



# From a Child's Perspective: Understanding detention, deportation and familial roots from children of undocumented immigrants

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## Introduction

Despite the growing body of research with immigrant children, little social scientific research has looked at the developmental and psychosocial effects of deportation policies and practices on children from the perspective of children themselves. Moreover, research on what children directly affected by these policies and practices, most of whom live in mixed-status households, know about their familial roots and differing citizenship statuses is scarce.

## The Present Study

- The current study address some of the gaps in our understanding of the effects of deportation and immigration systems on children born and/or living in the US with immigrant parents. Importantly, as a pilot study, it hopes to better inform work with this population around these issues by generating more focused questions and methodologies for further research.
- The current pilot study is part of larger interdisciplinary *Participatory and Action Research* project entitled "The Post Deportation Human Rights Project": a collaboration between Boston College and 3 local immigrant community organizations.

## Methods

### Participants & Procedures

- Children (5-11) from participating PDHRP community organizations were brought together in the setting of "Know Your Rights Workshops" for a specially designed workshop entitled: "Knowing our Families"
- Activity 1
  - Children drew a picture of their families.
- Activity 2
  - Children were interviewed individually and asked questions about their drawings by one of the two researchers facilitating the workshop.
- Activity 3
  - Stickers of flags from many Latin American countries were handed out to each child and children were instructed to put the stickers on each person in their drawing labeling what country they are from. Children in the group were then asked to share the country of origin of everyone they included in their drawing with the group.
- Activity 4
  - Children participated in a group discussion about their thoughts on what their parents/family members were doing in the workshop taking place outside of the room where we were gathered.

### Analysis

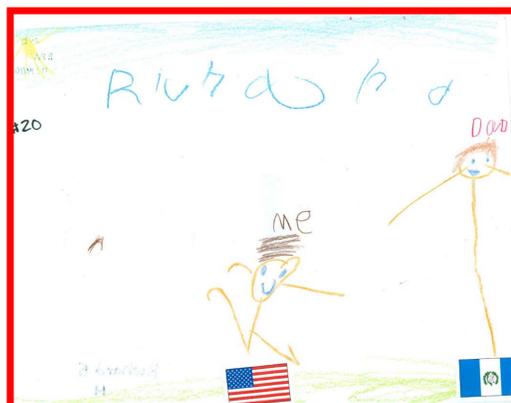
- Audio tapes of all activities were transcribed by a Spanish native speaker and then organized across activities per each child.
- Drawings and their corresponding transcripts were individually analyzed using thematic inductive coding.
- The current analysis triangulates data from previous pilot studies, researchers' field notes, and other encounters the researchers had with participants through the PDHRP.

## Findings



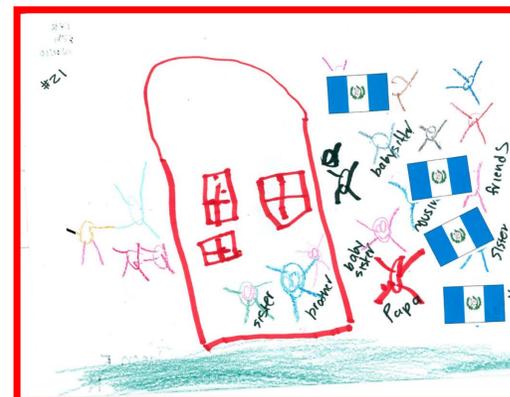
**#1 Female/Age 5**

- Lives with her single mother (*not represented in the drawing*) who is from Guatemala
- Her transcripts indicate that she knows Guatemala is in her life yet she does not represent it in her drawing; instead she focuses on her siblings and father with whom she has limited contact and all of whom currently live in the Dominican Republic
- She was born in and identifies herself with the US whose flag she placed above the drawing of herself



**#2 Male Age 5**

- Lives with his mother, father, and baby sister but only includes his father and himself in his drawing
- There is an apparent disconnect between his drawing, which includes a US flag above his own picture and a Guatemalan flag above his father, while his verbal description of his family states his family are "all from the United States" yet we know his parents are from Central America



**#3 Male Age 5**

- Lives with his mother, father and baby sister
- Both parents are from Guatemala and each maintain relationships with their families back home
- In his drawing he includes his older siblings who currently live in Guatemala and whom we know he has gone to visit
- We know both he and his baby sister were born in the United States yet there is no representation of the US in his drawing



**#4 Female Age 9**

- Lives with her mother and little sister
- Only child in sample who identifies herself and her sister with dual nationalities which she justifies doing "because we were born here, but we are really from Guatemala"
- Knows very little about Guatemala even though we know she speaks to multiple family members who currently live there



**#5 Female Age 11**

- Lives with her mother, brother, sister, and baby half sister. Her mother and father are currently separated
- Parents are both from Guatemala
- She has visited Guatemala which implies she is a US citizen, and yet no US identity is represented through her use of flags
- Family is undergoing transitions (*parents with spouses and step-siblings moving in*) yet she holds on to her family's homogeneity through her choice of flags



**#6 Male Age 8**

- Lives with his mother, father, and 2 siblings (*he left one out of his picture*)
- Identifies everyone in household including himself with a flag from El Salvador

## Cross-Case Summary of Findings

### Conclusions

- Children across all ages claim an identity connected with a country's flag.
- Some children identify with their countries of origin despite being born in the US (#3, #5 and #8) while others identify with a US Flag (#1 and #2). This was true across all ages which could mean that this identity is based more on personal and familial experiences rather than differing levels of understanding of nationality due to age.
- Some children who we can confirm or confidently speculate were born in the US (#3 and #5) do not identify themselves or anyone in the family with US flags.
- Children who identified themselves with US flags (#1 and #2) are both 5 years old.
- Some children recognize the presence of dual nationalities in their families (#1, #2 and #3)
- Some children represent family members currently living in their respective countries of origin in their drawings (#1 and #3), whether they have limited contact with them or not.

### Questions emergent from pilot study

- Based on these findings for children of all ages within this population:
  - Are children's nationality identity more tied to personal identification and life experiences than place of birth?
  - Do their family's current ties with their respective countries of origin influence their identity/ connection with their parents' countries of origin?

### Methodological Notes

- Children of different ages benefited from using drawings, speaking individually about their drawings, and using flags to talk about their parent's roots.
- All kids wanted to speak in English even though they come from Spanish speaking homes where English talk is limited
- Through drawings, some children were able to talk about family members currently residing in their countries of origin and engage in group dialogue about these countries of origin

### Acknowledgments

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