

THE EXPERIENCES OF UNDOCUMENTED LATIN@ STUDENTS WHO DEMONSTRATE  
RESILIENCE IN NAVIGATING HIGHER EDUCATION

By

Leslie Jo Shelton

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
For the degree of

Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education – Doctor of Philosophy

2014

## ABSTRACT

### THE EXPERIENCES OF UNDOCUMENTED LATIN@ STUDENTS WHO DEMONSTRATE RESILIENCE IN NAVIGATING HIGHER EDUCATION

By

Leslie Jo Shelton

The status of undocumented students is a significant contemporary issue in postsecondary education, as the demographics of the United States are rapidly changing with a rising number of undocumented Latin@ students enrolling in postsecondary education. Although approximately 65,000 undocumented students graduate from U.S. high schools each year, these students' citizenship statuses serve as a barrier to the admission, financing, and completion of higher education (UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education, 2007). Little is known about the experiences of undocumented Latin@ college students and university educators will benefit from learning about the experiences of resilient undocumented Latin@ students to inform best practice for serving this student population.

In this study, I use Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) with a resilience framework to analyze data from semi-structured interviews with 16 undocumented Latin@ college students who are enrolled in or recently graduated from four-year institutions of higher education throughout the United States. Through the use of qualitative interviews, I explore how undocumented Latin@ college students demonstrate resilience while navigating higher education. The research question guiding this study is: *How do undocumented Latin@ college students demonstrate resilience as they navigate higher education?* I explore this main question through two sub questions:

1. How does being undocumented shape a student's college experience?
2. What factors help undocumented students overcome challenges encountered in

higher education?

Participants reported that being undocumented shaped their experiences related to perception of campus climate, emotional challenges, academic and career limitations, and organizational involvement. Students demonstrated resilience through environmental factors such as relationships with family, peers, mentors, and other educational gatekeepers, as well as through maintaining ties to their home community, and through involvement in campus or community organizations. Students also demonstrated resilience through personal factors such as being future-oriented, effectively navigating the system, using effective coping behaviors, and embracing the connection between the personal and the political.

The discussion includes addressing themes related to CRT such as positionality, use of an anti-deficit approach, color-blindness, racist nativism, and interest convergence. Related themes of microaggressions, along with the importance of identity-based campus spaces, improving educator skills, and emphasizing an ethic of care are also explored. Implications for practice include raising awareness among educators and proactively showing support for this student group through visible ally programs, having positive interactions with students, serving as a resource, and helping to create networks of support for these students. Improving university resources includes practices such as creating formal peer and faculty/staff mentoring programs, dedicating physical campus spaces for a related student office with centralized resources, and enacting non-discrimination policies. Building connections external to postsecondary institutions includes involving the community, families, and K-12 partnerships in supporting undocumented students in achieving their higher education goals. The study concludes with a discussion of limitations and suggestions for future research.

Copyright by  
LESLIE JO SHELTON  
2014

To all of my loved ones who have shared in this journey. And, to all of the participants - this work would not be possible without you taking the time to share your experiences.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many times I have heard the analogy of the doctoral degree and dissertation process as a marathon and not a sprint. I can confirm this to be true, as I completed all of the above in the same time period. As a first generation college student and a former non-runner, these goals may seem like a long shot. However, thanks to the support of many amazing individuals, I truly enjoyed my adventures, both academic and running-related, at MSU.

A big thank you to my committee who believed in this work and helped shape it into a stronger piece of scholarship throughout the process. Dorothea Anagnostopoulos (affectionately referred to as Dr. A) – You were the first faculty member to support this work when the idea was floated to you for a small-scale in-class project I co-authored with Dr. Christina Yao. Not many faculty members would be as brave and willing to allow students to tackle this subject and to see the project through well beyond the semester, especially when participating from afar! And, Dr. Carter – You carefully crafted a classroom environment that introduced us to, and fueled our passion for, Critical Race Theory. Thank you for raising important questions and for helping me to explore CRT in a thoughtful and responsible manner. Kris Renn – You have been such a wonderful mentor and it was a true pleasure co-teaching with you as well as benefitting from your words of wisdom regarding my scholarship and professional development. Your sense of humor, encouragement, and willingness to share stories of your own successes and bloopers has been much appreciated (not to mention our joint student development theory Halloween costume that shall go down in history!). And to Ann Austin – You have been the best advisor and mentor I could have asked for during my time at MSU. I am so fortunate to have benefitted from your guidance and kindness over the past five years. I will strive to mirror this level of development and support for the students with whom I work in the future. Ann, what a gift it has been to work

with you the past five years – I’m looking forward to staying connected for many years to come!

I am lucky to have also benefitted from a true community of scholars that extends well beyond my committee. A big thank you extends to all of the HALE faculty members who provided support, good humor, and incredible opportunities that have shaped my identities as a scholar. A special thanks to Pat Enos who was my first GA supervisor at MSU, and so much more. Pat was always willing to check-in personally, provide support, a good laugh, and ask thoughtful questions leading to important reflection on the work we do as educators. In my future work, I hope to replicate Pat’s commitment to mentoring students and meaningful reflection.

In addition to wonderfully supportive faculty members, I have also been extremely lucky to form meaningful relationships within the Spartan student family. Thank you to my cohort, who provided support, thoughtful conversation, and many laughs as we worked together to achieve our goals. Saying thank you does not do justice to my level of gratitude to Level 1 – Dr. Leanne Perry, Dr. Missy Soto, and Dr. Christina Yao. Our inner-circle has supported one another through blood, sweat, and tears (no, literally - all three at multiple points in time). What would I do without you all to work through all the things “NOT in the brochure!”? I am so lucky to have you all as cohort-mates, colleagues, and most importantly, lifelong best friends. I cannot imagine this wild ride without ‘yall!

Thank you to many others who have also touched my life at various points in my educational journey. Dali and Bernadette (HALE Buddy and B!) – You are two of the most giving and fun chosen family members I could ask for... and I’m so glad you also let me get in quality puppy time with sweet little Lucy. Speaking of which, thank you to Missy and Wilson – Our fun work breaks for boops and snoots were so important in enjoying the PhD process. Good chats, good food, and good times! Plus, nobody does a study tour like we do (not even Rick

Steves himself...). There are many other members of the Spartan family to whom I am also forever grateful. Your friendship means the world to me and I look forward to staying connected as we move forward in our journeys.

Also, a thank you to my non-Spartan loved ones that have been significant in various chapters of my life thus far. A special thank you to Annie for being such an important part of my life. I am so lucky to enjoy your love, infectious laughter, deep passion for education and social justice, and wonderful care of the cutest four-legged baby ever, Mable Ruston. Dr. Cappie and Dr. Skippy ‘fa life, yo! To Elizabeth - You are the best cheerleader and support anyone could ever ask for. Your unconditional love and support absolutely mean the world to me and I cannot imagine the last several years of my life without our shared laughter and love. I look forward to sharing many more adventures in the years to come, including celebrating your doctoral graduation! And, last but certainly not least, thanks to my Mom for always reminding me that going to school was my job, for asking if I have any questions, and for putting up with me during stressful times – especially when offering up stories of the little bunny (the details of which are on a “need to know” basis). I may be your “free radical,” but you have managed to humor me throughout it all – and I know Aunt Bev agrees!

Beyond all of the personal, professional, and emotional support, I would also like to acknowledge my deep gratitude to Michigan State University and the College of Education for the financial support I received throughout my doctoral studies. Thanks to various scholarship and fellowship opportunities, I had the good fortune of being able to pursue this degree as a full-time student while also engaging in other enriching educational activities. Once such opportunity was traveling to South Africa to participate in a professional collaboration with Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. During this program, I had the great pleasure of meeting Eddie



Daniels, an anti-apartheid activist who was imprisoned with Nelson Mandela. I had the chance to visit one-on-one with Mr. Daniels on the boat ride back from the tour he gave us of Robben Island. Mr. Daniels spoke to me about the power of allies and advocates in social justice movements, and his words of wisdom shaped my personal philosophy of scholarship and what it means to be a global citizen advocating for equity in postsecondary education. As a part of this experience, our HALE group read Nelson Mandela's biography, A Long Walk To Freedom. A particular passage from this book resonated with me as I reflected on my journey as a scholar working to combat injustice. This idea speaks to the interconnectedness I believe exists in all of us, and to the approach I hope to uphold in setting the foundation for my dissertation work regarding undocumented college students:

*"A man who takes away another man's freedom is a prisoner of hatred, he is locked behind the bars of prejudice and narrow-mindedness. I am not truly free if I am taking away someone else's freedom, just as surely as I am not free when my freedom is taken from me. The oppressed and the oppressor alike are robbed of their humanity. For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedoms of others." -Nelson Mandela*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	xiv
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xiv
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT .....	1
Immigration and Higher Education Policy .....	8
The Role of University Educators .....	14
Statement of the Problem .....	16
Definitions .....	16
Latin@ .....	17
Undocumented .....	18
Research Questions .....	20
Purpose Statement .....	20
Statement of Significance .....	21
Economic standpoint .....	21
Ethical and humanistic standpoints .....	24
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE .....	26
The Experiences of Marginalized Students of Color .....	26
Access for minority students .....	27
Degree attainment for minority students .....	28
Relationships between society and higher education .....	29
Historical .....	29
Social .....	30
Financial .....	31
Individual .....	31
The Experiences of Latin@ Students .....	32
Latin@ K-12 students .....	32
Undocumented Latin@ K-12 students .....	34
Latin@ students in higher education .....	35
Undocumented Latin@ College Students .....	37
Family .....	41
Campus Climate .....	42
Sense of Belonging versus Marginalization .....	43
Social isolation .....	44
Encountering unaware and unsupportive educators .....	45
Stigma and Fear .....	46
Stigma .....	47
Fear .....	48
Professional Development Limitations .....	48
Activism .....	50
Gaps in Literature .....	52
Literature Review Conclusion .....	54

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY .....	56
Overview of Methodology .....	56
Research Paradigm.....	56
Anti-Deficit Approach .....	57
Counter narratives .....	59
CRT .....	60
LatCrit .....	63
Resilience .....	64
How CRT/LatCrit and Resilience Theory Guide This Study .....	69
Participant Selection .....	71
Site Selection .....	73
Data Collection .....	75
Interviews.....	75
Data Analysis .....	76
Transcription .....	77
Coding.....	77
Emergent Themes .....	78
Credibility .....	79
Reflexivity.....	82
Consideration of Human Subjects .....	85
 CHAPTER 4: PARTICIPANT PROFILES.....	 87
Kate .....	88
Eddie .....	90
Maria .....	92
Eber .....	95
Alexa .....	98
Zoe .....	99
Ignacio.....	103
Michael .....	108
Ben .....	110
Aracely.....	113
Miri .....	116
Karla.....	121
Alicia.....	124
Samuel.....	128
Ana.....	131
Mia .....	135
Conclusion .....	140
 CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS - QUESTION 1 .....	 142
Perception of Campus Climate .....	144
Sense of belonging versus marginalization.....	146
Social interactions.....	152
Coming out .....	154
Other undocumented students.....	160

Educator and Non-Peer Interactions .....	162
Unaware and unsupportive educators .....	164
Emotional Challenges .....	166
Stigma .....	168
Fear .....	171
Academic and Career Limitations .....	175
Organizational involvement.....	180
Chapter Summary: Findings From the First Research Question .....	181
 CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS - QUESTION 2 .....	183
Resilience: Environmental Factors .....	183
Family .....	186
Gender.....	188
Cultural expectations .....	193
Maintaining ties to home community .....	197
Peer relationships .....	199
Involvement in campus or community organizations.....	201
Mentor and supporter relationships .....	204
Resilience: Personal Factors .....	213
Future-Oriented.....	215
Sense of purpose .....	215
High educational and career aspirations .....	218
Goal oriented.....	220
Effective coping behaviors .....	222
Internal locus of control .....	222
Maintaining hope and motivation .....	225
Views difficult experiences as opportunities .....	228
Effectively Navigating the System .....	231
Problem solving skills.....	29
Social competence .....	234
Reaching out for support.....	235
Embracing the Connection Between the Personal and Political .....	237
Political activism and identity exploration .....	237
Maximizing and critically exploring Deferred Action.....	240
Chapter Summary: Findings From the Second Research Question.....	246
 CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS.....	248
Study Overview .....	248
Research Questions .....	248
Significance.....	249
Summary of Major Findings.....	250
Discussion of Findings.....	252
Discussion Theme 1: Undocumented Identity as Problematic .....	253
Discussion Theme 2: Color-Blindness.....	255
Discussion Theme 3: Racist Nativism .....	257
Discussion Theme 4: Campus Climate .....	261

Implications.....	269
Implication 1: Campus Services .....	270
Implication 2: Ethic of Care.....	276
Implication 3: Interest Convergence.....	280
Suggestions for Practice.....	284
Educator Efforts .....	285
University Resources .....	287
Building Connections External to the Institution.....	290
Limitations .....	291
Further Research .....	293
Final Thoughts .....	295
 APPENDICES .....	 297
APPENDIX A: Interview Protocol.....	298
APPENDIX B: Chart Highlighting How the Framework Informs the Chosen Research Questions.....	300
APPENDIX C: Pilot Study Interview Protocol .....	306
APPENDIX D: Participant Consent Forms for Study .....	307
 REFERENCES .....	 311

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1.	Participant profile summaries .....	87
------------	-------------------------------------	----

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1.	CRT and Spin-off Movements .....	62
Figure 3.2.	Elements of the study leading to informing educational practice .....	64
Figure 3.3.	Counter narrative based factors related to demonstrating resilience.....	69
Figure 3.4.	Scholarship informing the research questions .....	71
Figure 5.1.	Themes that emerged from research question one .....	143
Figure 6.1.	Themes that emerged from research question two, part one .....	185
Figure 6.2.	Themes that emerged from research question two, part two .....	214

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT**

In this study, I examine the experiences of 16 undocumented Latin@ students who are enrolled in or recently graduated from four-year institutions of higher education throughout the United States. Although approximately 65,000 undocumented students graduate from U.S. high schools each year, these students' citizenship statuses serve as a barrier to the admission, financing, and completion of higher education (UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education, 2007). Before moving into further detail about the status of undocumented college students in the U.S., a note on language is appropriate. For the purposes of this study, the use of the "at symbol" "Latin@" was chosen over the more common use of "Latina/o" as an intentional effort at gender inclusion, which is explored later in the study as having a significant role in undocumented Latin@ college student experiences. Also, despite APA manual guidelines to capitalize "White" when referring to race, I chose to not capitalize "white" as a way to decenter whiteness, and as is consistent with the use of "white" in foundational Critical Race Theory literature.

Despite the rapidly shifting political climate impacting related state and national policies, undocumented students are present in U.S. institutions of higher education. Undocumented Latin@ students are an often hidden, yet particularly rapidly growing student demographic, and U.S. institutions of higher education have an obligation to serve all segments of the student population. A recent report by the National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good (2012) explained the need for serving undocumented students, as,

Higher education has been a powerful force for change in our society. College and university presidents, faculty, staff, and students have often been in the forefront of social issues and have often distinguished themselves as leaders within their institutions and the nation. Once again, we are asked to mediate a challenging environment. And once again we must do so guided by the values of universal access and the vision of diversity we profess. (p. 5)



Undocumented students face barriers to higher education access, and little is known about the experiences of students in this population who overcome barriers to attend college.

Given what scholars know about the challenges faced by underrepresented students in higher education, it is reasonable to believe undocumented Latin@ college students face additional barriers to success, yet some of these students still demonstrate resilience and graduate from college. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, I explore how undocumented Latin@ college students demonstrate resilience while navigating higher education. The research question guiding this study is: *How do undocumented Latin@ college students demonstrate resilience as they navigate higher education?* I explore this main question through two sub questions:

1. How does being undocumented shape a student's college experience?
2. What factors help undocumented students overcome challenges encountered in higher education?

The sample of 16 students was drawn from predominantly white institutions (PWIs), as these are the majority of institutions in the U.S. Also, as explored in further detail later, the majority of participants were restricted to attending institutions close enough to home that allowed for commuting. Due to the higher presence of PWIs in any given area, the institutions realistically available to participants were PWIs. Most importantly, choosing to focus on PWIs was a way to place parameters on site selections, as opposed to signifying attendance at this institutional type as a measure of success. Similarly, the exclusion of community colleges was not meant to signify attendance at this institution type as an indicator of non-success. Rather, community colleges are present in the small body of existing literature on this topic due to the nature of the educational pipeline of undocumented students. Therefore, I wanted to fill gaps in literature

about the experiences of undocumented students at four-year institutions. It was also clear that participants had the goal of attending four-year institutions, often a local PWI, as a way to have a “traditional” college experience, and because of their perception of increased educational opportunity and challenge this would provide them compared to a community college education.

For this study, students who show resilience are those who have demonstrated persistence, meaning continuation behavior leading towards graduation. Specifically, persistent students are defined as in good academic standing (at least a 2.0 GPA) and are of at least sophomore status, or those who graduated from college within the past two years. For students who have not yet graduated, a 2.0 GPA was chosen as a cut off point for participant selection because this is commonly used as the minimum GPA required to remain in good academic standing in many institutions of higher education. Therefore, choosing a specific GPA requirement for participant selection was not intended as a benchmark for success rooted in measures that imply assumptions about students’ ability to achieve high levels of standard measures of academic success. Rather, a 2.0 GPA benchmark is a practical marker of students who are in good academic standing as defined by universities, and therefore are able to remain enrolled to demonstrate persistence to graduation. Also, the parameter of participants being of at least sophomore status serves as a way to narrow the sample to students who have already earned enough credit hours to move past their first year, thus they have demonstrated persistence through behaviors leading towards graduation. Students who graduated within the past two years demonstrated persistence through graduation and are not too far removed from recalling their higher education experiences.

