are the second largest demographic, this makes sense proportionally. The median property value was \$389,700 in 2018, which is 1.7 times larger than the national average, yet the city's home ownership rate is 50.5%, which is lower than the national average (Data USA, 2021).

On the positive side, there is 1.38% annual growth in the number of employees in Gaithersburg. Yet, Hispanics or Latinos were classified as having the fourth highest degrees awarded at institutions in Gaithersburg. This is a relatively low ranking considering Latinos are the second most populous in the city, and it may explain why the wages by "Race and Ethnicity in Common Jobs" is lowest for black,

² "Wave": I tend to put this word in quotes because I do not necessarily agree with calling the arrival of a large group of immigrants to the United States a wave. Vocabulary like this is used to negatively frame immigration as a "crisis" for the nation (Massey and Pren 2012). Marine metaphors have been used to dramatize the crisis, with Latino immigration being labeled as a "rising tide" or "tidal wave" that was meant to overwhelm the U.S. and "drown" its culture, "flooding" American society with a group of unwanted foreigners (Massey and Pren 2012). Rhetoric like this increases the sentiment of a Latino threat narrative, a concept created by political activists and bureaucratic entrepreneurs to frame Latino immigration as a grave threat to the status quo of the nation (Chaves 2013).

“other”, and “two or more races”, the only category presumed to include Latinos and Latino immigrants (Data USA, 2021).

Online City-Data Forum: Perspectives on Gaithersburg’s New Arrivals

I did heavy internet diving through the forums of city-data.com to learn more about Gaithersburg from the perspectives of its residents. City-Data is “an Illinois-based social networking and information website that presents data and information pertaining to United States cities, and offers public online forums for discussion,” (“City-Data”, 2021). An analysis of these forums highlights that Gaithersburg residents who have lived in the town for a long time have clearly noticed that there is a shift in population demographics: the amount of undocumented immigrants in the area has increased. These responses are not necessarily “safe for work” or correct in any way; however, the perceived safety of the internet truly allows users to comment their real opinions, something an anthropological researcher investigating such a political subject as U.S. immigration policy can appreciate. I observe these forum threads through a term coined by scholars Portes and Rumbaut as the “contexts of reception”.

A context of reception is the perceived incorporation into society for immigrants, which is shaped by multiple interacting elements (Getrich, 2020a). These elements include the characteristics of their residential community (size, spatial layout, ethnoracial composition of the population), conditions of the local labor market, government policies, and the resources and support of their own ethnic community (Portes and Rumbaut, 2014, 139). The context of reception is classified as either positive, negative, or potentially a mix of both. In a positive context of reception, immigrants are welcomed and can pursue their version of the American Dream, whether that involves finding a job, developing social support, reuniting with their family, etc. In a negative context of reception, immigrants experience hostility or discrimination, have trouble finding jobs, are isolated, etc. (Getrich, 2020a). From the information about Gaithersburg, Maryland provided above, there seems to be a fairly positive context of reception regarding the residential community, as the ethnoracial composition of the population shows a large percentage of Latinos and the suburban layout of the city does not allow for isolated, crowded ethnic enclaves as it would in a highly populated, dense area such as New York City. The local labor market is diverse and, although the rate for obtaining a degree amongst Latinos is not particularly high, the number of employees is growing in various industries. Later on, I discuss the nonprofit and community resources that Gaithersburg provides as well as government policies that Maryland has in place. For now, the element of context of reception that this online forum represents is public opinion, the public opinion of Latino immigrants’ own residents dispersed throughout discussions about development, crime, business, and schools in Gaithersburg and especially Olde Towne Gaithersburg. Contextually, Olde Towne is locally known for its arrival of new immigrants.

Thread #1

The creator of this forum group from August 2010, surprised at how “old” Olde Towne Gaithersburg is, asks why the area has not had any recent developments like the rest of the D.C. metropolitan area and also asks whether new investments in infrastructure would instantly increase rent in the town’s apartment complexes or whether the increase will be more gradual.

Response: **“It’s overrun with illegal aliens so no developer wants to touch it.** Same with Lakeforest/Montgomery Village. **Gaithersburg really f’ckd up** taking a page from the book of Takoma Park.” – User 1

Response: “Olde Towne isn’t a desirable area, so I guess so far **no developers are interested.** I don’t pay much attention now that I don’t live there anymore, though. **The area has a high concentration of**

Latinos– who knows how many legal compared to illegal– you must have noticed that already...” – User 2

Response: “Crime cameras are going up soon due to the fact that **all kinds of gangs roam the area**. I have lived here for 20 some years and used to walk in the Olde Towne area after dark, but not anymore. Sad but true...” – User 3

Response: “It has been on the decline since the '70s. **Before illegal aliens took it over, it was dumpy**. This is arguably the oldest part of Gaithersburg, so it looks kind of a dump when you see old buildings.” – User 4

User 1 may have mentioned Takoma Park because, historically, in 1985, a Takoma Park church was the original base of CASA de Maryland (the ‘Central American Solidarity Association of Maryland’). CASA de Maryland is arguably one of the most referred to resources for immigrants seeking help towards any sort of integration into society when they arrive in Maryland. Founded to assist people from Central America fleeing poverty and persecution, the nonprofit organization shows that immigrant participation in Montgomery County society is both facilitated by disregarding legal status and stimulated by government support for non-governmental organizations like itself (Daamen and Doomernik, 2014, 555). CASA de Maryland can be seen by some as disregarding legal status because the county administration provided a large part of the means to open a day labor center in 2005. Day labor centers work their way around the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, which introduces an E-Verify program that prohibits employers from hiring federally unauthorized immigrants for work. They do this by claiming that it is the employer’s responsibility to check immigration status, not theirs, and CASA does not question what immigrants tell them. CASA offers vocational training and the CASA de Maryland Identity Card, purchased for \$15, without any documents needed from the immigrants’ country of origin (Daamen and Doomernik, 2014, 556). The applicant just requires a ‘witness’, a guarantor, and is then issued the CASA ID, valid for 6 months or 2 years if the immigrant provides some valid documents. This ID enables the immigrant to work by providing something with an address to the employer, and CASA has achieved recognition and acceptance of the CASA ID among Montgomery County policy, banks, doctors, and other organizations. However, the negative context of reception did not disappear, and the NGO Help Save Maryland (HSM) was founded to oppose this CASA ID initiative. HSM members feel that services such as those provided by CASA to illegal immigrants, especially when funded from taxpayers’ money, are threatening to public safety because of the presence of such migrants and the day labor center in their ‘backyards’ (Daamen and Doomernik, 2014, 557). Chavez’s Latino threat narrative is clearly exhibited in this situation (2013).

The responses in forum #1 highlight the clear acknowledgement by local residents of a Latino, largely undocumented, immigrant presence in the town. One user seems to claim that undocumented immigrants have livened up this historic area with their arrival. This is supported through evidence of most immigrants settling with multiple family members as a part of the United States’ family reunification process, which would in turn lead to the development of community centers for the youth, Latino restaurants and markets, etc. (Jordan, 2021). Unfortunately though, the residents’ use of the outdated and no longer recognized³ term “illegal aliens” conveys that these residents have an overwhelmingly negative context of reception surrounding the growing Latino immigrant community in Gaithersburg.

Thread #2

³ In April 2021, the Biden administration fulfilled a promise it made on Joe Biden’s first day in office to change immigration agencies’, such as US Customs and Border Protection, official language practices (Bayoumi 2021). Words such as “alien” and “illegal alien” have been replaced with “noncitizen”, and the word “assimilation” has been replaced with “integration” (Bayoumi 2021).

The creator of this forum group from March 2011 asks what the trend of crime will be in Olde Towne in the next 5 years, and whether development of street cameras and a pipeline will return the area to the “commercial and cultural center it once was”.

Response: “There has been a lot of crime in the Olde Towne Area and **many people stay away from this area.**” – User 5

Response: “I like how people will say this but not actually back it up with anything. **Olde Towne has a large population of Hispanics, and for some reason this makes some types of people very nervous.** If you take a look at a crime map like the one below⁴, you'll see that Olde Towne doesn't have any lower or higher rate of crime than any of the surrounding areas.” – User 6 (response to User 5)

With only a few responses in this forum, generally talking about a hope for less crime in the area in the future, there is a sense that crime is currently high in the city. I, myself, have spent a lot of time in Olde Towne Gaithersburg and can see why people perceived the area to be rife with crime due to its rugged nature, but like a few others in this forum, I find no immediate feeling of threat or danger once I stop and spend time in the area at its small shops and cozy restaurants and apartments. It is important to highlight User 6's reaction to User 5's claim about crime, responding to the unstated assumption that Hispanics are the cause of crime or at least are the reason people stay away from the area. User 6 is clearly challenging User 5's negative context of reception.

Thread #3

The creator of this forum from April 2017 is simply asking residents whether or not they should relocate from downtown Frederick (a town 30 minutes North) to Gaithersburg.

