

**Paper Title:** “The ESL Kids Are Over There”: Social Boundaries Between Immigrant Latino and White High School Students

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### **ABSTRACT**

This ethnographic study was conducted at a high school on California’s central coast during the 2000-2001 school year with an enrollment of approximately 800 students, 43% of whom were White, and 54% Latino. Of the Latino enrollment, 216 or approximately 26% were immigrants classified by the school as English learners. The study focused on the students’ perspectives of the social interactions between immigrant Latino and White students, and identified factors contributing to boundaries which existed between the two groups. It also explored whether there were gender differences in both groups of students’ attitudes and behaviors regarding the social interactions, and to what extent these attitudes and behaviors were influenced by societal ideologies. Data were collected primarily through interviews with both Latino and White student groups. During the interviews, students were given a map of the school and asked to identify the different student groups on campus. Interview responses were supported or contested by my observations and field notes both inside and outside the classroom, and were compared to responses given on a student survey administered to 25% of the student population that same year. The data show that immigrant Latino students were virtually invisible to the White students at the school. None of the over 200 immigrant Latino students were

identified on the maps constructed by White students. Reasons why the immigrant students are not “seen” by their White peers are explored from the students’ perspectives, as well as from a theoretical multicultural perspective.