The focus on persistence in this study highlights how undocumented students are able to overcome challenges and demonstrate continuation behavior leading towards postsecondary

graduation. Sharing stories of undocumented student persistence contrasts the dominant narrative that this student group is unwilling or incapable of succeeding in higher education by obtaining a degree. However, it is also worth a word of caution that the focus on persistent undocumented students is not meant to further stigmatize undocumented students who are unable to obtain a postsecondary degree. As highlighted in this study, there are many challenges undocumented students face in progressing through educational systems that block their mobility. Therefore, undocumented students demonstrating persistence in higher education are not meant to be seen as the “good” students within a broader group of “bad” undocumented students who are to blame for not being able to overcome the barriers to postsecondary degree attainment.

It is well documented in scholarly literature that college presents multiple challenges for students, especially for those who are members of underrepresented groups such as students from marginalized racial and ethnic backgrounds (Passel & Cohn, 2009; Swail, 2002; The Pell Institute, 2005; Zusman, 2005). For many traditionally aged college students (18-25 years old), attending college is a time of personal exploration and growth marked by the first time living away from home. This may be the first time students have been immersed in a diverse community outside of their comfort zone, which can lead students to question previously held assumptions and beliefs about others and themselves. Engaging in this new environment also presents challenges for students in other areas of growth such as academics, personal development, and social development. In addition to these challenges and opportunities for holistic growth, researchers have highlighted that students from underrepresented groups often face additional marginalization (Passel & Cohn, 2009; Swail, 2002; The Pell Institute, 2005; Zusman, 2005).

Underrepresented students are defined in this study as students who are members of groups who have faced systemic oppression and a historical legacy of exclusion from higher education. Underrepresented students, also referred to in this study as marginalized and underserved students, refers to students who are often first-generation college students, from low-income backgrounds, and students who are racial and/or ethnic minorities, and who are undocumented or who have 1.5-generation immigrant status. This understanding of underrepresented students stems from common definitions used in related literature that cites these populations as facing barriers to persistence in higher education (Harbour & Gwyn, 2011; Pérez, 2014; Rendón, 2006; The College Board, 2014).

Underrepresented students come from a wide variety of backgrounds, yet there are some commonalities in challenges they face in accessing and succeeding in higher education. For example, students from marginalized backgrounds have been shown to disproportionately come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, underserved K-12 schools, and families where they are the first to attend college (Harbour & Gwyn, 2011; Pérez, 2014; Rendón, 2006; The College Board, 2014). Once on campus, students from marginalized backgrounds also face negotiating multiple identities within hostile campus climates (Abrego, 2011; Garcia, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Pérez Huber & Malagon, 2007; Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Zusman, 2005). Due to the structural and social status quo, and through no fault of their own, these circumstances make it especially challenging for marginalized students to have the resources and knowledge about accessing and navigating higher education.

Latin@ college students are a diverse subset of traditionally underrepresented college students, and many of the challenges they face in college mirror those of other underrepresented groups. Challenges include issues such as SES, race, and ethnicity, along with additional

elements especially salient for many Latin@ students such as familial ties and expectations, gender, and language (Contreras, 2011; Garcia, 2011; Meza, 2011; Pérez, 2011). Within this group of underrepresented students lies the subgroup of undocumented Latin@ students with even more layers to the challenges in higher education.

Despite barriers to accessing and persisting in higher education, undocumented Latin@ college students are present in institutions of higher education and find ways to demonstrate resilience and overcome challenges. Scholarly literature has only recently expanded upon a Latin@ focus to study undocumented Latin@ college students, and this work primarily focused on issues of college access and the associated financial struggles (Contreras, 2011; Garcia, 2011; Pérez, 2011). In this study, I use the interpretive lenses of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) with a resilience perspective, as opposed to a deficit model, to explore the experiences of undocumented Latin@ college students in the United States. Too often, a deficit model is used to explain underachievement of students from marginalized backgrounds. The deficit model is problematic because it attributes students' struggles to characteristics rooted in their cultures and communities, while overlooking the systematic institutional barriers as root causes of marginalization within the status quo. Also, Irizarry (2009) wrote about this need to move beyond a cultural deficit model:

Because this model frames the problem as one of students and families, the remedies informed by deficit perspectives created to ameliorate student underachievement and failure often fail meaningfully to address problems within schools or society at large that combine to depress the performance of certain groups of students. Under the cultural deficit model, schools are, at least in part, absolved from their responsibilities to educate all students appropriately, and this charge is shifted almost entirely to students and their families. (n.p.)

CRT challenges dominant ideology, including resisting the “predominant deficit frameworks used to explain Chicana and Chicano educational inequality (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001, p. 313).

Research has shown that, “Undocumented Latino youth share many similarities with their documented peers, such as low socio-economic status, geographic and background characteristics as well as education deficiencies and barriers” (Beltran, 2011, p. 13). However, research has indicated that students face additional challenges based on the added layer of holding an undocumented status (Abrego, 2008, Gonzales, 2010). Also, instead of utilizing the common cultural deficit model and focusing on the reasons undocumented Latin@ students do not persist in higher education, there is a need for understanding how persistent students demonstrate resilience in the face of challenges. For undocumented Latin@ college students, resilience is a culturally relevant term that does not fit with traditional models of attrition based on white men who experience a stage of adopting the collegiate environment’s culture and leaving behind their previous culture. Yosso, Smith, Ceja, and Solórzano (2009) explained the experiences of Latin@ college students,

is very different from Tinto’s (1993) transition stage, when students acquire new socioacademic skills, values, and networks in their new college environment through a process of leaving behind their previous attitudes and behaviors. Latina/o students’ resilience depends on their ability to draw on the cultural knowledge, skills, and contacts from their home communities. (p. 19)

Latin@ college students navigate multiple worlds, and it is important to help students integrate these experiences rather than abandon their past and cultural ties.

Undocumented Latin@ students are academically driven and talented. Pérez (2011) wrote that, “Undocumented Latino students demonstrate a positive orientation toward school, a theme extensively documented in the immigrant student research literature. Despite the frequent challenges they face due to their legal status, they aspire to do well in their classes and hope to attend college” (p. 43). However, much literature also focuses on students who struggle in the face of multiple challenges in a collegiate environment that was constructed to serve dominant

populations. Learning about resilient undocumented Latin@ students' experiences while in college is an important step in moving from colorblind practice to shaping culturally appropriate practice in student affairs and higher education. Although specific information regarding immigration policies at state and federal levels is not the focus of this study, these are important contexts for understanding the complex realities of undocumented Latin@ college students. In the following sections, I provide a brief overview of immigration and higher education policy and the role of university educators in addressing this issue, before moving into sections addressing the purpose and significance of this study, including further detail on how the selected frameworks helped me examine the problem under study.

### **Immigration and Higher Education Policy**

Immigration to the U.S. is a significant element of the United States' history and throughout time there have been numerous attempts at legally controlling the status of various immigrant groups in the U.S. (Garcia, 1995). "Illegal immigrants" or "illegal aliens," hereafter referred to as the more humanizing phrase of "undocumented immigrants," have recently been in the forefront of a national political agenda as they face challenges in finding paths to citizenship and upward mobility (Contreras, 2011; Meza, 2011; National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good, 2012; Pérez, 2011). Also, border security efforts include attempts at safeguarding against perceived terrorist threats from overseas immigrants in a post-9/11 society, as well as controlling the border crossing of large numbers of Mexican citizens into the U.S. One recent policy example is the controversial Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act Senate Bill (Arizona SB 1070) of 2010 that is one of the broadest and strictest anti-illegal immigration pushes in recent times (<http://www.azleg.gov>). Similar legislation is on the radar of other states, and resulting legal and social implications are currently changing. The U.S.'

response to the continued flow of undocumented immigrants has a direct impact on these populations by negotiating paths to citizenship as well as holding significance for various U.S. social institutions including education.

It is difficult to track exact numbers of undocumented immigrants who are forced to live in the shadows of society, but estimates from the Immigration Policy Center indicate that roughly 11.6 million undocumented immigrants reside in the United States and this number continues to rise rapidly (2007). Although undocumented students are legally allowed to attend public K-12 schooling, there are large gaps in postsecondary access and degree attainment, especially given the varied policy climates from state to state. Nationally there are an estimated 65,000 undocumented immigrants who graduate from high school (UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education, 2007). An estimated 5-10 percent of this total continues on to college, which equates to less than 2 percent of college admissions (National Immigration Law Center, 2013). For undocumented immigrants who wish to pursue higher education in the U.S., there are many barriers to gaining residency status, resulting in limited access to and persistence in higher education. Previously, to have a chance at procuring a visa, children brought into the U.S. illegally by their parents had to return to their birth-country before applying for the visa (National Immigration Law Center, 2006). This process does not guarantee a visa will be granted, and additional barriers are in place including laws regarding the amount of time the student is banned from the U.S. before reentry, which can range from three to ten years (National Immigration Law Center, 2013).

Because of such barriers to permanent residency status, undocumented youth seeking higher education do so with the burden of non-legal immigration status, and therefore face marginalization on many fronts (Dozier, 1993; Pérez, Cortés, Ramos, & Coronado, 2010). These



individuals are disenfranchised in society in ways that stifle their economic mobility, including being forced into the shadows of working illegally for little cash in jobs such as servants, day laborers, and sweatshop factories (Immigration Policy Center, 2007). In addition to humanitarian concerns related to unsafe working conditions and economic immobility, this lack of financial resources is problematic when faced with skyrocketing higher education tuition costs (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2014).

State policy climates are rapidly shifting regarding the examination of granting undocumented college students in-state tuition. The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCLS) reported that, as of February 2014, the following states have taken official stances on in-state tuition policies for undocumented college students:

- At least 17 states have provisions allowing for in-state tuition rates for undocumented students, 15 of which extend in-state tuition rates to undocumented students through state legislation.
- At least five states currently allow undocumented students to receive state financial aid.
- Three states—Arizona, Georgia and Indiana—specifically prohibit in-state tuition rates for undocumented students.
- Two states—Alabama and South Carolina—prohibit undocumented students from enrolling at any public postsecondary institution. (2014)

Undocumented students do not qualify for state or federal grants or loans, even if the student or their family pays taxes (Educators for Fair Consideration Educator Guide, n.d.). Also, undocumented students cannot legally work to pay for school. For students who manage to find ways to finance higher education, there are still barriers to persistence including reporting feelings of marginalization on campus, learning to navigate the college environment as a first-generation U.S. student, and living with fear of their immigration status being discovered (Dozier, 1993; Contreras, 2011; Garcia, 2011; Meza, 2011; Pérez, 2011; Pérez, et. al, 2010).

The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) used their annual 2007 Admission Trends Survey to identify whether institutions of higher education had received

applications from undocumented students. Out of 312 responses, 60% of institutions indicated receiving applications from undocumented students. The report concluded that,

While the lack of the financial aid and legal work authorization remain the primary obstacles deterring undocumented students from postsecondary education, colleges and universities consistently receive applications from many qualified undocumented students who often finish near the top of their high school graduating classes. The survey results suggest that undocumented students are actively pursuing postsecondary education at a wide range of institutions, which include several of the nation's most selective public and private colleges and universities. (NACAC, 2012, n.p.)

Undocumented students must navigate legal policies that affect their college admittance and attendance. At this time, there is no consistent policy in the country that addresses the place of undocumented students in postsecondary education (NCLS, 2014). Individual states and institutions determine their own procedures for the admittance and recognition of undocumented students since there is no federal policy in place regarding undocumented immigrants in higher education (NCLS, 2014). Currently, K-12 education personnel do not have to question students' citizenship status due to a 1982 U.S. Supreme Court ruling. *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) was a case in which the Supreme Court struck down a Texas state statute denying educational funding for children of undocumented immigrants (Immigration Policy Center, 2012). This case is known as the landmark legal case for undocumented students. However, this case provides a ruling for K-12 education but the courts never extended that right to higher education. Despite a lack of formal legal ties to higher education, this case still has implications for postsecondary education.

In addition, the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, introduced as legislation in the United States Senate in 2001, would have allowed undocumented youth to earn conditional permanent residency by either serving in the military for two years, by completing two years at a four-year institution of higher education, or by graduating from a two-year community college (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/>). After ten years of heated debate, the

DREAM Act failed to pass a vote in December of 2010. However, California's effort at a state-based DREAM Act resulted in the 2001 Assembly Bill 540, also known as AB 540 (California State University Long Beach, n.d.). In a 2012 report, Educators for Fair Consideration (EFC) highlights AB 540, which is a bill that allows certain undocumented students to receive reduced in-state tuition at public colleges and universities. According to the EFC report, "in 2009-2010, 40,076 students qualified for AB 540" (2012, n.p.). Much of the AB 540 literature focuses on Latin@ college students given the large percentage of this student population in California (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009).

Since the writing of the initial study proposal, and after the failure of the federal DREAM Act in 2010, another immigration reform effort for undocumented youth surfaced: Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). DACA was announced on June 15, 2012, and allows certain individuals brought to the U.S. as children to apply for a two-year period of deferred action during which they would not be deported. DACA allows the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to exercise prosecutorial discretion to forgo deporting certain individuals for a set period of time, given that certain requirements are met. Individuals may request consideration for DACA if they meet the following criteria:

1. "Were under the age of 31 as of June 15, 2012;
2. Came to the United States before reaching your 16th birthday;
3. Have continuously resided in the United States since June 15, 2007, up to the present time;
4. Were physically present in the United States on June 15, 2012, and at the time of making your request for consideration of deferred action with USCIS;
5. Entered without inspection before June 15, 2012, or your lawful immigration status expired as of June 15, 2012;
6. Are currently in school, have graduated or obtained a certificate of completion from high school, have obtained a general education development (GED) certificate, or are an honorably discharged veteran of the Coast Guard or Armed Forces of the United States; and
7. Have not been convicted of a felony, significant misdemeanor, three or more other misdemeanors, and do not otherwise pose a threat to national security or public safety."

(U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, n.p.)

Individuals granted DACA are eligible for work authorization allowing them to gain lawful employment in the U.S., as well as apply for social security numbers and, in some states, to get a driver's license. DACA and work authorization may be renewed after the initial two-year period if certain criteria are met, and DHS has the right to renew or terminate DACA at any time (National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, 2012). Being granted DACA does not mean that "low-priority" individuals have lawful immigration status, nor does it provide a permanent path to citizenship.

DACA was announced during the first of two rounds of interviews for this study. As such, participants who applied for and were granted DACA during this time are in a unique position experiencing significantly shifting policies impacting their postsecondary education and early career realities. Although DACA provides some important opportunities and rights for individuals such as undocumented college students, there are several concerns. For example, the \$465 application fee (U.S. Department of Homeland Security) makes applying for DACA inaccessible for many undocumented college students who are already struggling with limited finances. Also, immigration scams quickly arose from individuals claiming to be qualified for assisting DACA applicants with the legal paperwork and the multi-step application process. DACA still results in an uncertain future for students and recent graduates, and is fairly new in its implementation. As such, undocumented individuals may be left in a vulnerable position if they formally disclose their immigration status during the DACA application process. It is unclear how personal information may be used at any given time, especially after the initial two-year period. Overall, many undocumented student activists argue that, although providing some

important short-term rights and related opportunities, DACA is a temporary Band-Aid for what needs to be more permanent immigration reform.

Latin@s are the majority of the nation's undocumented immigrant population, comprising 76% of the undocumented population, and the majority of undocumented immigrants, 7 million total, come from Mexico (Passel & Cohn, 2009). Huber (2010) wrote that scholarly research has focused on the experiences of Latino/a college students, but "it does not address the unique experiences of undocumented students" (p. 39). The undocumented Latin@ college student population is highlighted in this current study, as they are the largest growing undocumented immigrant population and the presence of these students has implications for the U.S. higher education system and how postsecondary educators serve these students (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009).

### **The Role of University Educators**

University educators, including student affairs professionals, faculty members, and administrators, can take an active role in learning more about the experiences of undocumented Latin@ students and how to better serve this marginalized population. In an editor's note, Jerry Price (2010) wrote about the need for student affairs educators to better understand and serve undocumented college students as he stated,

Student affairs professionals historically have made an effort to understand the unique needs of students due to their ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual identity, or other characteristics...another student group with unique needs is less understood: students residing in the United States without the legal permission of the federal government, better known as undocumented students. We may know that undocumented students are on our campus, but often do not know who they are, how many are enrolled, and whether we are serving them effectively. (p. 1)

Also, “when practitioners lack knowledge of their students’ cultural lives, they are severely limited in their capacity to adapt their actions and be responsive to the particularities of the situation as these individual students experience it” (Bensimon, 2007, p 453).

The need for cultural awareness is also highlighted as a way to meet specific students’ needs, as education is not a “one size fits all” endeavor. In a volume dedicated to learning about undocumented college students, Price (2010) explained that,

If undocumented students see that student affairs professionals understand their experiences and challenges, perhaps they will open up and let us in, so we can begin providing the support they desperately need. If we are successful in creating these open and supportive environments, it is not just our undocumented students who will benefit. Our institutions stand to benefit greatly as well. The undocumented students who have succeeded in enrolling at an American college or university have done so through tremendous drive, persistence, and resilience. Furthermore, the roadblocks they have encountered along the way to their degree have helped these students develop into creative problem solvers, cleverly exercising flexibility and adaptability to maximize their opportunities and ultimately achieve their dreams. Any campus would be lucky to have more students with these qualities. (n.p.)