Response: **What's your tolerance for increasing poverty and illegal immigrants? Poverty and illegal immigration has been steadily moving north up the I-270 corridor for more than a decade....and you are looking to move south.** So, these are things to consider. – User 7

Response: Gaithersburg is what you make of it **depending on what side of 270 [major highway] you are on....**most of the new developments and desirable places to live are west of 270: Kentlands, the Crown... that whole area that likes to be considered North Potomac. **The crime ridden areas are found to the east of 270: Olde Towne, Emory Grove neighborhoods...Montgomery Village...Lakeforest Mall...** even in those areas crime isn't random for the most part...**mind your business you are just fine....the schools clusters east of 270 are Watkins Mill, Gaithersburg, Magruder... more culturally diverse schools.**” – User 8

The responses to this forum combines the overall observations of the first two forums: a growing undocumented immigrant population and crime. Residents seem to have extensive knowledge about where in Gaithersburg it is pleasant and where one should be more cautious with themselves based on the I-270 highway, which runs through the city. There is also mention of “more culturally diverse schools”, which most likely refers to the large Latino population in local high schools such as Gaithersburg High School. Indeed, all 1.5G Latinos that I interviewed and surveyed attend or had attended Gaithersburg High School and Quince Orchard High School, two diverse public schools in the city.

⁴ The crime map this user is referring to comes from Spot Crime, a website that provides a crime map, trends, analytics, daily archives, and many other forms of data about crime in the United States. This user links the crime map for Montgomery County, MD, which has changed slightly since this forum was created in 2017. Here is the link: <https://spotcrime.com/MD/Montgomery%20County>.

The takeaway from this forum discussion among Gaithersburg, and especially Olde Towne Gaithersburg, residents is that whether locals are willing to share their opinions or not, there is a consensus that undocumented immigrants have arrived to this gateway city, and the arrival has been noticeable. The derogatory language used in users' responses such as "illegal immigrants" and "illegal aliens", along with associated phrases such as "gangs", "crime ridden", "tolerance", and "stay away from this area" all point public opinion towards representing a negative context of reception in Gaithersburg. It is important to keep in mind this classification as I discuss my findings regarding 1.5G Latino immigrants' feelings of confidence, fitting in, and succeeding in the United States.

Methods

To avoid criticism similar to that received by the author of *American Dirt*, I used methods that relied on the feelings, experiences and perspectives, of those who are either directly or closely impacted by U.S. immigration policy in Gaithersburg, Maryland. Therefore, rather than tell stories about 1.5G Latino immigrants based on my own observations, I wrote down the real narratives from this community, hoping to humanize those who are treated as statistical "others" in U.S. society.

Online Survey with Youth

I created a 42-question online survey for 1.5G Latinos aged 14 to 25 years old. The purpose of this survey is to learn more about the Latino 1.5G and to highlight the morale, future aspirations, confidence, feelings of fitting in, opinion on the United States government, and struggles of those who are documented and undocumented in Gaithersburg. The sixteen survey respondents' identifying information will be kept anonymous. I asked questions that aligned with the following domains: demographics, future aspirations, immigration story, struggles, and U.S. immigration policy.

Demographics

This section is meant to confirm that each respondent did, in fact, meet the required classifications as an immigrant, a 1.5G student or young adult, and either a resident of Gaithersburg or someone who spent enough time in Gaithersburg that they are very familiar with those who live in Gaithersburg (i.e., attended a school located in Gaithersburg).

Future Aspirations

This section is meant to gauge the respondents' thoughts about academic institutions and whether they ever plan on attending college in the United States. If respondents indicated that they had not begun to think about college, they were asked to explain why.

Immigration Story

This section is meant to determine the current immigration status of each respondent and how they came to obtain that status. An important part of this section asks respondents how confident they are about the future while they keep in mind their immigration status. For example, respondents were asked: "Thinking particularly about your immigration status, how confident are you, on a scale from 1-5, that you will be able to make enough money to live comfortably in the United States?" If respondents chose the number one, they were "not at all confident". If respondents chose the number five, they were "completely confident".

Struggles

This section is meant to gain a better understanding of the social life of a 1.5G Latino youth, particularly asking whether respondents feel as though they fit in with the people they are around every day, which country they feel most connected to, and their most difficult personal struggles that they faced or are facing immediately after arriving in the United States.

U.S. Immigration Policy

While this section does not relate to the life stages of 1.5G Latino immigrants, it is an opportunity for me to hear the true opinions about former president Donald Trump and President Joe Biden's presidencies and immigration policies. It also gives respondents a chance to voice what they would change about the immigration process to come to the United States, which relates to their possible struggles.

Individual Interviews with Nonprofit Coordinators and Community Leaders

I interviewed one former and one current coordinator for a local nonprofit organization in Gaithersburg called Liberty's Promise. I also interviewed a priest from a Catholic church in Gaithersburg, St. Martin of Tours Parish. These interviews were meant to capture the perspectives of those who work every week and sometimes every day with 1.5G Latinos, learning from this community and attempting to aid new arrivals to the United States in some way. Question types were all open-ended, relating to the history of Latino immigration into Gaithersburg, the reasons behind the new arrivals coming to Gaithersburg, Maryland, the perceived struggles of this community, and how the demographics of the town and the Latino community have changed over time.

Individual Interviews with Youth

These interviews acted as follow-up interviews for those who were willing to offer their emails at the end of the 42-question survey they took. They were meant to clarify any gaps or vague answers that the respondents gave in their surveys. I also interviewed one youth before she took the survey, but the questions were exactly the same as the ones she answered in the survey. The interviews were either in the form of a single, consolidated zoom session, or were email correspondences over time regarding specific inquiries or clarifications I wanted to make. They were a great opportunity to learn more about the story of the youth I surveyed, their detailed encounters with the U.S. immigration process, and their perspectives surrounding their community and the American Dream.

Focus Group Session

I conducted one focus group session with a total of six high school students from either Gaithersburg High School or Quince Orchard High School, both of which are located in Gaithersburg, Maryland. These students were in Liberty's Promise, and spent time after school every week getting help from the organizations' coordinators on job applications, resume building, school work, etc. The session was in Spanish, as the Program Officer of Liberty's Promise, Shiloah Kline, who also listened in on the session, advised me beforehand that each student was either in ESL level I or II. I am fluent in Spanish, but I also had a bilingual moderator join in on the session with me in case there was any loss in translation, especially of Guatemalan, Salvadoran, or Honduran slang. This session was meant to be a shortened version of the survey, and some questions were altered so that each student could answer and add to the conversation of the group. There were multiple open-ended and "yes or no" questions that aligned with the same domains as those in the survey. Participants were reminded multiple times that the Zoom session

was being recorded and asked multiple times if I had permission to use what they said in the recording to help my research as long as identifying information was left anonymous.

My initial observations during the session were, although there were clear head nods after every time I asked the students whether or not they were comfortable talking about immigration, confidence, feelings of fitting in, struggles, opinions on the U.S. government, etc., the students did not speak as much as I, or any anthropology researcher, would have liked them to. Rather than every student offering their answer to each question and agreeing or disagreeing with their fellow peers while offering an explanation, one or two students would eventually give a short answer after each question I asked. My moderator and I would highlight to the students that the Zoom session was a safe space to speak, following up our questions with, “Why?”, “Does anyone agree or disagree?”, etc., but there were many long pauses where no one spoke. This lack of interaction could be due to a few reasons. First, perhaps the students were not comfortable speaking about their immigration situation and only said they were to be polite. Second, as this session took place after a full day of school on a Monday, the students may have been tired and not wanting to have any more academically stimulating discussions— even though I told the students in my introduction that this was a “laid back conversation” and that there was no pressure to perform for my research. Third, these are high school students who, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, have spent the last couple of months on a computer screen becoming accustomed to very little interaction and talk about personal things. Ms. Kline assured me that this last reason was likely the most accurate one, and that she was quite happy with the turnout and amount of conversation, an amount that is not typical for high school students over Zoom.

Findings

1.5 Generation Perspectives: Nonprofit Coordinators and Community Leaders

Nonprofit coordinators in Gaithersburg work every week and sometimes every day with 1.5G Latinos, learning from this community and attempting to aid new arrivals to the United States, whether that be through providing college career preparedness, referrals to pro-bono lawyers, education on the democratic process in this country, or a familiar place to congregate with other Latino immigrants and practice their faith. In this section, I analyze the experiences of those who work to help the 1.5G Latino population in Gaithersburg and explore what they have learned about the generation’s constant struggles, including their difficulties talking about their past experiences and current need for help, adapting to a new lifestyle, constantly sending remittances⁵ back home, growing up without one or both parents living at home, lack of motivation to finish high school, family relationship problems as a result of family reunification, being used to gain citizenship for family members, learning English, lack of career help from school counselors, lack of financial aid from the U.S. government, and living life in between documented and undocumented status.

Liberty’s Promise

Liberty’s Promise is a nonprofit organization whose mission statement is to support “young immigrants in need while encouraging them to be active and conscientious American citizens.” Their programs aim to “make the immigrant experience an affirmative one for young newcomers while instilling in them a sense of pride and support for American ideals of democracy and freedom.” By doing so, Liberty’s Promise

⁵ Remittances: a transfer of money, often by a foreign worker to an individual in their country of origin. Money sent home by migrants competes with international aid and is one of the largest financial inflows to developing countries (“Remittance”, 2021).

seeks to reaffirm “fundamental egalitarian and democratic traditions for future generations”. This organization began in 2005 and has supported over 5,200 young immigrants to realize their American Dream through after school programs that promote college and career, and country, preparedness. New arrivals are immersed into the community, taking tours to City Hall, and meeting elected officials all while learning how to engage themselves and express their voice (“About Us”, 2021). The two workers I interviewed from Liberty’s Promise were Jennifer Escobar, the current Program Officer, and Julien Labiche, the former Montgomery and Prince George’s County Director for Liberty’s Promise who is now a Manager at the Gilchrist Immigrant Resource Center: an organization that provides resources to immigrants living in Montgomery County, Maryland— resources such as classes in English, computer use, and citizenship preparation; links to translation or interpretation services; handbooks on local housing, etc. (“Gilchrist Immigrant”, 2021).

Julien Labiche remarks that starting in 2012, there was an increase in the number of immigrants who arrived in the United States as unaccompanied minors. He remembers Gaithersburg High School having to hire extra ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teachers, to where the teacher count doubled in size as schools in Gaithersburg were receiving youth on a daily basis, with steady influxes from El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala. In response to the growing number of students with limited English language proficiency (LEP), ESOL programs were put in place in the 2000s after the 1990s “wave” arrived. There is also a strong presence of immigrants emerging from West African countries, but Julien claims the numbers are “nowhere near the numbers from Central American countries”. Julien confirms that Gaithersburg used to be a secondary migration location⁶, but now it is a gateway city much like Chicago, New York City, Miami, etc. The reason for this, as Julien poses, is because Washington D.C. established itself as a gateway years ago, but as new developments increased the cost of housing, immigrants were driven away from the city up North to towns like Gaithersburg, Germantown, Silver Spring, Frederick, and Olney, Maryland. Eventually, the growing number of Salvadorans, which is the largest demographic of immigrants in Gaithersburg, attracted more Salvadorans to the point where suburban locations in the metropolitan area were thriving with newly arrived Latino immigrants.

⁶ Secondary Migration Location: the second location immigrants move to after they first arrive in their new country

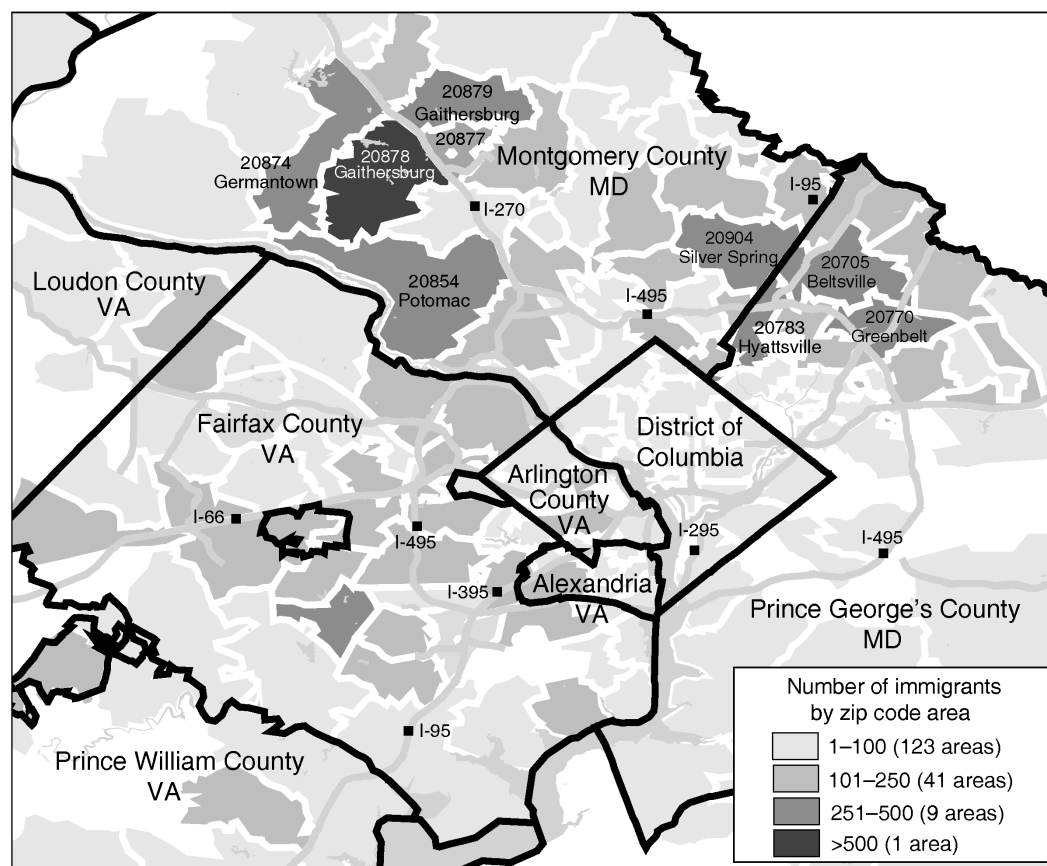


Figure 1. Source: Administrative data from the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service for fiscal years 1990-1998.

It wasn't until Jennifer Escobar was promoted from Facilitator to Program Officer that she began establishing deeper relationships with the students in Gaithersburg and Quince Orchard High School to where eventually students would approach her with more personalized problems, asking for help. This is the first of many examples that indicate how rare and difficult it is for this generation to open up about their struggles living as an immigrant to anyone other than their family members or close friends. Jennifer realizes that programs like Liberty's Promise are very helpful to the Latino 1.5G because, as most of her students were undocumented, the teenagers had just arrived to the United States and did not know which, or if any, resources were available to people like them.

Jennifer, herself, is a part of the 1.5G and also attended Gaithersburg High School, entering into ESOL levels III, IV, and V. I asked her about what it is like to move to a different country that does not speak her native language and have to adapt to her new life. In her words, "the change is scary". In her home town in El Salvador, mothers get the day off on Mother's Day, but when Father's Day comes around, no one is there to take it. This is because fathers are away working in the United States and sending remittances home to the rest of the family in El Salvador. Regarding the 1.5G, many students make the journey to the United States on their own to join their father after a few years. This highlights the main reason that the 1.5G in Gaithersburg decides to travel to the U.S.: their parents or extended family members are already here. Since Salvadorans make up a large majority of the Latino population in Gaithersburg, immigrants come because they know they do not need to know English in order to get around town and be productive in everyday chores like getting groceries, doing laundry, shopping for lawn tools, etc.

Zelinsky and Lee's (1998) heterolocalism theory maintains that immigrants can create communities through social networks and organizations rather than through residential proximity. Other scholars call this phenomenon settling into edge gateways: localities that have recently attracted immigrants in great numbers, transforming those areas from native-born white suburbs into identifiable places where a diverse mix of immigrant groups cluster. These edge gateways perform the functions of traditional inner-city neighborhoods where many immigrants still cluster, but due to their suburban setting they may offer advantages not found in the inner city like better schools, services, and housing (Price and Singer, 2008, 2). For example, the local governance structure of Gaithersburg with a mayor and city council allows it to create laws or programs that respond to the needs of immigrants in ways that surrounding areas like Langley Park-Adelphi and Wheaton cannot without county approval (Price and Singer, 2008, 18). City elected officials allow politicians to craft explicit responses to immigrant-related issues in the areas of language accommodation, housing, health care, and day labor sites (Price and Singer, 2008, 29). Gaithersburg also has some of the most affordable housing in all of Montgomery County, especially its rental stock (Price and Singer, 2008, 18). Instead of living side-by-side within ethnic enclaves, immigrants regularly gather informally at social, cultural, religious, and sporting events to maintain their vital networks throughout an entire suburban city, like Gaithersburg, rather than a small tight-knit enclave (Zelinsky and Lee, 1998). In the larger metropolitan area, there are immigrant-run soccer leagues for Latinos, with leagues organized by country of origin and teams that are often village-based (Price and Whitworth, 2004). Sunday soccer games at regional parks scattered throughout the metropolis are the time and place for newcomers to reassemble themselves in social units that replicate community patterns back home. In Gaithersburg, you might see Salvadoran adolescents on a team made up of immigrant youth from the small municipality of Intipucá, El Salvador practicing for their Sunday soccer game on one of the fields in Prince George's County. You might stay and watch Los Estudiantes de la Plata face Gaithersburg on the soccer field while a handful of vendors sell seasoned beef tacos to both crowds (Bock, 2018).



Source: *Hispanic International Soccer League of Maryland Facebook Page*, April 20th, 2021



Source: *JOStudios*, “Guate Bakery”, Guatemalan Bakery, in Olde Towne Gaithersburg



Source: *Google Reviews*, “La Casita Pupusería & Cocina C.A.”, Salvadoran Restaurant in Olde Towne Gaithersburg



Source: *JOStudios*, “Urban Cuts”, Barber Shop in Olde Towne Gaithersburg

This trending pull factor⁷ begs the question of whether or not the 1.5G has a choice to leave or stay in their country of origin. I will discuss this question in more detail later, but Jennifer notes that there were students who mentioned that they didn't want to come to the United States but had to because their parents were here. They lived with extended family members or well-known neighbors in their country of origin while their parents were away. Then, when it came time to leave, the child crossed borders, sometimes merely escaping ICE (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement) officers, and met their parents again after years of being apart. As Julien Labiche notes, the reunification process can be silent and awkward. One not so unique situation Julien recalls is one where a student's parent left to the states for 10 years before their child came to join them. Having been raised by their relatives, the child did not know their mother or father's parenting styles very well. On top of that, this student's parents had children here in the states in the past 10 years, meaning that the child was not only reuniting with their parents but also meeting their new siblings for the first time. The 1.5G child fought with the second generation child for their parents' attention and favoritism, resulting in a difficult developing relationship with their parents. The situation may, however, be the other way around as children leave their parents in their country of origin and come to the U.S. to live with grandparents, uncles, etc. Either way, the 1.5G children in Gaithersburg often had to make the journey alone. As Julien remarks, family reunification is "a roller coaster".