Learning to acknowledge, celebrate, and capitalize on the talents of undocumented college students is key in shaping relevant practice. Chavez, Guido-DiBrito, and Mallory (2003) stated, “University professionals and students must learn to value and harness the multitude of talents originating within various cultures, identities, ideologies, and backgrounds to be successful as institutions of higher education” (p. 453). University educators in various capacities have an opportunity to better understand this diverse group of students and to, in turn, facilitate best practice for undocumented Latin@ college students. Duderstadt (2000) explained,

Process toward diversity will likely require some significant changes in strategy in the years ahead. Unfortunately, the road we have to travel is neither frequently walked nor well marked. We can look to very few truly diverse institutions in American society for guidance. We will have to blaze new trails, and create new social models. (p. 200)

Overall, in the midst of broader shifting political climates impacting undocumented Latin@ students, university educators have an opportunity to learn from the experiences of these students and shape culturally relevant practice to better serve members of this marginalized population.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There is a need for information about the experiences of undocumented Latin@ college students, as this is a population increasingly present in U.S. institutions of higher education in the midst of shifting related federal and state policies. Throughout changing and inconsistent policies, undocumented students have continued to be present at U.S. institutions of higher education and will continue to be members of the college student population. In moving away from deficit-models, there is a need to learn from undocumented Latin@ college students who demonstrate resilience in navigating higher education. University educators will benefit from learning about these students to inform best practice.

The 2012 National Forum report summarized the importance of this issue, as,

Widening access to higher education for previously marginalized groups and improving educational opportunity to achieve a more equal distribution of wealth have been important for American educators and institutions since the middle of the last century. Undocumented students could contribute to the economic, social, and democratic goals of this country if given access to postsecondary educational opportunities. However, their educational marginalization prevents the nation from reaping the benefits of additional human capital, meanwhile exposing these students and their families to a future of poverty and hardship. (p. 8)

### **Definitions**

Key terms are further explained throughout this work, but this section provides basic background information to set the foundation for the study.

## **Latin@**

Choosing identity terms for scholarly work reflects a complex social context in which these labels were constructed. It is important that individuals are able to choose how to identify, such as naming one's own race and ethnicity. As such, individual participants in this study will have the opportunity to provide any additional details on how they identify within the broader Latin@ umbrella. For purposes of sampling and setting a common context for this study, the identity Latin@ was chosen to represent a diverse ethnic umbrella and a broad spectrum of geographic backgrounds students may come from including areas such as Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and other areas of Central and South America. The term "Hispanic" does not capture the purpose of this study, as it is a generic umbrella term imposed by the U.S. In contrast, the term "Latina/o" "gives more emphasis to the indigenous roots of 'Hispanics,' and correctly characterizes their U.S. experience as one deeply rooted in U.S. policies with the overall effect of social, economic, and political exploitation" and "allows for the development of a more relevant collective memory and history for members of this group, which in turn leads to a strong sense of self and group pride" (Muñoz, 2008, p. 12).

It worth noting that studying undocumented Latin@ students is an important first step in understanding the broader topic of the experiences of undocumented college students.

Undocumented students are a difficult population to connect with for research in general, and choosing to study the Latin@ segment of undocumented students made it more reasonable to begin research in this area due to Latin@s being the largest number of undocumented people in the U.S. due to proximity to the U.S. border. Although the sampling strategy of focusing on undocumented Latin@ students was purposeful due to practicality and personal interest, I also want to remain mindful of not perpetuating a common stereotype that all undocumented people



are Latin@. Although individuals who are Latin@ comprise the largest number of undocumented people in the U.S., there are many other areas of the world represented in undocumented groups in the U.S. Non-Latin@ undocumented groups are smaller in number and less visible than undocumented Latin@s in the U.S., but it is still important that future scholarship explore the experiences of these groups as well.

## **Undocumented**

The National Immigration Law Center (2009) defines an undocumented student as —a foreign national who: (1) entered the United States without inspection or with fraudulent documents; or (2) entered legally as a nonimmigrant but then violated the terms of his or her status and remained in the United States without authorization (n.p.).

In her presidential address to the American Sociological Association, Evelyn Nakano Glenn (2010) explained the problematic nature of choosing how to identify undocumented students in research. She wrote,

...the designation ‘undocumented,’ as well as the even more derogatory term ‘illegal,’ is a relatively recent construction applied to Latino and other non-European origin immigrants residing within the United States without official papers. It is clear that ‘illegal’ and ‘undocumented’ are racial/ethnic designations, given that countless Irish and other European immigrants have resided in the United States without legal permission without being labeled ‘illegal.’ These terms are particularly problematic in the case of the students I am talking about, because they did not enter the United States voluntarily but were brought by their parents. Having been raised and educated in the United States, they are culturally and socially American. (p. 9)

The term “undocumented” has been intentionally chosen for this study. Although not altogether unproblematic, this term was chosen in light of CRT to reject more pejorative terminology.

Throughout the study, participants’ levels of disclosure surrounding their undocumented status are associated with the terms “out,” “coming out,” and “closeted.” These words closely mirror terminology used in the queer community regarding sharing one’s sexual orientation, as

this is another area of identity this is often hidden and marginalized. In light of positionality, these terms also resonate with me as a queer scholar who finds empowerment through owning one's journey and choosing the details of the ongoing decision to come out with a marginalized identity. These terms were also used in this study because participants often used these words to describe their own levels of disclosure surrounding their undocumented status.

Also, I do not wish to overlook the importance of the experiences of students who choose to not disclose their undocumented statuses. It was my hope that this study will open up future lines of inquiry around this topic, especially after I have made initial connections within the @undocumented Latin@ student community.

It is also important to note that the definitions provided are given in light of my own identities as a researcher and scholar. Positionality is revisited throughout this work, and it means fully acknowledging where I am coming from as a researcher as points of subjectivity versus seeking false objectivity (Lincoln, 1995). There are several pieces of my identities that are particularly salient for remaining mindful of positionality in this work. These identities place me in clear positions of privilege in relation to participants' experiences. For example, throughout the research process, I critically reflected on my identity as a White scholar. In addition to having educational opportunity leading to my status as a doctoral student, I am mindful of the privileges that have shaped my experiences as a U.S. born citizen who has retained permanent citizenship status throughout my life. I am unaware of my family history regarding immigration and countries of origin, but likely due to perceptions including phenotype and accent, I have never faced discrimination based on perceived racial, ethnic, or immigration identities or status. My identities as a queer woman and first-generation college student are also relevant, as participants spoke about being the first in their families to attend college, and how gender shaped their

experiences, and they also often used terminology about “coming out” with their status, which mirrors language used in the queer community. As positionality was considered throughout the study, it is discussed in further detail in subsequent chapters.

### **Research Questions**

The research question guiding this study is: *How do undocumented Latin@ college students demonstrate resilience as they navigate higher education?* I explore this main question through two sub questions:

1. How does being undocumented shape a student’s college experience?
2. What factors help undocumented students overcome challenges encountered in higher education?

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to learn about the experiences of undocumented Latin@ students in higher education to better understand how they demonstrate resilience in the face of challenges. As a result of exploring this area, I hope to inform practice for university educators who serve undocumented Latin@ students. This audience includes student affairs educators, faculty members, and administrators such as provosts, deans, and university presidents. I use CRT and LatCrit with a framework of resilience to analyze data from semi-structured interviews with 16 undocumented Latin@ college students. I focus on these students’ perceptions of the factors that contributed to overcoming challenges they encountered in higher education. Based on the experiences participants share, my goal is to fill gaps in scholarly literature, thus leading to improving educational practice for serving undocumented Latin@ students.

## **Statement of Significance**

Understanding the experiences of undocumented Latin@ college students is significant for several reasons:

### **Economic standpoint**

As a country, the U.S. cannot afford to have some of the people who live here, regardless of citizenship status, whose abilities are not cultivated to contribute to the greater good while also being able to support themselves. In the Journal of College Admission, Gin (2010) addressed questions about why undocumented students should be served in higher education despite arguments about current times of tight budgets and limited resources in the U.S. She wrote that it is a “waste of our already-spent resources” to not have undocumented students attend college because most of these students attended primary and secondary education in the U.S. where resources were already invested in their educations. As a means to realize this investment, she stated we should,

help undocumented students pursue higher education so they can work and participate meaningfully to our society. With college degrees, they’ll be able to contribute substantially more in taxes, support their families, and be less likely to receive government assistance. We want the best and brightest students to attend our colleges. (p. 4)

Instead, turning away undocumented students from college in the U.S. means this population is encouraged to attend college in another country. This practice is harmful to the U.S. because the nation is “competing to attract talented international students from all over the world... We should hold onto undocumented students – some of our best and brightest homegrown talents” (p. 4). Gin emphasized the multiple ways undocumented students are an asset to society given their proven ability to succeed:

Undocumented students have proven their ability to succeed...College-bound undocumented students constitute a small group of extremely talented and motivated

students who have already overcome multiple obstacles. They've had to leave their homelands and everything they knew as children. They've had to learn English and assimilate to a new culture. They've excelled in school despite having few (or no) family members to guide them. Their desire and readiness to go to college shows their tremendous perseverance and potential for future success. (p. 4)

This potential is also highlighted in other pieces of literature, including the College Board Report by Gonzales (2009) that emphasized the high-achievement and involvement levels of many undocumented students, as well as their strong identification with the U.S. Gonzales (2009) explained,

Members of the 1.5 generation have, for the most part, received much of their primary and secondary school education here... Their mannerisms, interests and aspirations are identical to those of their American-born peers. They are honor roll students, athletes, class presidents, valedictorians, and aspiring teachers, engineers and doctors. They also tend to be bicultural, and almost all of them are fluent in English. Their bilingual and bicultural skills — assets at any level — give them an advantage in the global economy. (p. 8)

The U.S. was once seen as a global leader with educated citizens who contributed to a knowledgeable work force. However, the U.S. has dropped in prestige and now ranks 19th in quality of education in world competitiveness for several areas of measure (World Economic Forum, 2008). The College Board also reported that the U.S. must increase the number of 25-to 34-year olds who earn higher education degrees by 2025 to make America a world leader in educational attainment (College Board, 2009). In a separate report, the College Board detailed the crisis of achievement gaps for students from low-income families and for minority students who need to increasingly earn higher education degrees to keep pace with other industrialized nations and to alleviate the “alarming education deficit that threatens our global competitiveness and economic future” (College Board, 2010). The U.S. would benefit from currently untapped potential through educating undocumented students who will contribute to the U.S.’s role as an educated citizenry and workforce in a competitive global economy.

With a focus on public policy, Contrearras' (2011) book explored the need for increased access and success for Latino students in higher education, and she dedicates sections of her text specifically to understanding the importance of serving undocumented Latino students. She wrote,

The economic vitality and sustainability of states rests upon the ongoing investment of its residents. If entire segments are largely excluded from selective institutions of higher education and systems, this talent may go unrealized and underutilized. It has been well documented that students who attend selective institutions are more likely to graduate from college, enroll in postgraduate study, and have higher earnings than their peers who attend less selective institutions. (p. 122)

Also, on a national level increasing postsecondary graduation rates is crucial "toward ensuring the economic vitality of this country and a citizenry that is poised for global competitiveness," as "we as a nation are losing out on our ability to capitalize on the talents of some of the brightest, most disciplined young minds with a strong work ethic that is consistent with the principles this country was founded upon" (p. 152).

In the most comprehensive book to date on undocumented Latino students in education, Pérez wrote that, "...investing in education generally increases individuals' lifetime earnings and makes them more productive members of the labor force, which itself translates into higher levels of output, income, and economic return at the local, state, and national levels..." in addition to "the broader societal impacts of higher levels of educational attainment...because it contributes to enriching individuals' lives and the societies in which they live" and leads to "significantly lower incarceration rates and higher volunteerism among those with some college" (2011, p. 122). Also, Pérez wrote that focusing on undocumented students graduating from college "would serve as a means to begin to recoup some of the social and economic investments already made in them" (p. 132).

Overall, rethinking higher education's approach to serving undocumented youth will lead to many benefits including keeping talented students in the U.S., enhancing the U.S. economy and global economic competitiveness, and improving the quality of life for undocumented students and their families as members of the U.S. community who are currently forced to live in the shadows with limited chances at social and economic mobility.

### **Ethical and humanistic standpoints**

In addition to economic significance, this research is rooted in professional ethics for university educators, as well as from a humanistic standpoint. University educators at various levels are responsible for creating an environment that will enhance the success of all students. Institutions of higher education have an obligation to serve the country and to produce talented graduates with the opportunity for upward mobility. A College Board report by Gonzales (2009) highlighted that,

It is estimated that only between 5 and 10 percent of undocumented high school graduates go to college. This leaves too many of our children cut off from any means of lifting themselves out of poverty. From a public policy perspective, it makes sense to intervene when a sizable subset of our population is vulnerable and disenfranchised. The economic costs of continuing failed policies only reinforce the necessity of such action. (p. 25)

Without full legal rights facilitating higher education attainment, undocumented Latin@ students “are barred from the very mechanisms that have ensured high levels of economic and social mobility to other immigrants throughout U.S. history...Such a denial is enough to set them on a path of disenfranchisement, poverty, and frustration” (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010, p 152).

University educators have a professional and ethical responsibility to serve all students to the best of their ability. Gildersleeve, Rumann, and Mondragón (2010) wrote that, “Student affairs professionals are vested with the responsibility for assisting and supporting the academic and social success of all students, including those from undocumented families” (p. 5). An

important first step in supporting undocumented students is “Understanding the legal and policy contexts through which undocumented students struggle to persist in higher education,” which is necessary for becoming “advocates for undocumented students’ rights to support their success in higher education and participation in American democracy” (p. 5). Also, the authors stated that when “undocumented students see that student affairs professionals know about and demonstrate an ethic of care regarding their unique realities, it increases the students’ opportunity and likelihood to develop trust with student affairs professionals” (p. 6). This increased trust is important, as it “can translate into a more engaged use of student support services, and perhaps even assist student affairs professionals in learning how better to support these students’ academic achievement and personal growth” (p. 6).

Despite the economic, ethical, and humanistic significance of this research, there are still surprising gaps in literature addressing the experiences of undocumented Latin@ college students who demonstrate resilience in navigating higher education, and in turn, how this knowledge may inform practice for college educators. Undocumented Latin@ college students are present in institutions of higher education in increasing numbers, yet are marginalized as they face barriers to success and persistence in college. Learning about this topic is important for improving these students’ experiences and because educators in various roles should strive to serve all members of the student population. On a broader scale, it is also important to U.S. society that the full range of intelligence in the young adult population is tapped into for global and economic reasons.



## **CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The primary focus of this study is to understand how undocumented Latin@ college students demonstrate resilience as they navigate higher education. This section outlines relevant scholarly literature from areas such as higher education, student affairs, counseling, and social work as a foundation for this study. I also include information from a pilot study on the academic experiences of undocumented Latin@ college students that I co-researched for a qualitative methods course in Spring 2010 (Yao & Shelton, TE 931). I begin this section by reviewing background information about the experiences of marginalized students of color in higher education, then I shift to a review on knowledge about Latin@ students, and then narrow the literature review into a discussion on research exploring undocumented Latin@ students. \

A review of literature also highlights what this dissertation will contribute to scholarly knowledge on the topic, as there is currently a gap in understanding the experiences of resilient undocumented Latin@ college students. This gap in knowledge is especially apparent for understanding issues outside of access and financial aid, and is also lacking in translating knowledge to ideas for practice for university educators. Outlining other related studies also sets the stage for my use of CRT, LatCrit, and resilience as helpful lenses through which to examine participant experiences.

### **The Experiences of Marginalized Students of Color**

Marginalized students of color are increasing in the United States population but many face barriers to college access and degree attainment at rates disproportionately high compared to their white peers (Passel & Cohn, 2009; Swail, 2002; Zusman, 2005). I must briefly emphasize that the benefits of higher education are of particular importance for many minority students who have been systemically disenfranchised in society. As Duderstadt (2000) explained,

The full participation of currently underrepresented minorities and women is crucial to our commitment to equity and social justice, as well as to the future strength and prosperity of America. Our nation cannot afford to waste human talent, the cultural and social richness, represented by those currently underrepresented in our society. If we do not create a nation that mobilizes the talents of all our citizens, we are destined for a diminished role in the global community and increased social turbulence. Most tragically, we have failed to fulfill the promise of democracy upon which this nation was founded. (p. 16)

A status report by the Pell Institute explained that there are also broad societal benefits of college participation including impact on “earnings and other areas such as unemployment, incarceration, volunteering, and civic participation” (2005, p. 4). Unfortunately, many minority students have less opportunity to benefit from these outcomes of higher education due to low access and degree attainment rates.

### **Access for minority students**

U.S. demographic shifts continue to show increasing numbers of racial and ethnic minorities living in this country, yet disproportionately low numbers of minority students are gaining access to higher education, especially in four-year institutions (Passel & Cohn, 2009; Swail, 2002; Zusman, 2005). For example, “In 2015, white students in the undergraduate population will continue to be over-represented by more than 400,000 students, and African-American and Hispanic populations will be under-represented by over 200,000 and 500,000 students” (Swail, 2002, p. 19). Tierney also described that, “Black, Hispanic, and Native American students are less likely to attend a postsecondary institution and to attain a degree than are their European American and Asian American counterparts” (2008, p. 101). Zusman identified this gap in minority access as one of the great challenges facing higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (2005).

Reexamining college admissions policies is a necessity for impacting minority student access. Structural racism deeply embedded in U.S. history is a reality creating barriers for many

racial minorities. Sociologist Bonilla-Silva described how, “Blacks and dark-skinned racial minorities lag well behind whites in virtually every area of social life... and they also receive an inferior education compared to whites, even when they attend integrated institutions” (2006, p. 2). Despite the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision to desegregate schools, minority students are still disproportionately represented in low-income families that reside in struggling school districts that receive limited funding and resources (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). The details are extensive surrounding the dire situation in K-12 education, but are important to briefly highlight, as a lifetime of systemic racial inequality cannot be fragmented from the experience of minority students seeking higher education opportunities.