Other common reasons Julien and Jennifer mentioned as to why the Latino 1.5G move to the United States include the need to escape a traumatic situation in their country of origin. Gang violence, a corrupt government, and an unsafe living environment are causes listed on many immigration application forms⁸ that allow immigrants in the country as long as they were in an abusive environment in their home country. Another reason discussed was that of creating an "anchor baby" situation. The term "anchor baby" is a derogatory term used to refer to the U.S. citizen children of undocumented immigrants. One of Jennifer's students often joked that he was an anchor baby because he was born in the United States, then moved back to Guatemala and lived there for the majority of his childhood and adolescent years. Once he was old enough, he moved back to the United States and was able to sponsor his undocumented parents and obtain visas for them. Whether the joke was genuine or the student actually felt that way, Jennifer could never quite tell. This process of obtaining United States citizenship is referenced commonly in immigration studies between Mexico and the United States, and it has sparked a debate on what truly constitutes citizenship. Is citizenship founded on the principle of **jus soli**, meaning the "*right of soil*", which indicates that as long as one is born on a country's soil, they are citizens of that country, providing for them immediate rights? Or perhaps citizenship is conferred on the basis of **jus sanguinis**, meaning the "*right of blood*", requiring one's parent or parents to be a citizen of that country, providing for them very limited rights or none at all once they are born? While the United States bases its practical definition of citizenship on the basis of **jus soli**, there are a surprising number of people and politicians in the country who want to change that and change birthright citizenship (Getrich, 2020b).

While the number of students in the Liberty's Promise groups has grown over time from 7 to 36 to sometimes 60 students involved after school, most of whom do not have documentation, Jennifer and Julien note the corresponding growth in the number of new and long-lasting struggles.

⁷ Pull Factors: reasons immigrants come to, or are "pulled" to, their new country

⁸ While asylum seekers and refugees are the most commonly known types of immigrants that are fleeing from an unsafe situation in their home country, there are other forms of immigration status that require dangerous experiences. For example, Congress created Temporary Protected Status (TPS) in the Immigration Act of 1990 to provide standing immigration status to nationals of designated countries that are confronting armed conflict, environmental disaster, or a situation that prevents them from returning to the state in safety ("Temporary Protected", 2021).

Jennifer agrees with Julien that language is the biggest struggle the 1.5G has when they first arrive to the United States. In fact, there was a movement in Montgomery County to hire ESOL teachers who spoke a majority English so students are not tempted to converse with their teachers in Spanish even though it may make communication between the two parties much simpler. From my survey results, 81% of respondents answered that one of the greatest problems the 1.5G faces as soon as they arrive in the United States is learning English, which can bring about other challenges such as fitting in in school and finding a job. In her own experience, Jennifer believes she learned more English, or at least learned it “better”, while in El Salvador during her Saturday English classes than in ESOL in the United States. It has a lot to do, she explains, with the books used because the instruction textbooks in El Salvador are created for Latino countries, while the books in the U.S. have no specific target audience related to race or ethnicity and are much more difficult to understand. Regarding high school teachers of other subjects, Jennifer poses that the teachers need to understand the processes the Latino 1.5G students have gone through and have to go through. The teachers know, on the surface, that the situation is bad, but once again they teach their lowest level students with this goal in mind: “They just need to graduate,” rather than “They need to learn and use these skills to transfer them into a career.” Moreover, these students need individual care because they all learn the language and culture at a different pace.

Among other struggles is the cost of housing, even in Gaithersburg, as development increases the value of assets in town. Being undocumented without a work permit, Jennifer adds, provides students with no reward at the end of high school or college because, “No work permit means no job.” The feeling of hopelessness, as Julien previously noted, sets in. Both Jennifer and Julien noted that students in Liberty’s Promise had higher hopes that they would get a job and be successful in life if they had documentation or knew they had the opportunity to receive documentation in the near future. Jennifer has had frustrating conversations with 18, 19, and 20 year olds who need a job but do not have a work permit, a work visa, or any letters of recommendation for a work permit by a supervisor. She was turning into a case manager, referring the students to lawyers, rather than preparing them for the future.

Julien offers one possible solution that may at least mitigate some problems the students are having. He proposes that college students could help this generation navigate the college process and transition into adulthood once they enter campus. However, this does not help the majority of students who have the deepest struggles, those who are undocumented and cannot attend college.

St. Martin of Tours Parish

Father David Wells serves at the St. Martin of Tours Parish, a Roman Catholic Church located in Gaithersburg, Maryland. St. Martin has scheduled masses every day in English and Spanish, and even two masses in French. The church was founded in Gaithersburg in 1920, meaning it recently celebrated a centennial of worship in the town and has been around before, during, and after the first “waves” of Latino immigrants started moving in. In fact, the registers at St. Martin are said to be a testament to the church’s diversity. On their website, the church recalls a 1922 baptismal register for an adult “colored” male who was born into slavery and baptized on his death bed (“St. Martin”, 2021). While St. Martin of Tours may have been the first Roman Catholic Church to offer Spanish masses in the area, it certainly wasn’t the last, as St. Rose of Lima (Gaithersburg), Mother Seton (Germantown), St. John Neumann (Gaithersburg), and St. Raphael’s (Rockville) have also started weekly Spanish masses. This is a clear sign that the Latino population in the Metropolitan area continues to grow, and the demand for Spanish mass is increasing as well.

Regarding the Latino community, St. Martin’s started their first Spanish mass in the 1980s during the “first wave” of Salvadoran immigrants. Fr. Wells describes the church as one of the first places the new arrivals would and still will visit when they move to Gaithersburg due to the fact that these immigrants come from very religious, predominantly catholic countries. Once they see the parish, they realize an

immediate connection to their country of origin which is familiar to them. When Fr. Wells mentioned this, I couldn't help but ask, "So, you could classify this as a 'gateway parish' then?" He agrees.

Fr. Wells gives an estimate that around two thirds of the parish is Latino, with at least 90 to 95 percent of Latinos arriving undocumented their first year at the church. The two main Latino demographics are Honduran and Salvadoran, with approximately 60 to 70 percent of the Latino community being comprised of those from El Salvador. Latino prisoners from a local facility also visit. In normal times⁹, over 2,000 people visit the Spanish-speaking mass every Sunday.

Speaking about his experiences with St. Martin's youth group, Fr. Wells notes similar struggles that Julien and Jennifer from Liberty's Promise mentioned. English learning, mental health care, trouble with access to and understanding technology for school, obtaining documentation, and domestic violence¹⁰ were all listed as legitimate daily problems for the youths at the church. Economically, Fr. Wells highlights that when the economy is "doing fine", the Latino community struggles, but when the economy is not doing fine, the Latino community has to fight to stay afloat, and the church tries to provide any assistance they can during those particular times. This research coincides with scholar, Cecilia Menjivar's findings on legal liminality, the concept of conceptualizing undocumented and documented immigration by exposing the gray area of legal status through discussions of social networks, family, and artistic expression. Menjivar finds that one of the most important spaces for Salvadorans and Guatemalans to obtain varied forms of assistance and to connect with others is the church (2006). "The Catholic Church and mainline Protestant denominations have offered these immigrants the assistance and protection that the U.S. government has refused to extend to them or that their relatives cannot provide" because they are undocumented. Specifically, churches like these have provided settlement assistance, opened up community clinics, and developed English-language and vocational classes (Menjivar, 2006). Overall, Salvadorans and Guatemalans emphasize that help from the church is not only spiritual or moral, but also material and financial, because they have no other formal institutions available for assistance when they are still undocumented.

Life Stages

Although all newly arrived immigrants are bound by the law in some way, as they do not yet have full citizenship, their identities, sense of belonging, and confidence vary depending on social position. As Abrego argues, "the role of life-stage at migration and work-versus-school contexts importantly inform immigrants' legal consciousness" (Abrego, 2011, 337). That is why the 1.5G is such an important immigrant group to focus on, as most 1.5G Latinos are in the middle of schooling when they migrate. In this section, I discuss three life stages that Gaithersburg 1.5G Latinos live through in their immigration journey and how it affects their family relationships, their future endeavors, and their mental and emotional capacity to deal with the everyday struggles that an immigrant faces.

I use data from my survey and individual interviews with 1.5G Latino youth. As expected from my research about Gaithersburg, MD, a majority (66.7%) of the Latino immigrants in the survey are from El Salvador. As expected from my research about the United States, the top three Spanish speaking countries the U.S. receives immigrants from, are represented: El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala. In fact, these are the only three countries represented.

⁹ "normal times": This refers to times before the Covid-19 pandemic existed.

¹⁰ Fr. Wells mentioned that this is a struggle in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, as Latinos were some of the first at the parish to lose their jobs and end up spending more time at home. However, as mentioned in the previous section, unsafe living environments like domestic violence were quite a common occurrence in Latino households across the country even before the pandemic began.

Stage 1: Temporary Independence or Semi-independence

Every 1.5G that I interviewed started their immigration journey in Stage 1: temporary independence. This stage seems paradoxical, as a person's younger years are spent being dependent on their parents, while their older years are spent being independent. However, it's very common that parents immigrate to the United States at least one year before their children come to join them in order to create a stable living situation and gain legal status to sponsor their children with a visa later on. While this is a great strategy, my interviewees mentioned that they were separated from their parent or parents for years in their country of origin, often feeling very alone, and having to learn to live by themselves, with a neighbor, or extended family member. The age range for this stage is between around 10 to 16 years old.

Survey Participant 15 describes to me his immigration story. He is a 21 year old male from Guatemala, who responded in my survey that he feels most connected to the United States because it is the place he has spent the longest amount of time growing up in. His family tried living in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Spain, before settling in the U.S. When Survey Participant 15 was 4 years old, his mother and father divorced and his father later left him, his little brother, and his mother to come to the United States. He recalls being upset that one of his parents had left him alone. Therefore, he was overjoyed when his mother decided the family would reunite in the United States and try to make things work after one decade of living apart. Julien, from Liberty's Promise, supports this common situation in which family reunification is one of the main reasons Latino immigrants in Maryland wished to come to the United States. Unfortunately, his mother did not enjoy living paycheck to paycheck and ended up moving back to Guatemala, Survey Participant 15's little brother joining her. Something distinct about this story is that, while the respondent recalls having no choice in the matter of moving to the United States, his parents did give him the option of moving back to Guatemala, and he chose to remain in Gaithersburg, Maryland.

Which country do you feel most connected to?

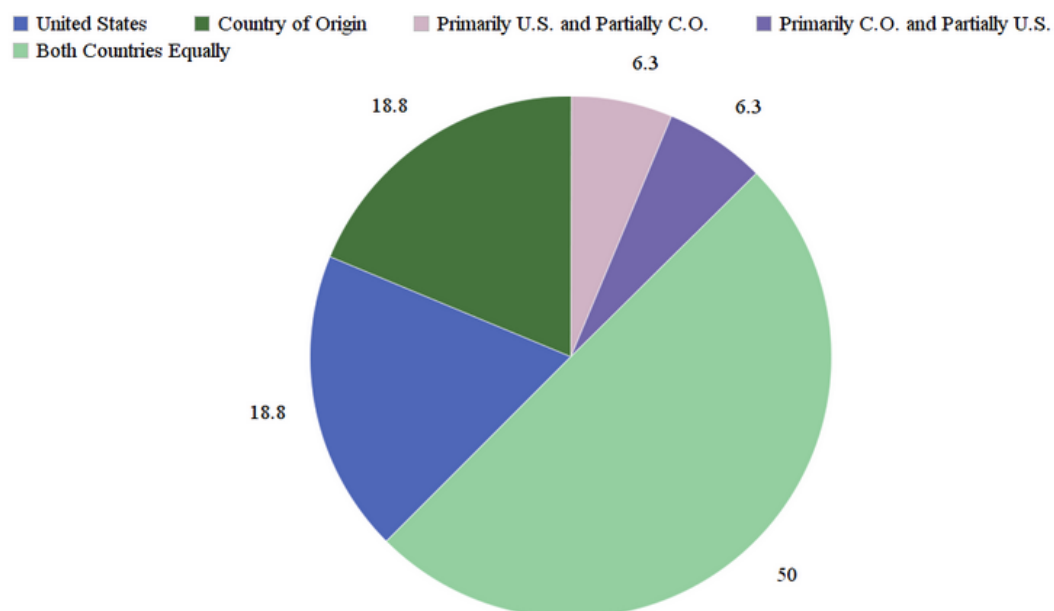


Figure 2

As I mentioned that Survey Participant 15 feels most connected to the United States rather than his country of origin, it is relevant to point out that that response was not the majority response (see Figure

2). 18.8% of respondents, three people, felt most connected to the U.S. and 50% of respondents, eight people, felt connected to both the United States and their country of origin.

Survey Participant 16 is a 20 year old female from Guatemala, finishing her senior year at Gaithersburg High School. She is documented in the United States under political asylum. When she was ten years old, her mother and father also divorced, so she lived with her mother and her older sister. The respondent became used to always being with her mother, until she left the country and moved to the United States to create a better life for their family. While her mother was away, she recalls life being difficult because, living with her sister, the two did not always see eye to eye. Eventually, Survey Participant 16 moved out and lived on her own for an entire year before joining her mother in the United States.

When [my mother] came to [the United States], everything [in my life] was different. I had to learn to do everything by myself. My sister was not the best sister I could have had in that moment...but I tried to do some things by myself since I was very young, like cook, do house chores, go shopping, study, and discipline myself. Sometimes kids have their parents to ask, "Have you done this? Are you going to do this?" I did not have that. I had to do it myself. Yes, I talked with my mother, but it wasn't the same as when she was present with me, here [in Guatemala].

If you responded "documented", what is your immigration status?

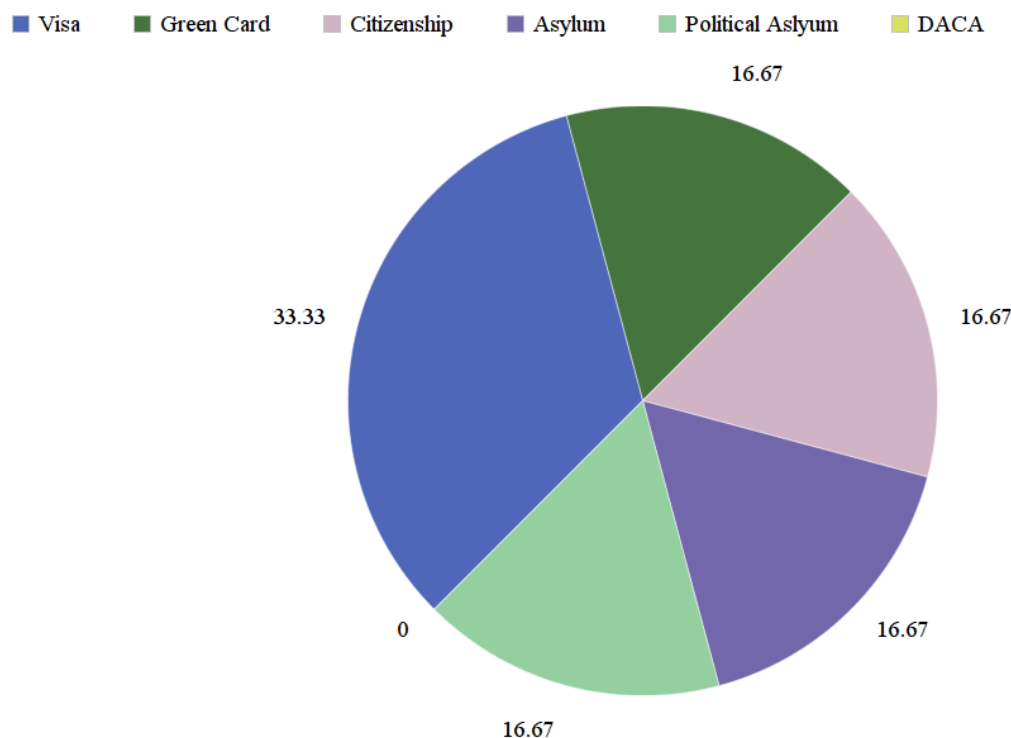


Figure 3

As I mentioned that Survey Participant 16 has status through political asylum, it is relevant to show the make of my survey respondents regarding their immigration status (see Figure 3). 62.5% of respondents, 10 people, are undocumented and 37.5% of respondents, 6 people, are documented. Of those who are documented, their status is split pretty evenly, however none of the respondents have Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status, a temporary form of status created by President Obama by Executive

Order in 2012. Of those who are undocumented, 90.9% of them came to the country by crossing the border without authorization and 9.1% came by overstaying their visa.

Survey Participant 1 is a freshman in Gaithersburg High School who was supposed to follow his mother to the United States soon after she arrived last year, in 2020, but due to the Trump administration's total shut down of the borders during quarantine for the Covid-19 pandemic, he had to remain in El Salvador by himself for months.

When she [my mother] left to come to the United States, it was a bit sad because I am always with her, practically... she became my mother and my father because my step father came [to the United States] when I was one year old. So, it hurt me a lot when she left because each parent left one at a time, and I had become accustomed to spending my time with her... [it is] a difficult process.

Survey Participant 1 was temporarily independent in El Salvador during this life stage of his immigration journey. He understood the commonality of his unfortunate situation among those his age, who, like him, travel for their first time on a plane to an entirely new country by themselves. He is happy, though, that he was able to see a new view of his beautiful country from the airplane before he landed at the airport and reunited with his mother.

Stage 2: Adolescence and Dependence

Stage 2 occurs when the child finally joins their parent or parents in the U.S., growing up in U.S. high schools and not worrying about their status because they can depend on their, usually legal, parents for transportation and financial security. And, everyone is entitled a public education regardless of immigration status. However, some high school students' grades and optimism about the future declined during the last year or two of high school as they came to realize the implications of their status. The age range for this stage is around 13 to 18 years old.

A majority (53.3%) of my respondents sometimes lose concentration/focus in school or at work because they are thinking about their immigration status or about their past experiences with immigration. This is something citizens are never distracted by.