### **Degree attainment for minority students**

Creating policies to bring minority students to campus is not enough, as policies must also support degree attainment for students who enroll. Swail reported that, “low-income and first-generation students, as well as students of color, are less likely to...persist through degree completion than are more advantaged students” (2002, p. 15). The Pell Institute finds that racial minorities are disproportionately represented in low-income groups and, “Baccalaureate attainment rates for low-income students lag considerably behind the rates for students from other income groups” (2005, p. 12). The struggle for minorities to complete postsecondary degrees is highly researched in scholarly literature, and can be attributed to a multitude of factors including the need for a more supportive campus environment. Castellanos, Gloria, Mayorga, and Salas (2007) reported that student affairs educators must develop skills to work with diverse students who often face “Inhospitable feelings of being unwelcomed and culturally devalued” which “are common educational experiences of many racial and ethnic minority college students” (p. 656). It is important to understand the needs of minority students who are a diverse

group often facing a negative campus climates which ultimately impedes persistence (Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Meza, 2001; Pascarella and Terenzini 2005).

It is also important to have effective practices in place for responding to hate-motivated incidents as well as educating the broader campus community on issues related to race and ethnicity. Pascarella and Terenzini explained, “A growing number of studies examine the effects on persistence and degree completion of campus racial and ethnic diversity and students’ perceptions of their campus’s racial climate” and “the overall institutional orientation to diversity also positively influence student persistence” (2005, p. 419). The authors also described how research has “found evidence that perceptions of racial discriminations and prejudice in the classroom and on campus were negatively related to continued enrollment” (2005, p. 419). Various studies show a hostile or chilly campus climate negatively impacts persistence and ultimately degree attainment of minority students (Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Meza, 2001; Pascarella and Terenzini 2005).

### **Relationships between society and higher education**

Higher education does not exist in a vacuum, so I will briefly identify the historical, social, financial, and individual circumstances surrounding minority student access and degree attainment in higher education.

**Historical.** Throughout history, higher education has demonstrated a reciprocal relationship with society based on the needs and interests of the times (Duderstadt, 2000; Gelber, 2007; Renn & Reason, 2012; Thelin, 2004). Duderstadt explained, “Throughout its history, higher education in America has always responded to the needs of a changing population” and “the changing character and needs of the American population are driving a major redefinition of the concept of a college student and hence the character of our institutions” (2000, p. 16). Stark

and Lattuca detailed periods of emphasis on access, as the beginnings of U.S. higher education in the 1650s reflected very limited access, but evolved by the 1800s to lower admissions standards, include women, and broaden opportunity with the Morrill Act (2009, p. 38). Following this shift, the GI Bill increased access for veterans and the 1950 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling impacted school segregation (2009, p. 38). As minority populations rise in the U.S., it will be necessary for higher education to respond to the need for educating these marginalized populations. Historical changes in increasing educational opportunities for minorities also reflect broader societal shifts regarding race relations in the U.S.

**Social.** The U.S. has a virulent past regarding racism and a significant time for social change occurred during the Civil Rights movement, which brought “racial tensions to the fore, [and] numerous college and universities initiated measure to promote racial access and diversity” (Thelin, 2004, p. 348). Despite gains made during the Civil Rights era, racial tensions persisted in the U.S. and a conservative political ethos led to backlash from non-minority stakeholders who have traditionally benefitted from higher education access policies. As a result, landmark affirmative action court rulings such as the Bakke case mandated that “race alone was not allowable as grounds for admissions decisions (2004). However, race taken into consideration with other factors was permissible” (2004, p. 348). Thelin described the challenge this rationale presents as, “in higher education, the past was indeed pertinent to the present and future of our public policies and institutional paths. Meanwhile, various court cases offered colleges and constituents little guidance for achieving equity in college admissions” (2004, p. 350). Overall, broader societal shifts and political patterns impact higher education and influence policy for minority student access and degree attainment.

**Financial.** With skyrocketing tuition costs and increasingly constrained resources, financing higher education is a significant concern for students (NCLS, 2014; Zusman, 2005). Zusman (2005) explained that racial minorities are overrepresented in low-income brackets and rising tuition costs, especially given inadequate financial support, may keep low-income students from entering or completing college. Merit-based versus need-based aid has been one ongoing debate related to increasing financial resources to minority students (Burd, 2013; Kantrowitz, 2011). Zusman (2005) found that based on limited financial resources, African American and Latino students are less likely to attend four-year institutions or be able to transfer and earn a baccalaureate degree. Zusman (2005) also reported that financial support alone will not ensure access and that minority students may be discouraged from applying to college for fear of encountering a hostile campus climate for minorities. Therefore, minority students willing and able to take on large amounts of college debt must still overcome other factors related to access and degree attainment.

**Individual.** I would be remiss in not mentioning the importance of student identity development during college, which has evolved in scholarly literature to include the development of more diverse students such as models for Black, white, Latino/a, American Indian, Asian American, and multiracial identity development (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). These theories are important for understanding how race and ethnicity play a role in individual student development during college. Student development theory can inform practice focused on shifting the campus environment in which students interact and develop.

Tierney stated that, “when minority college students are able to affirm their own cultural identities, their chances for graduation increase” (2008, p. 108). Tierney (2008) clarified that “mere celebration of minority cultures” on campus is not enough (p. 108). Rather, “if

postsecondary institutions make concerted and meaningful efforts to affirm these students' cultural identities, they stand to gain increased possibilities for ensuring the latter's success in college" (p. 108). Also, Rendón, Jalomo, and Nora (2000) found,

In the end, students will elect to stay or leave college not so much because of a theory, but because college and university faculty and administrators have made transformative shifts in governance, curriculum development, and in- and out-of-class teaching and learning, student programming, and other institutional dimensions that affect students on a daily basis. (p. 152)

Given the impact of campus climate on facilitating minority student degree completion, it is significant to understand how certain subgroups of marginalized student populations navigate college.

### **The Experiences of Latin@ Students**

#### **Latin@ K-12 students**

The experiences of marginalized students of color explored above are not isolated challenges once students attempt to access higher education. Rather, challenges to educational success begin early in students' K-12 experiences and continue throughout the educational pipeline. Regarding Latin@ students, Quijada and Alvarez (2006) wrote that marginalization occurs as early as elementary or middle school. A recent White House report (2011) found that:

Overall, Latinos have the lowest education attainment level of any group in the U.S. Currently, 1 in 5 students in the public schools system is Latino. Yet almost half of Hispanic students never receive their high school diplomas. These dropout rates have limited the advancement opportunities of a population that is estimated to become the majority of the Nation's labor force in less than 50 years. And Latino students often have less opportunity than their peers to take the challenging curricula – including advance courses in mathematics, and Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses – that are often indicative of college success. (p. 6)

Research shows that educational marginalization for Latin@ K-12 students relates to issues such as limited financial resources, language barriers, negative relationships with teachers, barriers to

familial involvement, and the need for stronger learning communities with teachers, mentors, and peers (Auerbach, 2004; Quijada & Alvarez, 2006; Ramberg, 2007).

Latin@ youth are disproportionately represented in underserved K-12 school systems that face limited resources (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Eamon, 2005; National Council of La Raza, 2007). Coming from a low socioeconomic status in an underserved school system negatively impacts opportunities for advanced academic preparation (National Council of La Raza, 2007). Limited resources also impact the ability of K-12 schools to provide bilingual or ESL environments that effectively transition students to an English-speaking environment at school (Ramberg, 2007). In a review of studies on lack of bilingual and ESL resources, Ramberg (2007) wrote that, “Latinos are culturally and linguistically diverse” and “English represented a chronic barrier to academic achievement for about half of all Latino youth in the U.S. (p. 25). In another study, Fry (2003) found that non-English proficient Latino students had a dropout rate of 60%. Student language barriers also relate to challenges with parental involvement in Latin@ youth’s schooling.

Concerns regarding language are one aspect of problematic relationships between teachers and parents. Ramberg (2007) explained that,

School officials hold negative stereotypes about Latino parents based on language barriers, cultural differences, different educational expectations, and false assumptions regarding parents’ interests in their children’s education. As a result of discrimination and marginalization, Latino parents have reported feeling powerless and consistently excluded from active, policy-making roles within their children’s education. (p. 33)

Similarly, Susan Auerbach (2004) showed how Latin@ parents who attempted to help their child in education faced struggles of bureaucratic barriers and memories of their own negative experiences in the system. Despite challenges to parental involvement, it is clear that parents of Latin@ youth emphasize the importance of obtaining education. One study found that “Latino



parents either directly or indirectly communicated to their children that education was the primary vehicle for social, economic, and political mobility (Fuentes, Kiyana, & Rosario, 2003, p. 34). This familial support is imperative, as Ramberg (2007) wrote that for Latin@ youth, “Resiliency theory identifies protective factors and support systems present in the families, schools, and communities of successful youth that may be missing in those who drop out (p. 35). These important support systems extend beyond students’ immediate households.

Having a sense of community with teachers and peers in learning environments is a key element for Latin@ student success. Research shows that collective ideology in school is important for Latin@ students given that, “children from Mexico and other parts of Latin America adhere to traditional enabling values like familism (Ramberg, 2007, p. 36; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995). Similarly, mentor relationships are important and “can be further enhanced by the teacher’s ability to embrace and promote student’s unique cultural and linguistic identity” (Ramberg, 2007, p. 37; Valenzuela, 1999). Positive peer connections and involvement in co-curriculars and the community are important, as students feel more connected to their school and gain friendships with increased participation in extracurricular activities (Ramberg, 2007, p. 63). Overall, many of these challenges for Latin@ students in K-12 education begin early and continue to factor into students’ experiences as they move throughout the educational pipeline.

### **Undocumented Latin@ K-12 students**

The challenges that begin early for Latin@ students in the K-12 system also extend to undocumented Latin@ students who face additional barriers to educational success. In a study on building resilient undocumented Latino K-12 students, Ramberg (2007) found that “barriers to educational attainment for these students include legality issues, limited financial resources,

marginalization, lack of bilingual and ESL programs, low teacher expectations, and perceived lack of parental involvement (p. 9). The impact of these challenges is far-reaching as undocumented youth move through education. Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) remarked that, “The legal status of an immigrant child influences - perhaps more so than the national origins and socioeconomic background of the parents - his or her experiences and life chances” (p. 33). López (2007) also explored that:

The psychological repercussions of a child’s legal status, including feelings of being “hunted,” having distrust and fear in the school setting, and feeling a horrible sense of injustice once they discover they will not likely be able to go beyond high school. These scholars identified the anger, hopelessness, and depression that may occur among undocumented high school students. (p. 48; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 2001)

There is still a great deal to be learned about how these challenges extend beyond K-12 education into navigating postsecondary education as an undocumented Latin@ student.

### **Latin@ students in higher education**

In addition to facing the barriers to success in college addressed above regarding marginalized students of color, Latin@ college students have specific layers of challenges to overcome. For example, pillars of LatCrit highlight areas impacting Latin@ educational experiences such as language and accent, national origin, race, class, gender, and phenotype (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). Also, Latin@ college students are overrepresented as first-generation college students who come from a low SES background in underserved K-12 schools (Carmen, 2009; Contreras, 2011; Garcia, 2011; Meza, 2011; Pérez, et al., 2010; Pérez, 2011).

These backgrounds impact college access for Latin@ students, as many face limited resources in academic preparation as well as with the college application process regarding admissions and financing of postsecondary education (Carmen, 2009; Contreras, 2011; Garcia, 2011; Meza, 2011; Pérez, et al., 2010; Pérez, 2011). Institutionalized racism and structural

oppressions based on these areas continue to impact Latin@ students beyond their K-12 experiences into higher education. Meza wrote that, "...even before setting foot on a college campus, the majority of Latinos are academically and economically disadvantaged compared to their non-first-generation college student peers" (2011, p. 9). Many of these concerns translate to Latin@ students entering postsecondary education through community colleges, which has been a recent push by the Obama administration for increasing higher education access for Latin@s in the U.S.

Unfortunately, Latin@ students still face challenges in the community college environment and, even if they overcome barriers to transfer to a four-year institution, these challenges follow them throughout the educational pipeline. Pérez (2011) stated, "the more socially and academically disadvantaged students, who need to attend the community college due to their academic history but are not empowered by their community college experience, are less likely to transfer... Latino students are greatly affected by this trend" (p. 98). Pérez also reported that Latino students face barriers to transferring out of community colleges because of factors such as,

- They and their parents are not familiar with higher education and have little or no knowledge of academic requirements and procedures;
- These students typically lack adequate high school preparation;
- They enroll in academic courses or college preparatory courses at lower rates than their White and Black peers;
- They have limited facility with English, and instruction and tutoring are usually delivered in English;
- Latino students work to survive and help support their families, and thus, may prioritize work over school due to economic necessity;
- Many Latino students who transfer experience difficulty in adjusting to colleges that lack racial or ethnic diversity; and
- Numerous institutional barriers impede transfer, including relatively few faculty and staff role models, lack of counseling and orientation, prejudice on the part of faculty, and limited transfer programs. (p. 100)

Pérez (2011) described community colleges as both a gateway into higher education, yet also a gatekeeper. Although the “community college system provides the primary entry point to higher education” for undocumented students, “students face a variety of challenges and frustrations because community colleges are ill-prepared to serve a student population they hardly understand, and often, are hardly aware of their presence on campus” (p. 97).

For Latin@ students who find a way to transfer to four-year institutions, many of these challenges continue such as learning to navigate unfamiliar institutions, limited academic preparation, family obligations, economic concerns, and marginalization based on race and ethnicity (Contreras, 2011; Meza, 2011; Pérez, 2011). Contreras (2011) also wrote about “factors that contribute to retention and perseverance among low-income first-generation Latino college students, such as financial concerns, academic preparation, social integration, and family background” (p. 102). However, she explained, “Very few studies have explored the challenges facing unauthorized students in higher education and how these students navigate college...In addition few studies have explored campus resources that have been most helpful to Latino students and the factors that contribute to their persistence” (p. 102).

### **Undocumented Latin@ College Students**

The majority of existing literature on undocumented Latin@ college students focuses heavily on state-specific policies and students pathways to higher education given barriers to accessing college and financing postsecondary education (Dozier, 2001; Meza 2011; Pérez, 2010; Pérez, 2011; Perry, 2006; Zusman, 2005). However, very little existing literature addresses undocumented Latin@ students’ experiences once they have already entered into higher education. Although not the focus of this study, a brief review of literature on access and

financing is important contextual information before advancing to examining the experiences of undocumented Latin@ students already enrolled in college.

Given the findings from research on undocumented Latin@ K-12 students, there are related challenges in higher education for these students. In examining these challenges, it is important to remember that, "...undocumented students are not homogeneous. Students come from diverse ethnic, cultural, and economic backgrounds. While undocumented students can share similar challenges and encounter parallel experiences, it is essential to understand each individual's story" (Hernandez & Gadson, p. 15). This study seeks to highlight the stories of individual participants, yet I enter this research with general foundational knowledge from other scholarly works that suggest undocumented Latin@ college students likely face similar challenges impacting how they navigate higher education.

Undocumented Latin@ college students are likely to be first-generation college students from low SES-backgrounds, resulting in limited resources and knowledge about the legalities and options surrounding college access (Carmen, 2009; Contreras, 2011; Garcia, 2011; Meza, 2011; Pérez, et al., 2010; Pérez, 2011). A study by Garcia (2011) on undocumented Latin@ students matriculating to college had three major findings: "(a) institutional agents were instrumental in developing students' social capital, (b) family- and peer-based social capital was important to students' matriculation, and (c) perceptions about immigration status affected students' matriculation and social capital development" (p. 164). In addition to these positive external factors, undocumented Latin@ students seeking postsecondary education demonstrate positive personal traits.

In one of the most recent and comprehensive studies to date on undocumented Latin@ students, Pérez (2011) explained his research goal is "to gain a deeper understanding of the

factors that shaped the pathway to college for undocumented Latino students” (p. 12). Pérez provides a visual for a conceptual framework of undocumented student achievement and higher education access, which relates to areas such as external support, personal identities, community and academic engagement, educational aspirations, and demonstrating leadership skills. Most of Pérez’s (2011) text focused on the K-12 system with a section on community colleges. However, his work is still useful in understanding undocumented Latin@ students who seek postsecondary education.

Pérez (2011) explained, “College-going and college-bound undocumented Latino students are not typical. Despite attending similar schools and sharing similar socioeconomic characteristics, their academic profile is very different compared with the general academic profile of Latino students in the United States...” as they are particularly high achieving academically and involved in their schools and communities (p. 65). Contreras (2011) had similar findings in reporting that the undocumented student population “is made up of high achievers who have overcome personal adversity to overcome challenges of being in a country that refuses to invest in their human capital” (p. 96). Despite these challenges, Carmen (2009) reported that “undocumented students decide to seek a higher education in an attempt to improve their chances for upward social mobility and incorporation into mainstream U.S society” (p. i).

Once a student finds a way to access higher education, financing college is a major barrier to remaining enrolled. In addition to being ineligible for financial aid, most states charge additional out-of-state or international student tuition to undocumented Latin@ students, even if these students permanently reside in the state where their college is located. Further complicating financial barriers is the legal reality that undocumented Latin@ students are not allowed to hold gainful employment, which forces them into finding “under the table” jobs that

result in inconsistent income in often less-than-ideal working conditions. Additional economic pressures and work constraints also limit undocumented Latin@ students' ability to focus time and energy on academics, and render them ineligible for on-campus work study programs that foster positive campus connections for other students.