Jennifer, from Liberty's Promise, highlights the struggle to maintain motivation to attend high school, as one of her students, from Nicaragua, did not want to come to school anymore because he did not feel he was learning anything in his classes due to the fact that everything was taught in English. Students like him think, "What is the point of finishing high school? How am I going to graduate?" They feel as if they are not ready to graduate, they have nowhere to go after high school, and they will not go to college or find a good job. Some students feel as though they will fall into a limbo after graduation. Therefore, they disregard their school work and begin to focus on ways to make money for themselves. They think, "I am going to go out and help my dad instead with manual labor jobs because he knows people who hire undocumented workers, and I can get fake papers this way." The school administrators do not try to sway students away from this new realization because, as Jennifer notes, some of these new arrivals are already a bit older than their peers in the same grade level once they test into their classes; thus, the school tries to graduate them before they turn 21 years old to boost their high school graduation rates.

In my focus group session with six 1.5G Latino adolescent immigrants from local Gaithersburg high schools, one 17 year old student who crossed Mexico and the border with her mother when she was 14 years old believes that, because of her current legal status— undocumented while waiting to be granted asylum— and because of how the pandemic is affecting university decisions, there is a 50/50 chance she

will be able to go to college. Another student who is currently a freshman agreed with her about his chances and added that he has low grades that may be holding him back.

English seemed to be constantly on the students' minds. In the focus group session, when I began the session by asking each student how their day at school was, every student mentioned that they learned many new things in their English class, most likely referring to ESOL. Later on, when I asked how the participants' legal status has affected their lives here in the United States, most students were hesitant to share the specifics of their problems because some of them were undocumented, but they did all come to a consensus that the language is the most difficult thing to understand when they first arrive. When asked about their confidence in going to college, they also mentioned that they may not be able to go because of their lack of understanding of English. Finally, when I asked what the students believe are the main problems facing the 1.5G in the United States, English was once again, a main talking point.

Student 1: I believe that learning English is difficult because it is hard to understand... like to get the hang of it.

Student 2: What [the first student] said is true about English... for someone who is not accustomed to speaking English or hearing it, it is very difficult to speak and understand it.

Student 3: I agree.

In addition to the English problem, some students have never learned how to use a computer, and they feel overwhelmed as everyone else in their classes are moving faster than they are. Especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, the particular students in this session have been online all year and do not feel connected to their respective classmates.

Student 1: The first problem is English, and the second problem is fitting in in school as this is the first time I have seen a school like this in the United States.

Moderator: What is the problem of fitting in like? Do you find trouble fitting in with the school in general, with the people, was the school too big... what is the problem like?

Student 1: Well, I haven't gotten to go to school just yet because when I came here I started online [due to the pandemic], so it may be a problem to fit in when I go to school [in person] for the first time.

Student 4: Well, not really, I don't think it will be difficult. If you get along with everyone they might help you, but that depends on your behavior. If you are kind to others, they will be kind to you.

Student 2: When I first arrived, English was the problem because people started speaking to me in English, and because I never had anyone talk to me like that it was difficult. Another thing was finding someone to hang out with.

The Gaithersburg community is one of the places Julien notes that the 1.5G and their families find solace because they are aware of the areas, such as certain neighborhood streets, that are locally known for being areas where documented and undocumented immigrants live and help each other out.

Stage 3: Adulthood and (Stalled) Permanent Independence

Stage 3 involves 1.5G Latinos' transition to adulthood and permanent independence, without need of strong parental guidance. I add that their complete independence may be stalled because of their lack of

legal documentation. As immigrants turn 18 years old, they begin participating in adult rites of passage, such as voting, signing their own documents, etc., moving closer and closer to fulfilling their own version of the American Dream. The age range for this stage is around 16 to 25 years old.

Regarding rites of passage, Gonzales and Chavez (2012) find that once undocumented adolescents move into adulthood, they “awaken to a nightmare”, coming face-to-face with illegality, a condition they had been protected from by their age and by their parents. Specifically, like other youth, they desired to drive a car, work, vote, and join friends in social activities where a state-issued ID was required. However, without a state-issued driver’s license or a Social Security card, which are easy to get if one is a legal permanent resident (green card holder) or U.S. citizen, none of these rites of passage into adulthood were possible because attempting to acquire such identification exposes undocumented 1.5G Latinos to government practices of control, surveillance, and punishment. The authors note, “As children, most of them were not required to produce identification. It is only when they attempted to assert their position in the American mainstream that the importance of identification became essential... This often came as a surprise to many who were unaware of their unauthorized status or its significance,” (Gonzales and Chavez 2012).

From these findings, it is clear that once immigrants settle in the United States, the American Dream and the presumed feasibility of achieving it is not always what it seems. Research focusing on Central and South American immigrants finds that newer immigrants are given a distorted view of life in the United States which was perpetuated by earlier immigrants and the media. Once the newer immigrants arrive, they feel this pervasive pressure to appear successful as they do not want their families to worry about them nor diminish their social esteem in the U.S. Economically, immigrants spend most of their time working to send remittances back home, so they cannot earn surplus income as easily as they would have in their country of origin. Socially, immigrants have noted that “people change here”, becoming more egotistical and competitive rather than willing to fulfill their traditional kinship obligations of helping newer and/or younger immigrants get back on their feet (Getrich, 2020c).

1.5G *undocumented* Latinos feel as though their lives are on hold as they move from one low paying job to another just to get by until they gain documentation.

It is really difficult to watch all my best friends that I went to high school with posting things about college life on social media, while I’m here wondering when I will ever get my work permit and not have a negative balance in my bank account. I was popular in high school because I did sports and photography. I don’t see my friends that often because they are all in different universities. I am still in Gaithersburg, trying to find small photography and landscaping gigs that pay cash.

Survey Participant 15, as quoted above, helps to confirm that the undocumented community of 1.5G Latino immigrants live their lives on hold, without much hope. However, as Menjívar (2006) highlights, the condition of being “illegal” is not so black and white. Survey Participant 15 is a 21 year old male who attended Gaithersburg High School for a majority of his high school years, and even went to college for one semester as a documented immigrant with a student visa. Once his visa expired, he was told he could no longer continue college and remains caught in the gray area of Menjívar’s legal liminality (2006). This is because, his application for a Special Immigrant Juvenile visa was accepted in 2017, but he has not received the official visa sticker in his passport. He cannot be deported if he gets pulled over for a traffic stop, yet he cannot work or pay to go to school, for lack of his visa, work permit, and Social Security Number. He watches his documented friends continue on with life as he waits for documentation. Without being able to work even part time jobs, he moves from job to job earning cash rather than a stable wage rate. He has no workers benefits like health or dental insurance. The respondent mentions he was popular in high school. He had social status, and is proud of that time as he now has no official legal status. Scholars find that as immigrant youth are integrated into the school system, where they grow up

side-by-side with the native-born (Gleeson and Gonzales, 2012), their “unity of experiences” with friends and classmates promotes feelings of togetherness and inclusion (Rumbaut, 1997, 944), and these feelings, in turn shape immigrant youths’ identification and experience of coming of age (Gonzales, 2011, 604). Legally, the United States encourages this because of the Supreme Court ruling in *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) which ruled that all children, even undocumented immigrants, are afforded Fourteenth Amendment protections preventing schools from denying them the right to a K-12 education. Furthermore, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act prevents schools from releasing any information from students’ records to immigration authorities, making school a protected space in which undocumented status has little to no negative effect (Gonzales, 2011, 605). With that being said, there is a clear sense of “awakening to a nightmare” once immigrant youth graduate high school and realize they are stuck on their life’s path due to their legal liminality (Chavez and Gonzales, 2012).

One youth told Gonzales and Chavez that she moves from one low paying job to another, either finding work where employers do not ask for identification or staying until identification becomes an issue (2012). “She has held various jobs— minor office work as a receptionist and secretary, factory work stuffing envelopes, and in fast food restaurants— but she runs the risk of not getting paid when the issue of identification surfaces, which has previously happened. Sometimes she works for cash,” (Gonzales and Chavez 2012). It is as if those in the undocumented Latino 1.5G felt like they were living a wasted life, not being able to remain in school and earn higher certificates of education, yet also not being able to establish a well-paying career and path for growth.

A final important aspect of the slowed transition from childhood to adulthood is that of identity. Gonzales and Chavez argue “the condition of illegality not only constrains daily life, but can leave an indelible imprint on identity,” (2012). Even though this generation may have come to believe the civic lessons so essential to citizenship and to hold dear the values driving the American Dream from encouragement and education from school or nonprofit organizations, the illegality that defined their abject status left them with a clear sense of their difference. However, one silver lining may be that, “while some would wilt under such pressure, these people resisted, pursued education and training, struggled to survive economically, contributed to organizations working to change the nation’s immigration laws, and maintained hope in a future where they would be allowed full participation in society,” (Gonzales and Chavez 2012). The authors interpret these acts of resistance as acts of **cultural citizenship**, which Flores and Benmayor define as a broad range of activities that disadvantaged groups used to claim space and rights in society (1997).

Survey Participant 16 earns Student Service Learning hours as her form of cultural citizenship. During her first weeks in the United States, she claims she barely understood anything as she could not speak English well and was around a majority of English speakers in her classes. This situation made her extremely shy, and she never knew how to practice her conversation skills in English nor connect with others as she had nothing to talk about for more than a couple of sentences. Then, through Liberty’s Promise, Survey Participant 16 learned about opportunities to gain Student Service Learning hours¹¹.