In addition to financial struggle, Contreras (2011) found that common issues undocumented Latin@ college students face include finding the will to persist despite struggles in K-12 schooling, fear of separation from family, experiencing discrimination on campus and the need for helpful campus educators (p. 106). In another study, Meza (2011) summarized other challenges for undocumented Latin@ students regarding a negative institutional climate with higher rates of racial hostility than Caucasian students experience.

Not surprisingly, Latino students' perception of a hostile campus environment negatively affects their sense of belonging to their college, which directly impacts their transition, persistence, and success in higher education" (Meza, 2001, p. 9; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996). Meza also reported that, "Furthermore, several emotional challenges have been recorded among this population during their college experience as a result of their undocumented status, including the fear of deportation, loneliness, and depression, as well as feelings of shame and discrimination" (p. 11; Dozier, 1993; Pérez, Cortés, Ramos, & Coronado, 2010). Also, "Undocumented Latino college students may have to deal with emotional distress associated with the negative views and stereotypes of being (1) an ethnic minority, (2) undocumented, and (3) economically disadvantaged, which Pérez, et al. (2010) describe as the "triple minority status" (p. 11; p. 39).

Other themes emerging from scholarly literature include the important role of family in undocumented Latin@ college students lives, the need for a sense of belonging and inclusion

through campus social and academic communities, experiencing stigma and fear based on immigration status, and experiencing professional development limitations throughout college. The following section highlights these themes in the literature, as well as identifies current gaps in scholarly work that I hope to fill through my study (Abrego, 2008; Carmen, 2009; Dozier, 1993; Garcia, 2011; Lopez, 2007; Olivas, 2009; Ortiz & Hinojosa, 2010; Pérez, et al, 2009, Pérez, 2011).

## **Family**

In addition to upholding Latin@ cultural norms of maintaining close familial ties including providing economic support and caring for elders and younger siblings, undocumented Latin@ students also have an additional layer of expectation for academic achievement. Many families come to the U.S. so their children will have better educational opportunities (Contreras, 2011; Pérez, 2011). The important role of family is a prominent theme in scholarly literature, and Contreras (2011) captured this reality as she wrote, “The one common reason that their parents gave them for migrating to the United States was the desire to provide their children with the educational opportunities and economic mobility that did not exist for them in their home countries due to challenging economies, corruption, or limited social and economic mobility” (p. 106). Also, although undocumented Latin@ students are often first-generation college students and their parents are unfamiliar with how to offer what is considered traditional forms of support for navigating higher education, families set high academic expectations for their undocumented Latin@ students and expect them to role-model academic achievement for younger siblings.

Many undocumented Latin@ college students embrace familial responsibility and benefit from these connections. Garcia (2011) wrote, “They appropriated many of the values they witnessed in their families—namely hard work and determination—and applied them to pursuing



their academic goals” (p. 193). Pérez (2011) explained, “Students wanted to earn a college degree, even if they don’t get to use it, because they wanted to make their parents proud. They saw their accomplishment as a way to repay their parents for all the sacrifices they have made to provide a better life and educational opportunities” (p. 111). This sense of responsibilities to others extends beyond ties to family into students’ broader communities. Hernandez and Gadson (2010) explored the common theme of giving back in undocumented student experiences, as “Undocumented students often report that their pursuit of a higher education serves to honor the sacrifice and struggle of their families, friends, and an educational system to which they feel indebted” (p. 82). This sense of community is also important for understanding how undocumented Latin@ college students experience the campus climate.

### **Campus Climate**

Campus climate has been well documented in scholarly literature as a significant piece of shaping college students’ experiences. Campus climate can be defined as “the overall ethos or atmosphere of a college campus mediated by the extent individuals feel a sense of safety, belonging, engagement within the environment, and value as members of a community” and, “It is fundamentally a ‘felt’ concept” (Renn & Patton, 2010, p. 248; Renn & Reason, 2012, p. 100). It is hard to truly imagine what experiencing a negative campus climate “feels” like for undocumented Latin@ students, so highlighting individual student experiences is an area of scholarly research that must be bolstered. The limited amount of scholarship on this area briefly touches upon important concepts such as sense of belonging versus marginalization, stigma and fear, and professional development limitations that have an impact on the overall campus and academic experiences of undocumented Latin@ students (Abrego, 2008; Carmen, 2009; Dozier, 1993; Garcia, 2011; Lopez, 2007; Olivas, 2009; Ortiz & Hinojosa, 2010; Pérez, et al, 2009).

## **Sense of Belonging versus Marginalization**

Feeling a sense of inclusion on campus is an important piece of students' collegiate experiences (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Schlossberg, 1989; Strayhorn, 2012). This sense of belonging may be particularly important for undocumented Latin@ students who are likely to come from cultures valuing collectivism and community (Goldberg, Kelly, Matthews, Kang, Li, & Sumaroka, 2012; Taylor, 2004; Torres & Solberg, 2001). Based on the limited amount of research available, it is unfortunately not uncommon for undocumented Latin@ college students to feel isolated on campus for various reasons (Abrego, 2011; Contreras, 2009; Garcia, 2011). For example in the pilot study that I co-conducted, a lack of institutional connection was mentioned by all three participants due to different cultural experiences as undocumented Latin@ students. One participant, Rico, explained, "I don't feel that connection within the school" because he does not live on campus. He would like to live on campus, but he cannot afford it. He wondered if living on campus at a four year college would provide a different life with less worries.

Garcia (2011) wrote that perceptions of belonging is one of the three main challenges undocumented college students experience in pursuing a college education and that students of underrepresented racial and ethnic backgrounds must feel "included and welcomed in educational institutions as a prerequisite for student success" (p. 24). However, holding an undocumented status presents challenges in this area. Abrego (2011) explained that undocumented students' feelings of inclusion on college campuses are constantly under threat since their immigration status is equivalent to illegality. This isolation extends to relationships with peers as well as with university educators.

**Social isolation.** Feeling a sense of social connectedness with peers is important for college students as they seek a sense of belonging on campus. Garcia (2011) explained, “In the case of low-income and first-generation students, relationships with peers are pivotal since they lack other social relationships and resources that foster successful college matriculation” (p. 25). The importance of peer relationships extends to undocumented Latin@ students who are often low-income and first generation students, yet there are additional barriers leading to social isolation for undocumented Latin@ students.

Contreras (2009) wrote about numerous social constraints due to undocumented Latin@ students not possessing a social security number and inability to obtain a driver’s license. These limitations include the inability to vote, being unable to attend social scenes with peers such as bars or events requiring age-verifying identification, and having to rely on public transportation (2009). Undocumented students may also face direct questions from peers regarding their lack of social participation. Garcia (2011) wrote that, “Students may also have to answer questions from peers about why they attend a community college instead of a four-year institution, why they cannot go to a nightclub that requires identification for entry, or why they took a term off from school to work on a full-time basis (p. 33).

Overall, Garcia (2011) reported that, “Many undocumented college students modify their academic and social activities in order to minimize the possibility of being identified as undocumented by school officials or law enforcement,” which is a reality also reported in Pérez’s work (2009). There are repercussions of this social isolation, as Garcia (2011) wrote,

Refraining from communal social activities limits the opportunities when these students can make friends and meet contacts who can possibly assist with educational plans. Feelings of inclusion in the community facilitate undocumented students bridging networks of people and resources that may assist with their educational goals. (pp. 25-26)

Educational goals may be facilitated with increased peer connections, along with encountering knowledgeable and supportive university educators.

**Encountering unaware and unsupportive university educators.** The presence of supportive university educators, along with visible role models and mentors, are important pieces of the college student experience, especially for marginalized students (Castellanos, Gloria, Mayorga, & Salas, 2007; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000). Unfortunately, the presence of such university educators is lacking for undocumented Latin@ college students (Contreras, 2011; Garcia, 2011; Pérez's, 2011). Furthermore, undocumented students are often a hidden segment of a university's student population, and university educators generally lack the knowledge about these students' experiences and how to effectively serve them (Abrego, 2008; Contreras, 2009; Garacia, 2011; Olivas, 2009; Ortiz & Hinojosa, 2010). Although some university educators may become aware of the presence of undocumented Latin@ students on campus, some educators are unsupportive when it comes to serving these students based on personal political beliefs and biases (Pérez, Cortés, Ramos, & Coronado, 2010). These issues may manifest in many ways, and do not go unnoticed by undocumented Latin@ students in navigating campus on a daily basis.

In the pilot study, Alicia experienced frustration with her school officials, despite it being legal for undocumented students in her home state to attend college as in-state citizens. She said, "People didn't know how to deal with an undocumented person... So it was a lot of self-teaching and then teaching the people who were supposed to guide me. I ended up teaching them, so I had a lot of frustration on that." In addition to encountering university educators who are unaware of how to serve these students, undocumented Latin@ students also face unsupportive educators who leave students feeling marginalized. For example, Alicia also shared that she

spoke English fluently but her Spanish accent was noticeable. This caused her discomfort in academic settings, as she explained she felt “looked down upon” because she was a minority compared to all of her Caucasian peers. She said she would clearly communicate, but still had teachers who would ask her to repeat herself, which made her self-conscious regarding her accent. She asked herself, “...do they really think that you are beneath them, and that they don’t think you can do it? You are not feeling secure in your capacity as a student and you always feel questioned. Like people question why you are taking up a seat at a nursing school” (p. 25).

Other university educators are even more blatantly unsupportive as personal views on immigration debates impact interactions with undocumented Latin@ students. A study by Garcia (2011) described how some undocumented students have negative experiences with institutional staff members. For many students, “their illegality translates into a vulnerable, inferior status within the larger society and among their college peers” (Contreras, 2009; Abrego, 2008; Olivas, 2009). Overall, educators play an important role in undocumented Latin@ college students’ experiences, and the presence of unaware or unsupportive educators has a negative impact on students’ experiences.

### **Stigma and Fear**

Undocumented Latin@ college students face stigma associated with the label “undocumented” as well as experiencing fear regarding the possibilities of arrest and deportation (Carmen, 2009; Dozier, 1993; Lopez, 2007; Murillo, 2002; Oliverrez, 2005a; Oliverrez, 2005b; Perry, 2006). These legal realities of daily tasks cause additional psychological burdens as students worry about separation from family and interruptions in schooling. For example, in the pilot study, one participant named Fredd was taken from his home in front of his mother and younger siblings by Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) and put in an out-of-state

detention center for two months. During this time, Fredd was waiting to be deported to his family's country of origin where he said he was unfamiliar with the culture and would be in unsafe conditions. Incredibly, even in the face of such uncertainty and danger, Fredd emphasized his efforts at not missing an exam and taking measures to formally drop his courses so his GPA would not be negatively impacted during his time away from school. He was later released, but at the time of the pilot study, he had so far been unsuccessful in receiving assistance from his academic dean to complete his interrupted coursework.

**Stigma.** Given the highly political nature of current immigration debates in the U.S., there is much stigma that follows undocumented Latin@ college students (Murillo, 2002; Oliverez, 2005a; Oliverez, 2005b; Perry, 2006). A study by Lopez (2007) highlighted how, “research has found that undocumented immigrants face racial prejudices regarding beliefs in their innate inferiority and inability to continue on towards higher education” and that “many in the American public see them as less deserving of public resources and ‘membership’ in U.S. society (p. 2). One participant in the pilot study shared that he did not know he was undocumented until it was time to apply to college and he did not have the required information for the application paperwork. This surprising burden is further complicated for another pilot study participant, Alicia, who explained her experience with staying silent about her undocumented status. She said families often do not talk about being undocumented and this silence carries on to college:

And then once you get out to high school and junior high, it becomes something that you are afraid of and something you are afraid of sharing. Something you are ashamed of sharing. Because in high school you can't get your license and all that. And then in college, it's the same. (p. 27)

The choice to remain silent about one's undocumented status is complicated by negative public opinions regarding immigration reform and the presence of undocumented students in college.

These feelings of stigma are further complicated by experiencing fear based on holding an undocumented status.

**Fear.** In addition to navigating the average daily challenges of college life, undocumented Latin@ students must carry the burden of fear based on immigration status. For example, the fear of deportation is often cited as the most salient factor in the emotional and mental strain undocumented students experience (Dozier, 1993). This risk extends to students and their families, as “Many undocumented students fear that if they apply for college, they and their family members might risk being deported as a result of the information they disclose in their applications” (López & López, 2010, p. 63). Once on campus, students continue to carry this fear with them.

Carmen (2009) reported that, “The fear of being judged, reported to ICE, and “caught” and deported is a pressing fear in these students’ minds” (p. 22). The additional measures undocumented Latin@ students must consider are well beyond the average daily stressors other students face. For example, “Many of these students carry with them a pocket phone book or a list of phone numbers in their cell phones that they can call if they get “caught” and deported. Most have talked this through with their families and have developed a plan for whom they will call, where they will go, and how they will get back to the U.S. (p. 22). In sum, fear related to the reality of deportation for oneself or for one’s family is a reality for undocumented Latin@ college students who carry this psychological burden on a daily basis.

### **Professional Development Limitations**

Undocumented Latin@ college students have been shown to be academically high achieving with regards to GPA and taking on multiple majors despite challenging campus environments (Pérez, 2011; Pérez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2009). Pérez, et al.

found that academic success was related to the students' environments and that high-risk groups, identified as undocumented Latin@ students, experienced significantly higher levels of adversity, which affects their academic resilience (2009). Aside from impacting direct academic success regarding GPA, a surprising array of challenges arises regarding professional development opportunities. Although not as heavily researched as GPA, this area is significant to understand, as these students have many blocked opportunities preventing full participation in campus life regarding professional development opportunities which, in turn, negatively impact their collegiate experience and opportunities for success post-graduation (Dozier, 2001; Ortiz & Hinojosa, 2010).

One main study on this area by Ortiz and Hinojosa (2010) explored the career development for undocumented college students. The authors reported that “many facets of the typical career counseling and planning process conflict with or are not relevant to undocumented students” and that “career assessments do not necessarily take into account students' values related to ethnicity or familial commitments” (p. 3). Also, undocumented students' inability to travel freely restricts them from the ability to study abroad. These limitations based on immigration status and identification also extend to the ability to qualify for internships, travel to conferences, and research programs.

Ortiz and Hinojosa (2010) wrote that career services professionals need to be informed about what majors undocumented students qualify for given restrictions on areas like site visit clearance, background checks, and travel restrictions. Not only do these barriers prevent students' full participation in campus life for academic and career development, but misinformation about realistic opportunities also has tangible repercussions for undocumented students struggling to pay high tuition. Misadvising students to take a course or select a major



that is not realistic could result in additional financial and time-commitment strain along with the emotional burden of blocked opportunity.

In the pilot study, Rico explained his dream of becoming an engineer and how he got his hopes up for participating in academic-related travel abroad. He shared that he has always wanted to travel, but he knows this is not an option. He spoke with his engineering advisor who recommended an engineering program in France. Rico thought it sounded like a great opportunity, “but in the back of my mind, I’m thinking, why are you lying? You are lying to yourself because you cannot travel around abroad—you are undocumented. And that is the reality that comes to my life...” (Yao and Shelton, 2010, p. 16).

Participants in my study reported a strong desire to attend graduate school. However, limited professional development options also extend to graduate school, as entrance exams for law and medicine often require identification which undocumented Latin@ students would not be able to provide, thus limiting future educational plans while still in their undergraduate years. Dozier explained that this uncertainty regarding future employment leads to feelings of discouragement and negatively impacts undocumented students’ successes in higher education (2001). Overall, students’ uncertain future regarding residency status and limited ability to have gainful employment post-graduation is a great burden that undocumented Latin@ students must carry throughout their collegiate experiences.

## **Activism**

One area that arises in literature is the topic of activism by undocumented Latin@ college students (Abrego, 2008; Gonzales, 2008; Pérez, 2009; Pérez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2009; Rincon, 2008). This activism is often specifically related to civic engagement focusing on one’s undocumented status. One study reported that in states where the

undocumented student population is larger, activism has become a means of resiliency (Contreras, 2009).

Activism can take place through formal campus student organizations or community groups serving the umbrella population of Latin@ students, or in groups specifically focused on immigration status. Each of these approaches to involvement offers opportunities to connect with peers and give back to one's community. For undocumented Latin@ students, connecting with campus-based groups may start with summer bridge programs or through being introduced to campus organizations like MECHA or HOLA. Informal social networks also may lead students to non-campus affiliated groups such as the national political group called the DREAMers, named after the DREAM Act.

In the pilot study, a participant named Fredd summarized the significance of his activism surrounding being an undocumented Latin@ student in higher education. He said, "It gets harder every day," but he wants to be a change agent. Meeting other DREAMers makes him happy because they are "Standing up for what they believe in coming out of the shadow to speak the truth. They're undocumented, unafraid, and unashamed. Because that's how it should be" (Yao & Shelton, 2010, p. 29). Similarly, in the pilot study Rico talked about the importance of being active in his local communities as a way to connect with other undocumented students.

He values these connections because other undocumented students understand his situation and "are willing to fight the fight with you...so you can be more active and more open to lose that fear and that shame of being undocumented." Rico explained this is important because "it's not your fault...And there is a need to remove that fear and shame so you can live your life more open..." which allows others to, "know that this is happening so they...can be able to voice out those experiences that you have. So lose that fear, lose that shame, talk to your

politicians, to your community, to your school, and organize” (Yao & Shelton, 2010, p. 26).

Overall, it is also significant to note that not only does activism benefit students and their communities during college, but this activism is likely to carry into life post-graduation, which is important for fostering civically engaged members of the U.S. population.

### **Gaps in Literature**

LatCrit emphasizes immigration theory and policy, which clearly influences the legal challenges undocumented Latin@ college students face regarding college admissions and financial aid (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). Also, the focus on class and immigration status in LatCrit is apparent in the literature on undocumented Latin@ college students who are often from low SES backgrounds and face the reality of their undocumented status in day-to-day actions (Pérez, 2011; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). Other LatCrit pillars such as gender, language rights, and discrimination based on accent were present in my study, but are not as prominent in related literature. Both elements of language and gender were present in the pilot study as important factors impacting the experiences of undocumented Latin@ college students, yet these areas are not heavily addressed in current literature. LatCrit and literature on Latin@ K-12 students highlights the importance of language in students’ experiences, yet this theme is not as prominent in much of the literature on undocumented Latin@ college students. Similarly, LatCrit and K-12 literature highlights that gender is an important element in Latin@ culture, but this has not been closely examined in higher education literature regarding undocumented Latin@ students.

In addition to the need for more in-depth information regarding the experiences of undocumented Latin@ college students and how they demonstrate resilience in college, there is a need to explicitly translate this knowledge to practice. Very few pieces of literature address how

to learn from undocumented Latin@ students' experiences to shape practice, and much of this literature focuses on certain states like California or on community colleges (Beltran, 2011; Garcia, 2011; Greene & Kropf, 2009; Meza, 2011; Pérez, 2009; Pérez Huber & Malagon, 2007). The ideas that do exist are brief and require further exploration to provide details to university educators working to shape practice. Pérez (2009) stated the need for educational practice reform for working with undocumented Latin@ students, as he writes this population is the most vulnerable and in need of services including receiving accurate information from staff (p. 141). Ideas for practice that are briefly presented in literature range from the need to formally train university educators on issues undocumented Latin@ students face, to creating support groups and Safe Space programs for students while also proactively reaching out to these students in a variety of venues emphasizing culturally relevant practices.

The small amount of literature that exists in a non-deficit model for learning about these students utilizes social and cultural capital theories as a framework (Huber, 2009; Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012; Yosso, 2005). The use of CRT and LatCrit, combined with a resilience framework, adds to existing literature. The primary piece of literature by Pérez (2009) focused on undocumented Latin@ students in college, but this is a smaller portion of the text, as it also includes K-12 information. Pérez's (2009) book focuses primarily on access to and the financing of higher education in light of state and federal policies impacting these students. Only a few small paragraphs are dedicated to educational practice reform, and these ideas are based on one sample restricted to a specific geographic area within the U.S.

A large portion of the literature on undocumented Latin@ college students focuses on policies impacting admission and financial aid, but the literature does not address what can be done now on a campus level to serve students regardless of the broader shifting policy climate

(Beltran, 2011; Garcia, 2011; Greene & Kropf, 2009; Meza, 2011; Pérez, 2009; Pérez Huber & Malagon, 2007). Many studies also focus on areas such as California or Texas that have a high number of undocumented Latin@ college students and are in the media as states with unique policy approaches regarding these students (Beltran, 2011; Garcia, 2011; Greene & Kropf, 2009; Meza, 2011; Pérez, 2009; Pérez Huber & Malagon, 2007). It is important to learn about undocumented students' experiences in a variety of state policy contexts, as well as unique institutional climates, as a way to inform relevant practice.

### **Literature Review Conclusion**

The primary focus of this study is to understand how undocumented Latin@ college students demonstrate resilience as they navigate higher education. It is well documented through previous research that college presents certain challenges for most students, and there are additional challenges faced by students from marginalized racial and ethnic backgrounds (Passel & Cohn, 2009; Pell Institute, 2005; Swail, 2002; Zusman, 2005). These challenges extend to specific issues for the Latin@ college student population such as areas highlighted in LatCrit regarding language and accent, national origin, race, class, gender, and phenotype (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). Furthermore, there are specific challenges for undocumented Latin@ students related to areas such as experiencing marginalization on campus (Dozier, 1993; Pérez, Cortés, Ramos, & Coronado, 2010) facing stigma and fear based on immigration status (Abrego, 2011; Hernandez, Gadson, Huftalin, Ortiz, White, & Yocum-Gaffney, 2010), and having limited professional development opportunities throughout college (Dozier, 2001; Ortiz & Hinojosa, 2010). Despite these barriers to persistence, some undocumented Latin@ students still demonstrate resilience in navigating higher education and graduating from college.

Undocumented Latin@ students are an often hidden, yet rapidly growing student population, and U.S. institutions of higher education have an obligation to serve all segments of the student population. However, gaps in scholarly knowledge are especially evident for understanding issues facing undocumented Latin@ students beyond the areas of access and financial aid and how to translate knowledge to practice for university educators. Given background knowledge from previous scholarly work, it is clear there is a need to learn more about the experiences of undocumented Latin@ college students. Through this study, I hope to address some of these gaps in knowledge as I explore how undocumented Latin@ college students demonstrate resilience as they navigate higher education. Ultimately, learning about these students' experiences will help inform practice for university educators serving undocumented Latin@ students.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of undocumented Latin@ college students. The organization of this chapter is as follows: (a) An overview of the research design; (b) Data collection and data analysis procedures; (c) Consideration of trustworthiness and reflexivity; and (d) The privacy and confidentiality of the study's participants.

### **Overview of Methodology**

I interviewed 16 participants to share their experiences as undocumented Latin@ college students to learn how they demonstrate resilience as they navigate higher education. Interviews were informed by conceptual, theoretical, and practical ideas that emerged in the literature review as relevant to the resilience and persistence of underrepresented students in higher education. All participants identified as undocumented Latin@ students who are currently enrolled in or are within two years after graduating from a U.S. institution of higher education that is a PWI. The participants, therefore, included a wide variety of geographic diversity, including countries of origin and current residence, and a range of major areas of study is represented.

The study included two rounds of 60-90 minute interviews with 16 undocumented Latin@ college students, with the exception of one participant who did not return for a second round interview. The second interview allowed for expanding upon initial interviews after establishing rapport with participants, including seeking any clarification needed and asking additional questions.

### **Research Paradigm**

Merriam described the importance of qualitative researchers identifying the rationale for the chosen research design, sampling selection methods, and data collection methods (2002). I

used qualitative interviews with an emphasis on counter narratives as the mode of inquiry since it reflects the critical nature of my questions as well as the framework. This dissertation involved qualitative interviews, as it aimed to highlight an in-depth understanding of the experiences of undocumented Latin@ college students who demonstrate resilience in higher education.

### **Anti-Deficit Approach**

In seeking equitable educational practices, an asset-focused approach is necessary to overcome negative images of undocumented college students who are often portrayed in various venues as less-than-human, underachieving, and undeserving of educational opportunity. Reshaping the deficit-focused discourse surrounding undocumented college students is one step in acknowledging the assets these students bring to their educational journeys and in shaping relevant practices supporting their resilience.

The goal of using a resilience framework in this study is to combat the deficit approach commonly seen in discourse about undocumented students. Various literature emphasizes a need to move beyond a deficit framework in educational scholarship and practice, which reinforces the resilience foundation of this study (Carter Andrews & Tuitt, 2013; Harper, 2010). In their scholarship on the current legal and policy environment in K-12 schooling, Carter Andrews and Tuitt (2013) addressed how, “We have become so complacent with referring to certain groups of students as ‘at risk’ that we forget this framing often perpetuates the deficit thinking that they are broken and need to be fixed” (p. 4). Although the authors spoke about integration and educational equity in the K-12 education system, much of their message rings true for considering the opportunities of diverse students in higher education as well. Color-blind policies go hand-in-hand with deficit thinking about students in higher education, and as such, there is a need for asset-focused practice for learning about diverse students.



In a blog post related to their book, Carter Andrews and Tuitt (2013) critique K-12 education and the failure of achieving educational equity for racial minorities. Again, the authors' arguments also translate directly to thinking about the experiences of undocumented college students. Their concluding thoughts resonate in particular as they emphasize equitable educational laws and policies (2013):

As advocates for educational equity, we argue for racial justice in our nation's schools and demand focus on fair treatment and meaningful involvement in the educational process for all people regardless of race with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of educational laws and policies that promote racial equity in achievement and opportunity. It is when no racial group bears a disproportionate share of negative consequences resulting from such laws and policies that we will be realizing Dr. King's dream.

Another leading researcher in anti-deficit educational research is higher education scholar Shaun Harper. In a study of Black males in STEM education, Harper explained an anti-deficit inquiry as one that “recognizes students of color as experts on their experiential realities and empowers them to offer counternarratives concerning their success” in their fields (2010, p. 71). In his growing body of research on this topic, Harper argued that a deficit orientation to learning about students of color is perpetuated in the media, scholarly literature, and educational practice. This three-pronged assault on the character and ability of students of color also applies to undocumented college students who are often portrayed in various venues as dehumanized, underachieving, and undeserving of educational opportunity.

Participants acknowledged the negative messages the media and political debates portray about undocumented populations, and oftentimes they attributed this as the foundation of ignorance and racist interactions on campus. Reshaping the deficit-focused discourse surrounding undocumented college students is one step in acknowledging the assets these students bring to their educational journeys and in shaping relevant practices supporting their

resilience.

### **Counter narratives**

The use of counter narratives is an attempt to use student voices to counter the dominant narrative surrounding undocumented Latin@ college students. This common narrative is one that portrays negative images of undocumented students situated within dehumanizing broader immigration reform debates. For example, media images often portray undocumented students in as non-human, or “aliens” who are attempting to “infiltrate” the U.S. to take advantage of social support that is perceived to take away resources from “more deserving and capable” U.S. citizens.

The counter narratives students share to combat these perceptions also extend to the specific topic of educational opportunity and equity. Undocumented Latin@ students are often portrayed in the media as underachieving and undeserving of postsecondary educational opportunity. This common perception of undocumented Latin@ students is rooted in a deficit framework that blames students’ cultures and communities for their marginalized status in society, instead of acknowledging legacies of marginalization rooted in institutionalized oppression.

Sean Harper’s (2010) study on Black males in STEM education highlights the power of an anti-deficit inquiry as one that, “recognizes students of color as experts on their experiential realities and empowers them to offer counternarratives concerning their success” in their fields (2010, p. 71). Harper’s work focused on how participant stories can counter the common deficit-focused narrative perpetuated in the media, scholarly literature, and educational practice. Reshaping the deficit-focused discourse surrounding undocumented college students is one step

in addressing challenges they face in postsecondary education while learning from their counter stories to acknowledge the assets these students bring to their educational journeys.

The use of qualitative interviews and counter narratives is also consistent with Critical Race Theory as a lens since the voice of people of color is essential in CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The use of narratives, or storytelling, provides a “historical and political process that places people of color in control of their story” since the narratives provide the participant the ability to reflect and trace their personal histories (Dunbar, 2008, p. 94). Additionally, narratives and storytelling are an essential part of LatCrit, which espouses the benefits of using ‘testimonios’ (Huber, 2010, p. 83). Although participant counter narratives in this study are not classified as testimonios, it is helpful to understand how testimonios fit within this genre of scholarship.

Huber explained, “while there is no universal definition of testimonio, it has been generally used as a strategy to denounce injustices experienced by marginalized groups” (Huber, 2010, p. 83). Within CRT and LatCrit, testimonio “can be described as a verbal journey of a witness who speaks to reveal the racial, classed, gender, and nativist injustices they have suffered as a means of healing, empowerment and advocacy for a more humane present and future” (Huber, 2010, p. 83). In keeping with the common use of CRT found in related literature, the use of narratives in this study highlights the stories of undocumented Latin@ students as a way to disrupt the dominant discourse surrounding their experiences in higher education.

## **CRT**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a lens used to examine the relationship amongst race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Major tenets of CRT include: (1) that racism is normal and ordinary; (2) interest convergence, or material determinism, exists; (3) race is a

product of social thought; and (4) that the voice of people of color is essential in CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT stems from “a long tradition of resistance to unequal and unjust distribution of power and resources along political, economic, racial, and gendered lines in America” (Taylor, 2009, p. 1). Additionally, CRT builds on Critical Legal Studies, which argues that white males hold power over marginalized groups, leading to unbalanced opportunities for all citizens (Taylor, 2009). The decision makers in U.S. legislation that affect undocumented immigrants are almost all white men, and their decisions impact thousands of underrepresented people of color in the United States.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is appropriate to use as a lens through which to analyze the experiences of undocumented college students, especially given the political climate shaping these students’ experiences based on issues such as race and ethnicity. CRT has produced several “spin-off movements” including a “forceful Latino-critical (LatCrit) contingent” that examines “immigration theory and policy, as well as language rights and discrimination based on accent or national origin” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 6). Also, “CRT and LatCrit are transdisciplinary and draw on many bodies of progressive scholarship to understand and improve the educational experiences of students of color” (Bernal, 2002, p. 109). The following figure shows the foundations and spin-off movements for CRT (Yosso, Villalpando, Delgado Bernal, & Solórzano, 2001, p. 93).

FIGURE 1. A GENEALOGY OF CRITICAL RACE THEORY

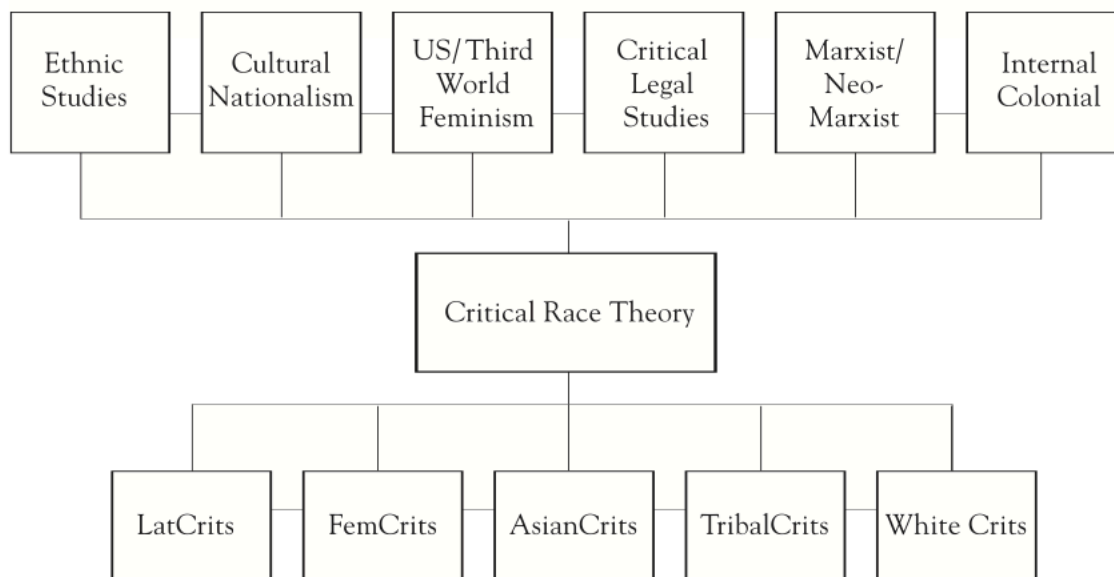


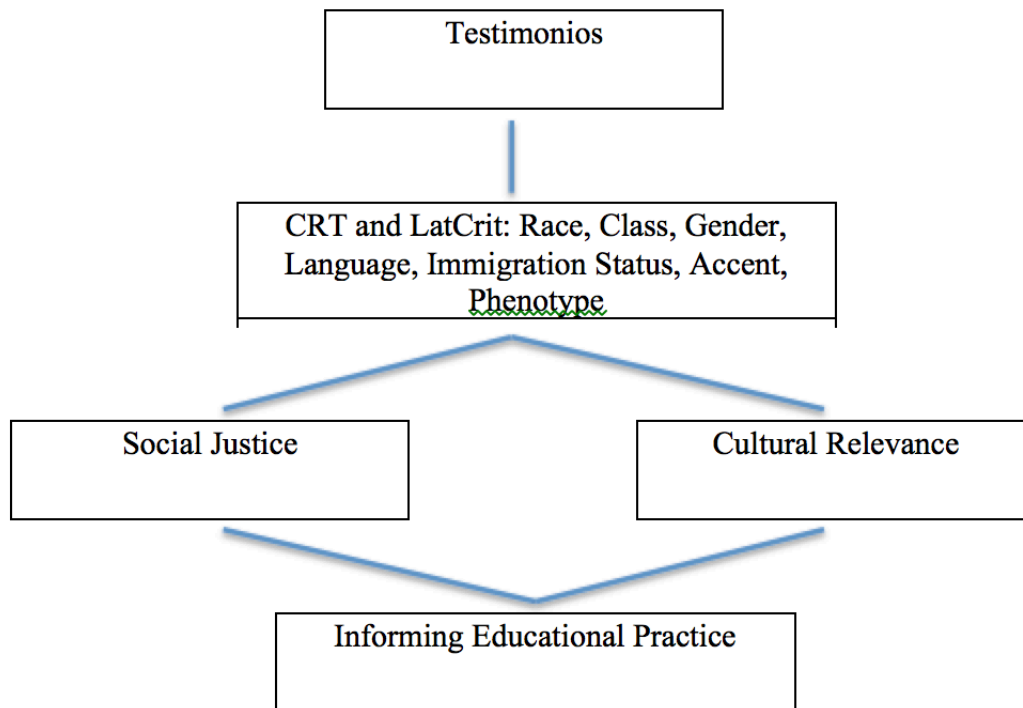
Figure 3.1. CRT and Spin-Off Movements.