The SSL hours gave me the drive to want to know more and more [about this country] and build relationships with more people. I have 291 SSL hours... I distribute food, I help at interfaith organizations, I have cleaned up parks... I love to clean up the parks because I get to be around nature and the color green, and I get to see the animals... Not everyone understands my happiness... My life in the past has been so sad and so hard. This country is a new chapter for me, so I try to be involved in helping other

¹¹ In Montgomery County Public Schools, students have from the end of fifth grade until the end of twelfth grade to complete 75 service-learning hours, which are service activities promoted by school-sponsored clubs and organizations (“Frequently Asked”, 2021). If students do not gain at least 75 hours, they will not graduate (“Frequently Asked”, 2021).

communities come together as a team... I found a form of happiness doing SLL hours... because I understand I am doing something good for other people.

This respondent feels as though the United States gave her another chance at life, and through unpaid public service, she feels as though she can give back and help those who want another chance at life like she did in Guatemala. Therefore, she has claimed space in this country by positively affecting other people's lives, something she can do without being a United States citizen.

The optimistic assertions of the interviewees seem to brazenly challenge the cold statistical data gathered in the past by the U.S. Census Bureau, documenting that Latinos trail the non-Hispanic White population in many important indicators of economic wellbeing and leisure (Hernandez-Fujigaki, 2017, 139).

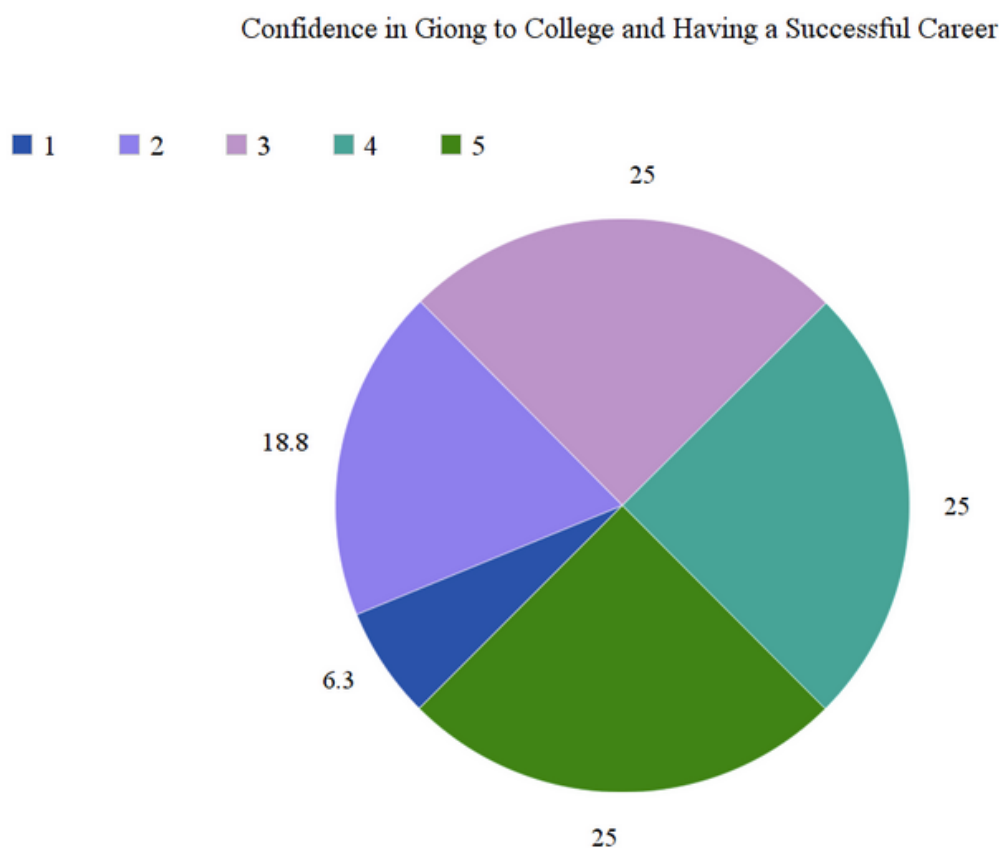


Figure 4

This question asks: Thinking particularly about your immigration status, how confident are you, on a scale from 1 to 5, that you will go to college and have a successful career in the future (see Figure 4)? 75% of respondents are at confidence level 3 or higher. For those at confidence levels 3 or higher, the common explanations as to why they felt this way involved them believing in themselves and knowing they can do anything if they try hard enough- a common mantra of the American Dream- as well as having always had the aspiration to outdo themselves and help their family. Some, however, did mention that they were not at confidence level 5 because they were unsure of the future with President Biden's new immigration plans or they were just not completely sure they could attend college and make enough money because they did not know English as well or had no legal status.

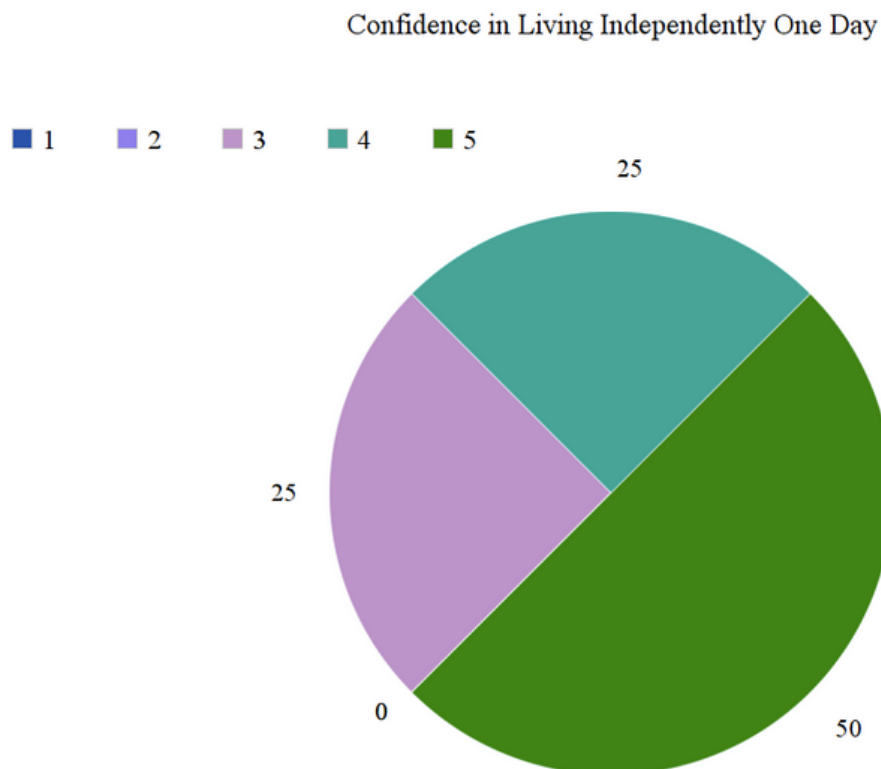


Figure 5

This question asks: Thinking particularly about your immigration status, on a scale from 1 to 5, how confident are you in your ability to live on your own, independently, one day (see Figure 5)? 100% of respondents are at a confidence level of 3 or higher. Those at confidence level 5, once again, mentioned believing in themselves and their work ethic. Two respondents, one aged 19 years and the other aged 25, noted that they already live alone. The 25 year old respondent says their parents are not in the country with them. Those at confidence levels 3 or 4 explained that it is difficult to adapt to this country. They worrying about and try to help their family, which may prevent the 1.5G Latinos from living alone and separating themselves from their relatives.

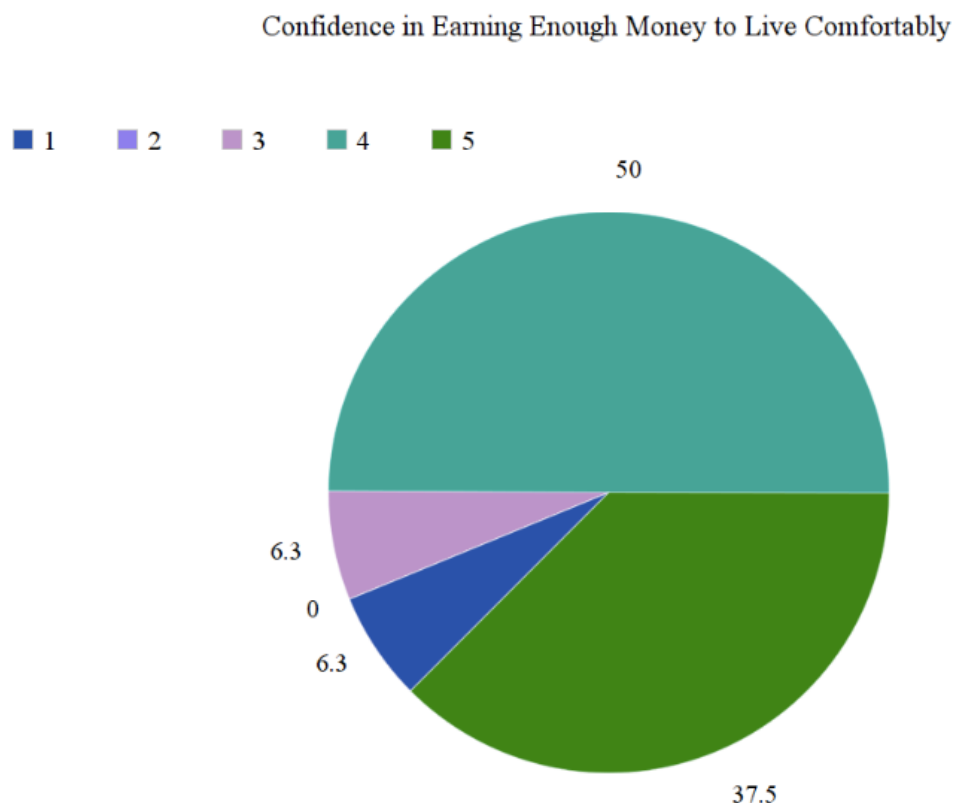


Figure 6

This question asks: Thinking particularly about your immigration status, how confident are you, on a scale from 1 to 5, in your ability to earn enough money to live comfortably in the United States (see Figure 6)? 93.8% of respondents are at a confidence level of 3 or higher. Those with confidence levels of 3 or higher believed, with their work ethic and the types of jobs they want to pursue, that they will have enough money to use and save for themselves. The respondents tended to think in the far future rather than the near future, mentioning that once they gain a work permit or become legal, then they will be able to earn a comfortable living.