Solórzano (1998) outlined the following five defining elements of CRT in relationship to educational research: 1) The importance of transdisciplinary approaches to understand and improve the educational experiences of students of color; 2) An emphasis on experiential knowledge which “for too long...has been viewed as a deficit in formal learning environments” and where “an emphasis on experiential knowledge also allows researchers to embrace the use of counterstories, narratives, *testimonios*, and oral histories to illuminate the unique experiences of students of color;” 3) A challenge to dominant ideologies to shift to offering culturally relevant ways of teaching and learning; 4) The centrality of race and racism in their intersectionality with other forms of subordination; and 5) A commitment to social justice to “seek political and social change on behalf of communities of color” (p. 122). CRT offers a way to resist the trend of marginalizing the holistic experiences of undocumented Latin@ college students. Instead, as Gloria Ladson-Billings (2000) wrote, “The ‘gift’ of CRT is that it unapologetically challenges the scholarship that would dehumanize and depersonalize us” (p. 272). Combatting this

dehumanizing and depersonalizing approach is particularly important in learning about undocumented students who are often represented in the media as the “other” and “alien” to the human experience.

### **LatCrit**

LatCrit emphasizes multiple aspects of Latin@ identity and the role these areas play within a racist society. Solórzano and Bernal (2001) explained that, “CRT and LatCrit theory challenge the dominant discourse on race and racism as they relate to education by examining how educational theory and practice are used to subordinate and marginalize Chicana and Chicano students” (p. 313). Also, “CRT and LatCrit theorists acknowledge that educational structures, processes, and discourses operate in contradictory ways with their potential to emancipate and empower,” as “Chicana and Chicano students live between and within layers of subordination based on race, class, gender, language, immigration status, accent, and phenotype” (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001, p. 314, 335). The use of LatCrit as a theoretical foundation allows for examination of these various intersections of Latin@ students’ realities impacting their postsecondary academic experiences.



*Figure 3.2. Elements of the study leading to informing educational practice.*

The use of the “at symbol” “Latin@” was chosen over the more common use of Latina/o “because it represents gender neutrality, gender inclusion, and disrupts the misogynistic ways language privileges men, masculinity, and things that are considered ‘male’” (The LatiNegr@s Project, 2012, n.p.). Also, explicitly examining the role of gender is a central tenet of LatCrit (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001).

## **Resilience**

CRT and LatCrit provide foundational lenses through which to examine the experiences of individuals of color generally and also specifically for Latin@ individuals. In addition to this context, resilience theory provides specific theoretical assertions that may help explain aspects of

the successes of the students under study. In this section, I detail various definitions of resilience theory, which is rooted in psychology literature.

Collins (2009) explained one common definition of resilience theory as the ability to adapt to risk factors by using protective factors, which requires actively handling stress and challenges. Brené Brown's (2010) work on wholehearted living speaks to the very essence of undocumented students demonstrating resilience in navigating higher education. Brown is a human behavior researcher who examined what it means to live a whole-hearted life, which consists of having courage, compassion, and connection (2010). In a section particularly relevant to thinking about undocumented Latin@ college students, Brown described the five main factors of resilient people:

1. They are resourceful and have good problem-solving skills.
2. They are more likely to seek help.
3. They hold the belief that they can do something that will help them to manage their feelings and to cope.
4. They have social support available to them.
5. They are connected with others, such as family or friends. (p. 64)

Themes from Brown's work provide context for examining participant experiences in my study.

The importance of connection to others and social support is a theme found in studies on the persistence of Latin@ undergraduates in higher education. Morales, Herrera, and Murray (2009) described the importance of students receiving mentoring and/or validation. However, they also address the tensions undocumented students face in maintaining ties to home communities while also connecting to support systems on campus. Although I cited Tinto in other locations of this study in reference to student attrition, it is worth repeating the common critique of Tinto's work as it relates to students of color. Morales, Herrera, and Murray (2009) also explained this common critique of Tinto's (1993) foundational higher education scholarship as they explain, "The popular conception is that students need to break away from the family and



community to be successful...but research on students of color challenges that notion and shows that maintaining strong family and community ties enhances student success” (p. 285).

A specific branch of resilience theory called educational resilience theory “commonly refers to the ability to succeed in school despite difficult or adverse circumstances, often through the presence or development of protective factors (Waxman, Gray, & Padron, 2003). Similarly, educational resiliency “refers to students who despite economic, cultural, and social barriers succeed at high levels” (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004, p. 152). Specific educational resilience theory is often focused on the experiences of K-12 students. However, more recent studies have begun to apply educational resilience theory to the experiences of marginalized college students.

In recent work on undocumented Latin@ college students, Pérez and colleagues (2009) explained that resilience theory “is focused more on strengths rather than deficits and understanding healthy development in spite of high risk exposure. Personality characteristics and environmental social resources are thought to moderate the negative effects of stress and promote positive outcomes despite risks” (p. 6). Pérez et al. also wrote that,

Environments may contribute to a person’s risk of various problems, but can also provide protection to enhance the likelihood of positive outcomes. Resources are positive factors that are external to the individual and help overcome risk, such as parental support, adult mentoring, or community organizations that promote positive youth development. (p. 6)

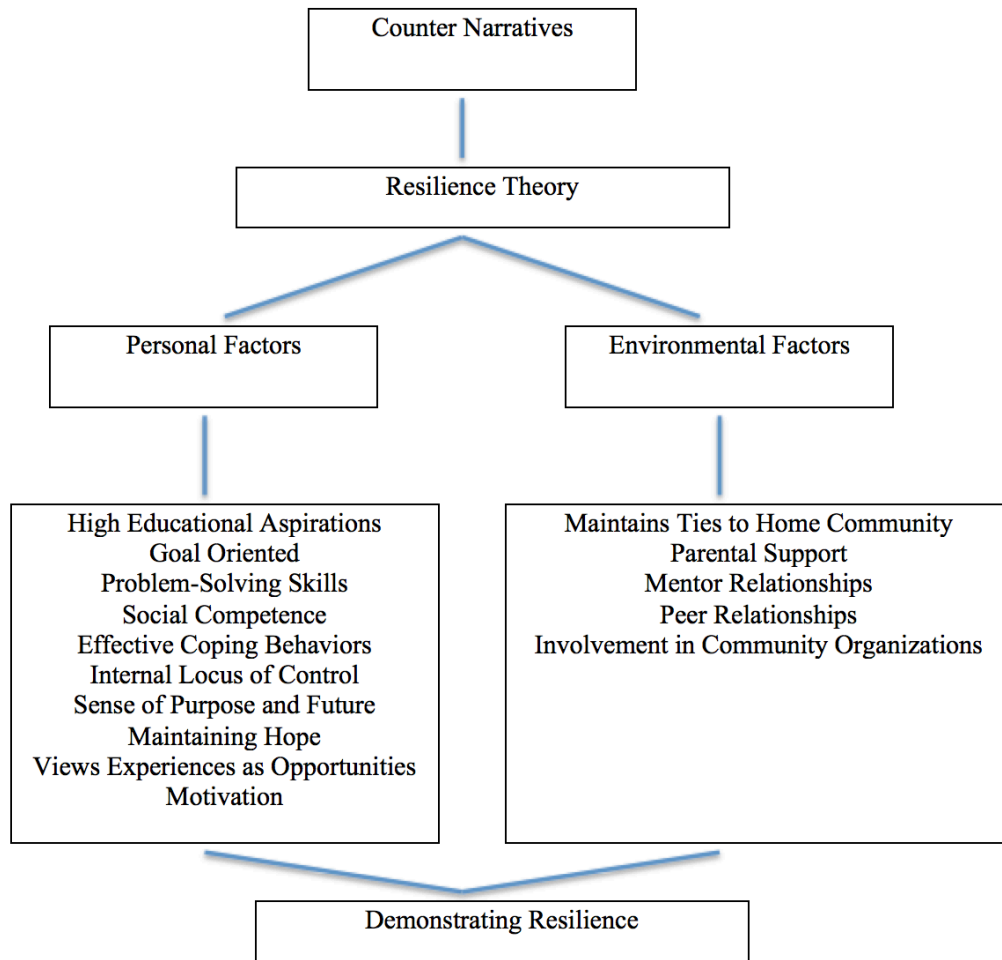
In another study on undocumented Latino college students in California, a resilience perspective is defined as addressing “this student population’s resiliency factors that encourage them to continue to pursue a college education, in spite of legal and educational barriers preventing them from accessing higher education. Individuals with resilience capacities can prevent, minimize, and even overcome adversity” (Beltran, 2011, p. 7). One commonly cited scholar in this area, Waxman, et al. (2003), wrote,

In education, conceptual and empirical work on resilience has gained recognition as a framework for examining why some students are successful in school, while others from the same socially- and economically-disadvantaged backgrounds and communities are not. Such a framework could be useful in helping educators design more effective educational interventions that take into account ‘alterable’ factors that distinguish resilient students from nonresilient students. (n.p.)

Carlson’s (2001) College Resilience Questionnaire (CRQ) “consists of 27 items and measures college student resilience...based on the work of Tinto who identifies social and academic integration as central to persistence in college” (Reynolds & Weigand, 2010, p. 181). As mentioned previously, Tinto’s work is problematic in its applicability to students of color given that his original views on departure do not factor in cultural perspectives. As such, Carlson’s work is based on a foundation of assimilation that overlooks the significance of Latin@ college students fostering resilience by maintaining ties to their home communities (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). Yosso’s (2006) model of college persistence moves beyond Tinto’s model based on a dominant cultural perspective to include the cultural roots of Latin@ students as they navigate multiple worlds.

In a study on the impact of service learning, Yeh (2010) described how resilience theories apply to college students. She wrote that Benard’s (1993) qualities of resilient children included social competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy, and a sense of purpose and future, as areas that “correspond directly and indirectly with the self-efficacy, effective coping behaviors, and internal locus of control that Bean & Eaton (2001) highlight as important for college student persistence” (Yeh, 2010, p. 59). In a study on high achieving African American high school students who demonstrate resilience in college preparation, Griffin and Allen (2006) wrote that, “resilient students are able to translate difficult environments into a source of motivation by maintaining high expectations and aspirations, being goal-oriented, having good problem-solving skills, and being socially competent” (p. 480).

Educational resilience has been applied to Latin@ college students in a limited scope of studies. For example, a study by Ceja (2004) highlighted how “educational resiliency gave Chicana students the ability to view and interpret their everyday experiences as empowering realities and gave them a source of motivation to aspire for a college education” (p. 358). A study by Pérez (2009) touched upon this concept for undocumented Latino students; this researcher explained: “When faced with the challenges of living in poverty, working long hours at a job during school, low levels of parental education, feeling a high sense of rejection due to their legal status, resilient undocumented Latino youth draw on available personal and environmental resources” (p. 37). Although the studies on educational resilience focusing specifically on undocumented Latin@ students are limited, the broader literature on resilience theories, combined with literature on the experiences of marginalized students and Latin@ students overall, inform the research questions in this study. Also, as highlighted in the following chart, this framework is filtered through a CRT/LatCrit lens.



*Figure 3.3. Counter narrative based factors related to demonstrating resilience.*

### **How CRT/LatCrit and Resilience Theory Guide This Study**

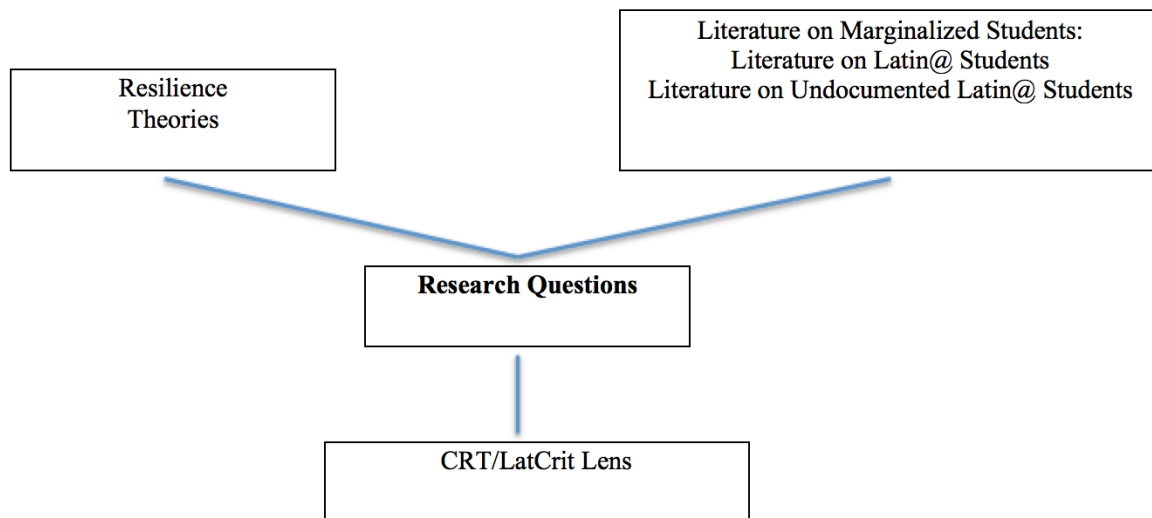
CRT/LatCrit and resilience theory directly informed this study by drawing my attention to specific issues for undocumented Latin@ students. This framework and lens were particularly significant for shaping my interview questions. I was open to all experiences and ideas that participants shared in interviews, but I was also particularly alert to certain concepts that emerged from my framework. A resilience framework filtered through a CRT/LatCrit lens was evident in my study as I explored how being an undocumented Latin@ student impacted the educational experiences of these students.

CRT/LatCrit informed my methodology, as students of color are often silenced regarding their personal stories and their life experiences are not viewed as legitimate knowledge. However, the use of qualitative interviews allowed for centering students' counter narratives with the foundational goals informed by CRT/LatCrit of commitment to social justice and informing culturally relevant educational practice. In addition to highlighting students' stories, there are certain issues I also probed in interviews because a CRT/LatCrit lens brought them to my attention. Specifically, CRT and LatCrit tenets drew my attention to how intersecting issues of race, class, gender, language, immigration status, accent, and phenotype have shaped students' educational experiences.

This CRT/LatCrit lens served as a filter for resilience theory, which informed this study and shaped the interview protocol. General resilience theory foundations helped me to examine how students utilize protective factors to actively deal with challenges related to economic, cultural, and social barriers in education. Specific educational resiliency theory allowed me to focus on certain personal and environmental aspects of student's experiences.

Personal characteristics I was attuned to included the following: Holding high educational aspirations, being goal-oriented, having good problem-solving skills, being socially competent, having effective coping behaviors, holding an internal locus of control, demonstrating a sense of purpose and future, and maintaining hope while viewing everyday experiences as opportunities and motivation for success. In addition to personal characteristics, environmental aspects in educational resilience theory focused my attention on students drawing upon available resources such as maintaining ties to home communities, having parental support, fostering mentor and peer relationships, and involvement in community organizations. Resilience theory addresses these personal and environmental factors, so I explored these areas

with the students I interviewed while also being open to learning about other ways in which they demonstrate resilience. Also, I remained mindful that these factors may not be relevant to the experiences of each student I am studying. Therefore, I was aware of factors suggested by resilience theory and prepared related probes, but was also open to hearing about other factors important to my interviewees. Overall, without constraining interviews, these ideas from CRT/LatCrit and resilience theory guided my study and informed my open-ended interview questions.



*Figure 3.4. Scholarship informing the research questions.*

### **Participant Selection**

This study used a purposeful snowball sampling technique. In this technique, participants hold specific characteristics related to this study's research questions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participants qualified for the sample if they met the following criteria: identifying within the undocumented Latin@ community and being currently in good academic standing (at least a 2.0 GPA) and are at least sophomore status or within two years from having graduated from a four-year predominately white institution (PWI). Originally, I indicated participant selection

parameters that were more restrictive, such as only interviewing students who were currently enrolled and within 24 credit hours of graduation. However, due to the difficult nature of identifying participants, I expanded the sample to include sophomores, juniors, and seniors in college, as well as students who were within two years of graduation from college. This participant selection approach allowed for a larger sample of individuals who still demonstrated persistence towards graduation or who were within a reasonable time frame of graduation to recall their experiences clearly. Also, I unexpectedly connected with several participants who had already graduated from undergraduate studies and were currently enrolled in graduate school. Expanding the participant parameters based around grade-level also allowed for increased diversity in participants. Undocumented Latin@ college students are a diverse group from many countries of origin. Although almost all participants identified Mexico as their country of origin, I did not restrict the sample to this particular area.

As with the pilot study, I found the first few participants who identify as undocumented Latin@ college students through gatekeepers listed on university websites as advisors to related student organizations. I also contacted gatekeepers through personal and professional networks when individuals were known to work with undocumented students individually or through related student groups. Gatekeepers are the “person or persons who must give their consent before you may enter a research setting, and with whom you must negotiate the conditions of access,” which was of particular importance given the often hidden nature of this population (Glesne, 2006, p. 57). The gatekeepers were current or former full-time university employees and had direct access to potential participants through their roles as campus educators. The use of a gatekeeper to contact potential participants was especially helpful when I asked to enter into a tight-knit community of students who must gauge levels of trust with outsiders like a

researcher. I also identified students by emailing them directly if their information was readily available online such as through a listing of officers in a related student or community organization.

Since the time of the pilot study, an increasing number of students seemed to be coming out of the shadows to declare their undocumented statuses and tell their stories as a political strategy. The initial student participants were eager to offer suggestions for other participants, leading to snowball sampling. It is important to note that students who are willing to be interviewed may differ in important ways from students who do not wish to participate in the study. This is of particular significance given the varying levels of being “out” with one’s undocumented status given the potential legal repercussions of disclosing one’s status.