Although respondents may be confident in their own abilities to fulfill the typical milestones of the American Dream in the future, they are not as confident in the U.S. government's ability to provide necessary resources or enact policies making life easier for immigrants.

In the focus group session, one student gave her opinion about U.S. immigration policies and whether or not the new Biden administration will improve the lives of immigrants through better policies.

Student 4: Well, I think the policies [of Biden] are going to be the same policies that Donald Trump had regarding immigration and everything else, and nothing is going to change. A president proposes a policy but the people [in Congress] don't accept it. So, it is always something impossible. We are accustomed to hearing the same promises over and over again, and they never come true... Politicians only say these things to gain more constituents.

Every other student agreed with this thought. However, I will point out that survey respondents agreed with the immigration policies of President Biden significantly more than those of former president, Donald Trump.

On a scale from 1 to 5, how much do you agree with the immigration policy of former president, Donald Trump?

■ I do not agree at all. ■ I do not agree a little. ■ I am indifferent. I don't care.
 ■ I agree a little. ■ I completely agree. ■ I don't know.

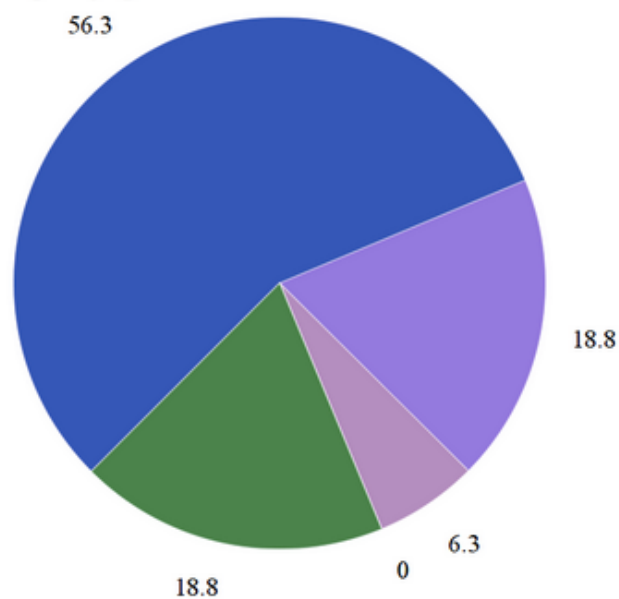


Figure 7

On a scale from 1 to 5, how much do you agree with the immigration policy of President Joe Biden?

■ I do not agree at all. ■ I do not agree a little. ■ I am indifferent. I don't care.
 ■ I agree a little. ■ I completely agree. ■ I don't know.

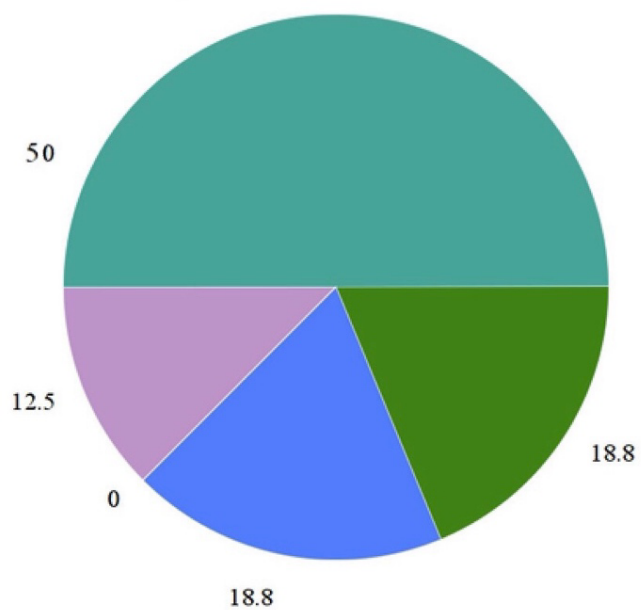


Figure 8

Conclusion and Implications

While it is not correct to say that all 1.5G Latino immigrants in the United States face the same challenges regarding confidence, future aspirations, feelings of fitting in, and day-to-day struggles living life in between connections to one's country of origin and their new country, I do argue that this sample of 1.5G Latino immigrants from Gaithersburg, Maryland begins a valid and relevant discussion that needs to be had about this unique generation of immigrant youth in the United States. I have also found that each 1.5G immigrant in my research goes through most, if not all, aspects of my theory regarding the three life stages of immigration at a young age: temporary independence or semi-independence, adolescence and dependence, and adulthood and (stalled) permanent independence. These life stages are present whether the immigrant is undocumented, documented, or somewhere in between.

Policy Implications

A unique observation made by immigration scholars about this immigrant generation is their active involvement in the politics of the United States. Especially undocumented youth, many of whom are growing up and coming of age in the U.S., are actively demanding full inclusion into U.S. society while their parents or any undocumented adults from earlier generations have remained in the shadows. Specifically, prominent internet presence of various undocumented youth groups as well as public presence of protests of collective claims-making is important because the 1.5G's greater visibility may lead to greater inclusion through legalization and real policy change (Abrego, 2011, 338). This is a positive change in the behavior of future immigrant generations and may lead to the passage of current citizenship pathway bills in Congress.

The most prominent act allowing for a legal path to citizenship for the 1.5G is the DREAM Act. The DREAM Act, which stands for the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act, is a bill that has been introduced repeatedly in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate since 2001, but it has not been passed. If passed, the act would provide conditional legal status and a more permanent pathway to legalization and citizenship for undocumented minors in the U.S. In 2019, the DREAM and Promise Act (HR6) was passed in the House but denied in the Senate. There has been a rise of the "DREAMer" social movement where youth have organized in cities to protest, bring more attention to, and advocate for this community, yet the act is in gridlock still (Getrich, 2020b). Gonzales and Burciaga note that congressional gridlock over immigration policy over the last two decades has moved immigration lawmaking responsibilities to the states, counties, and municipalities (2018, 183). In the absence of a federal reform in immigration policy, local lawmakers have manufactured their own responses to immigrant issues with a proliferation of immigration proposals at the local level (Gonzales and Burciaga, 2018, 183). For example, Maryland's SB167 law in 2012 allows undocumented minors to attend and complete community college and then transfer as long as they have attended and graduated at least three years in a Maryland high school and meet the income tax, residency, and selective service registration requirements (Getrich, 2020b). This may be the easiest way, therefore, to make positive change and quicken the path to citizenship for undocumented or noncitizen youth. It also demonstrates that today, where one resides in the U.S. dramatically shapes a multitude of experiences based on local impediments and opportunities, as there is no universal standard or quality expected by immigration policy (Gonzales and Burciaga, 2018, 184).

It is beneficial for the immigrant youths in my research who are living in Gaithersburg that the city, and virtually all of Montgomery County is an official "sanctuary city", a term from the Oxford Dictionary defined as a city whose municipal laws tend to protect undocumented immigrants from deportation or prosecution, despite federal immigration law. For example, Montgomery County passed a law in 2003 that allowed immigrants to use identification cards issued by foreign consulates, usually Mexico and

Guatemala, which say nothing about a person's legal status, but the city considers the card proper identification and immigrants can use them to open bank accounts, enroll children in schools, and obtain driver's licenses in some other states (Price and Singer, 2008, 32). Still, there are things that could be done to make life easier for documented and undocumented immigrants. One Montgomery County official has observed that the county has strict zoning and housing regulations that residents have a true lack of knowledge about, and these codes can cause 'true problems' for immigrants and the county officials who must see that they comply (Price and Singer, 2008, 35). Also, CASA de Maryland's ID has been criticized by local immigrants, especially undocumented immigrants, because about 80% of the jobs they provide to immigrants with the CASA ID require a Social Security Number.

Further Research Paths

In the future, to enhance my research, a representative sample of 1.5G Latino immigrants in Gaithersburg, Maryland should be obtained in order to better understand how representative these experiences are relative to the population of 1.5G Latinos in the United States as a whole. I would like to learn more about school grades of 1.5G Latinos, their struggles with English learning, and the perspectives of ESOL as well as regular high school teachers in order to learn what improvements need to be made to the education system and where one should start with immigrant education reform advocacy in this country. Finally, I would like to generate more findings regarding how 1.5G Latino students forge belonging for themselves in local contexts such as Gaithersburg, Maryland and its community organizations and resources.

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