Although I chose to focus on students who are out with their immigration status on a level consistent with openly discussing related experiences with me and within IRB parameters, it is also relevant to acknowledge the importance of understanding the experiences of undocumented Latin@ college students who choose to not disclose their statuses at all. Focusing on students who are willing and able to identify as undocumented is a first step in understanding the experiences of a diverse group of students who must individually navigate the realities of visibility. Throughout the study, I remained attentive to any information that arose about the impact of being out with one’s immigration status, as I hopefully set up a future line of inquiry allowing deeper exploration of this topic that is beyond the scope of the current study.

### **Site Selection**

Institutional climates and institutional types also impact student experiences. My primary interest was to examine student experiences on campuses at four-year institutions. This is complicated by the reality that many undocumented Latin@ college students begin their



academic careers at two-year community colleges and there are many challenges regarding stopping out and transfers (Pérez, 2010). However, as explained below, I defined demonstrating resilience as having found a way to enter a four-year institution either directly or from transferring out of a community college. Also, my sample of 16 students was drawn from predominantly white institutions (PWIs). Focusing on PWIs was a way to place parameters on site selections, as opposed to signifying attending this institutional type as a measure of success.

Most participants were restricted to attending institutions close to home, and the prominence of PWIs in most areas compared to Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) led to participants having the most access to PWIs. Similarly, the exclusion of community colleges was not meant to signify attendance at this institution type as an indicator of non-success. Rather, community colleges are already explored in the small body of literature on undocumented students, given the educational pipeline of this population. However, even less is known about the experiences of undocumented students at four-year institutions, which is important because participants had the goal of attending four-year institutions as a way to have a “traditional” college experience, and because of the perceived increased educational opportunity this would provide them compared to a community college education.

Political climates and statewide policies in various geographic regions in the U.S. impact the experiences of undocumented Latin@ college students, and I wanted to explore student experiences in a range of geographic areas. Within the small body of existing literature examining the experiences of undocumented Latin@ college students, much of the scholarship such as the studies highlighted in the literature review, focus on community colleges and on specific states such as California or Texas due to the more open policy climates in those states which also creates a more easily accessible population to sample (Beltran, 2011; Garcia, 2011;

Greene & Kropf, 2009; Meza, 2011; Pérez, 2009; Pérez Huber & Malagon, 2007). I was interested in allowing the snowball sampling technique to lead me to participants who attended college in various locations, which might have resulted in noticing patterns in specific geographic regions and extending knowledge to areas outside of previously researched states.

### **Data Collection**

The following section describes the data collection procedures for this study.

#### **Interviews**

This study used a semi-structured interview protocol to explore the research questions. These questions were refined based on feedback and additional literature reviews after an initial study I co-researched for a class project examining the experiences of undocumented Latin@ college students. Two rounds of phone or Skype audio interviews were conducted due to multiple far-away geographic locations, and because this venue offered a safer distance between interviewer and participants given the often-labeled “vulnerable” nature of this student population. Round one of interviews allowed me to develop rapport with participants while asking basic interview questions. Round two allowed me to probe deeper for emerging themes I found after the completion of round one interviews. Each interview was digitally recorded. Without offering any identifying information about participants, I used my professional network to offer any assistance with Spanish phrases used by participants that were unclear at this stage.

After contacting gatekeepers, who in turn notified potential participants of this opportunity, I emailed invitations to students to participate in the study. The email I sent included a description of the study, along with the purpose, length of interview, a description of privacy, and my contact information. I also included options for scheduling a phone interview at their convenience. Students who responded to the email expressing an interest in participating in

the study received a follow-up email with the scheduled phone interview. At this stage, participants were sent the required IRB consent form including the research questions ahead of time and the opportunity to identify a pseudonym. Also, in consideration of personal safety, potential participants were notified that I would conduct interviews over the phone so I never actually see participants, thus preserving aspects of confidentiality.

At the time of the phone interviews, I reviewed the emailed consent form with participants and asked for verbal consent. I also notified participants verbally that they could ask to have the digital audio recorder turned off at any point in the call and that they could end the interview at any time. Before the second round of interviews, participants were emailed the IRB consent form again, and this document was updated to include the option of receiving an online Amazon.com \$20 gift card as a thank you for participating in both rounds of interviews. The online gift cards were funded through a College of Education grant. After each individual gift card was purchased online, it was sent directly to my email, and I then forwarded the online gift card to each individual participant. Therefore, participant names or emails were not used on Amazon and all information was channeled directly through me via my email. None of the participants opted out of receiving the gift card.

Interviews were open-ended to allow for an in-depth exploration of students' experiences, and to allow for a dialogue to manifest. This dialogue allowed for exploring details through asking follow-up questions and adapting to the natural flow of participants' stories while also maintaining a focus on the main research questions.

### **Data Analysis**

In addition to my framework informing my methodology and interview probes, this foundation also informed the data analysis stage as I emphasized including direct student quotes

taken from transcriptions of their counter narratives, as well as being alert to themes emerging in codes that relate to tenets of CRT/LatCrit and elements of resilience theory.

### **Transcription**

Following Creswell's (2009) levels of data analysis, I began by organizing and preparing the data for analysis, which "involves transcribing interviews, optically scanning material" and then to "read through all the data...to obtain a *general sense* of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning" (p. 185). All interviews were transcribed and then double-checked for accuracy in the transcription process. As recommended by Creswell, throughout the process I also added my own descriptive and reflective notes to each interview.

### **Coding**

Creswell described coding as organizing materials into chunks or segments of text before assigning specific meanings to the information (2009). Coding was primarily completed by hand on paper printouts and was supplemented through use of Dedoose qualitative data analysis software. Through the use of Corbin and Strauss' (1990) grounded theory coding paradigm, I used the following three stages of coding: Open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Open coding will allow for identifying, naming, categorizing, and describing what I see in the initial analysis. This approach allowed for coding and looking for patterns while also being open to acknowledging the potential significance of data that do not fit with other main themes. Next, axial coding categories were related to subcategories and followed by selective coding, which is "the process by which all categories are unified around a central 'core' category and categories that need further explication are filled-in with descriptive detail" (1990, p. 424). I used "in vivo" coding to mirror participants' language as closely as possible in naming codes and categories (Creswell, 2009). I also chose to "use the coding process to generate a description of the setting

or people as well as categories or themes for analysis” which led into exploring emergent themes (Creswell, 2009, p. 189).

### **Emergent Themes**

My goal was to understand how undocumented Latin@ college students demonstrate resilience as they navigate higher education. Thus, through the lenses of CRT, LatCrit, and resilience theory, I explored commonalities and significant experiences that come from the in-depth counter narratives participants provided in the interview process. Interview probes and examining themes were based on cues from the literature review and framework, although I remained attentive to all information participants share.

Given my framework, there are certain main themes that were starting points for interview questions and probes, as well as for informing my coding process. CRT/LatCrit and resilience theory led me to believe it is important to address several specific areas of students’ experiences such as the impact of issues surrounding race, class, gender, language and immigration status, while also exploring personal and environmental influences on resilience such as remaining motivated and goal-oriented while utilizing community networks from family, peers, and mentors.

In addition to being informed by the literature review, I looked for overall themes that emerged in the areas of my conceptual framework. Although I am informed by this contextual information, I also remained attentive to coding for an “other” category that emerged in participants’ stories as significant information that falls outside of other themes. To aid in sharing this information with readers, I also employed Creswell’s fifth step of qualitative procedures, which is to “Advance how the description and themes will be *represented* in the

qualitative narrative. The most popular approach is to use a narrative passage to convey the findings of the analysis” (2009, p. 189).

Throughout the data analysis process, I also maintained a log of personal notes and questions, allowing me to engage in “having a conversation with the data” (Merriam, 1998, p. 181). The sixth step of the qualitative process was to make an interpretation or meaning of the data, which meant learning from student experiences as they are situated in the literature and also suggesting new questions to ask in future research (Creswell, 2009). This final step was important, as it is “used in advocacy and participatory approaches to qualitative research” and “can form interpretations that call for action agendas for reform and change” (p. 190). This focus facilitated my goal of informing practice for university educators serving undocumented Latin@ students.

### **Credibility**

An important area to examine in qualitative research is credibility. There are debates over appropriate use of the terms “validity” and “reliability” in qualitative research. Creswell (2009) explained that “Qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures, while qualitative reliability indicates that the researcher’s approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects” (p. 190). I followed reliability measures offered in Creswell’s (2009) research design text, including checking transcripts for errors, maintaining consistent coding, and utilizing cross-checking for coding through a technique such as peer checking (p. 190). I also emphasized validity strategies offered in Creswell’s (2009) text, such as using rich, thick description, clarifying the bias I brought to the study, presenting negative or discrepant information “that runs counter to the

themes,” and using a peer debriefer to ask questions about the study after reading the project (p. 192).

Other authors suggest that examining validity and reliability in qualitative research should be based on ideas about credibility, dependability, and transferability (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Merriam, 1998). For example, “internal validity” in a qualitative study can be conceptualized through use of strategies I employed such as “Peer/colleague examination – asking peers or colleagues to examine the data and to comment on the plausibility of the emerging findings” and in providing a “Statement of researcher’s experiences, assumptions, biases... This enables the reader to better understand how the data might have been interpreted in the manner in which they were” (Merriam, 1995, p. 55).

Instead of reliability, the goal of qualitative research is “dependability” or “consistency” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Merriam explained that, “The real question for qualitative researchers... is not whether the results of one study are the same as the result of a second or third study, but *whether the results of a study are consistent with the data collected*” (1995, p. 56). Strategies for facilitating greater consistency include peer examination and maintaining an “audit trail” which I used in my log of personal notes to “describe in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1995, p. 56).

Finally, external validity or generalizability is “the extent to which the findings of a study can be applied to other situations” (Merriam, 1995, p. 57). This is a difficult concept in qualitative research, but there are various strategies to address this concern. Specifically, I used thick description, which “involves providing enough information/description of the phenomenon under study so that readers will be able to determine how closely their situations match the

research situation, and hence, whether findings can be transferred” (1995, p. 58). Also, the open nature of my site selection and snowball sample within a broader Latin@ umbrella allowed for a multi-site design, which is where “The use of several sites, cases, situations, especially those representing some variation will allow the results to be applied to a greater range of other similar situations” (1995, p. 58).

I followed Merriam’s (2002) suggestion that findings “must be supported by the ‘raw’ data from which the findings were derived. These data are in the form of exact quotes from people interviewed” (p. 22). I also utilized “discussions with colleagues regarding the process of study, the congruency of emerging findings with the raw data, and tentative interpretations” through peer review or examination (Merriam, 2002, p. 31). I received feedback in discussions with faculty members during advisor and dissertation committee meetings. I also connected with colleagues and senior scholars to explore ethical considerations encountered, which is significant because “when research is... highly political, ethical issues become prominent” (Merriam, 2002, p. 30). The foundation of this study is political, as the nature of working with undocumented students relates to ethical concerns for this often hidden and vulnerable population.

At the advice of my dissertation committee, I connected with current scholars and colleagues who discussed their own work as white scholars using CRT and/or studying students of color. I was also intentional in attending presentations by CRT scholars at conferences. This allowed for networking with established scholars who could support my credibility while furthering my thinking on this topic. The opportunity to establish these one-on-one connections occurred at various conferences such as the ASHE 2012 Graduate Student Policy Seminar on immigrant students where many of the leading scholars in my area of interest were present as speakers. I also attended related sessions at local workshops, ASHE, and ACPA each year.



## **Reflexivity**

Another important aspect of qualitative research to examine is that of reflexivity, especially in light of this particular study's participants and scholarly debates over the appropriateness of white scholars using CRT (Bergerson, 2003). Glesne (2006) described the importance of attention to reflexivity, which is "inquiring into either [researchers'] own biases, subjectivity, and value-laden perspectives or into the appropriateness of their research, methodology and methods, including concerns regarding data collected, interpretations made, and representations produced" (p. 151). Despite much debate on how reflexivity factors into white scholars using CRT, many prominent education scholars conclude that it is possible for white researchers to appropriately incorporate CRT into their work. For example, Bergerson (2003), wrote that, "...white researchers must work to center race in their personal lives and work, engage in the strategic and sensitive use of CRT, and join in the effort to legitimize research that utilizes alternative methods such as CRT" (p. 51). In this spirit of this goal, I worked to use CRT and LatCrit effectively without co-opting or reinforcing racial hegemony through learning about the experiences of my student participants.

One main premise of CRT and LatCrit is to give voice to an often-silenced group, so attention to interpretations and representations produced is of particular importance for this study so as to not misrepresent students' narratives. Also, Glesne (2006) described Patton's work (2002) that suggested, "each person is situated in a sociocultural context of embodiment and positions ('culture, age, gender, class, social status, education, family, political praxis, language, values') that interact and provide 'screens' for differing perspectives" (p. 159). Therefore, I worked to remain aware of my own positions and how these relate to participants' various identities and experiences. In research, this positionality means fully acknowledging where I am

coming from as a researcher as points of subjectivity versus seeking false objectivity (Lincoln, 1995). In addition to attending workshops and conferences sessions related to reflexivity, I also spoke with a sociology professor from my cognate course on feminist theory, as this faculty member is a white woman who works directly with immigrant populations in her research. These strategies, along with my reflection journal and processing with colleagues, helped me remain attentive to issues of reflexivity.

In addition to holding many of these positions that differ from those of the participants, my study was explicitly filtered through CRT and LatCrit as I focused on issues faced by a specific marginalized racial and ethnic group. Therefore, I was aware of my own racial and ethnic identities which do not fall within the Latin@ community, especially given the white-dominated racist and oppressive systems that CRT and LatCrit seek to critically examine and combat. Whiteness remains the dominant identity controlling U.S. education, which relates to structural oppression for Latin@ students throughout their educational trajectory. Also, it is relevant to acknowledge the privileges that have shaped my experiences as a U.S.-born citizen who has retained permanent citizenship status throughout my life. Therefore, it is important that I acknowledge my positionality as a member of this privileged group based on my racial identity and immigration status.

In examining my privileged identities in relation to my Latin@ participants, I initially acknowledged that participants could have varying comfort levels with me as a researcher. In turn, the level of disclosure could be altered with me based on perceived similarities or differences, although these differences in identity might be difficult to identify via phone or Skype audio. However, once the interviews took place, it became evident that participants were enthusiastic about openly sharing their experiences. Only one participant did not feel

comfortable sharing specific details related to his institutions because of the nature of his work in the government requiring extreme caution with his status. Several participants also directly asked me if I was white, and most participants provided unsolicited comments on their views of white researchers engaging in this work. The participants who shared these opinions expressed a coalitions-based standpoint and felt that allies play an important role in raising awareness about this topic.

Overall, reflexivity was a particularly important and interesting piece to examine throughout the research process. Merriam (2002) explained the importance of examining the significance of these identity concerns because “critical self-reflection” is key regarding “assumptions, worldview, biases, theoretical orientation, and relationship to the study that may affect the investigation” (p. 31). I aimed to critically reflect on the area of reflexivity throughout the research process, as this is important for any study, and especially significant for a study emphasizing the impact of immigration status along with race and ethnicity. Centering student counter narratives in this study was an effort to highlight a value rooted in CRT that students of color are holders and creators of legitimate knowledge. Participants’ stories were ultimately filtered through me as the researcher, yet I hoped to use this academic venue to highlight and learn from students’ experiences without speaking for participants.

Dunbar, Rodriquez, and Parker (2002) explained that examining the identities of the researchers in relation to the participants is significant, as “too often, qualitative researchers have neglected discussions of the subjective lenses through which they view their research” (p. 283). Overall, reflexivity regarding my privileged white identity and debating my use of CRT as a white scholar is an area that could constitute an entire study on its own. Although there is not one clear answer, for the purpose of this study, I should acknowledge that I have grappled with

this issue in multiple courses during my graduate studies and throughout the dissertation process, and will continue to do so. In my aforementioned research log, I was also able to focus on critical subjectivity, meaning my ability as a researcher to acknowledge my psychological and emotional states during the research process (Lincoln, 1995). In addition to remaining committed to focusing on reflexivity given my own identities, I also emphasized attention to upholding ethical research standards for working with participants.

### **Consideration of Human Subjects**

In *Undocumented Research Participants: Ethics and Protection in a Time of Fear*, researchers explained that, “Undocumented participants have been described as vulnerable and in need of protection when researched. The authors contend that undocumented participants are capable, competent, yet vulnerable simultaneously. Characterizing these participants as wholly vulnerable is a form of Otherization” (Lahman, et al., 2011, p. 304). However, in keeping with a CRT, LatCrit, and resilience framework, it is important to acknowledge the sensitive nature of working with undocumented students while also realizing these students are strong individually and collectively. In describing research with undocumented students, Lahman et al. explained, “While we agree sensitivity to vulnerability is vital to ethical research, we believe it is important to remember that someone who is vulnerable in one context might be powerful in another” (p. 308). These authors also provided Eight Tenets of Culturally Responsive Relational Reflexive Ethics including the following:

- Use culturally responsive relational reflexive ethics
- Gain sociocultural consciousness
- Develop affirming attitude toward research participants from culturally diverse backgrounds
- Acquire the commitment and skills to act as agents of change through research
- Learn about participants and their communities
- Employ reflexivity throughout the research process
- Commit to see the good through research

- Integrate all tenets to cultivate culturally responsive relational reflexive ethical research practices. (p. 313)

Attempting to uphold these tenets while honoring the experiences of participants and simultaneously negotiating my own privileged identities is a challenging, but important, task as a researcher focusing on issues surrounding marginalization and social justice.

Using narratives as the avenue through which I explore this topic also had its challenges. A main criticism is that the use of narratives tends to essentialize all underrepresented people into one common experience. Based on the oppression experienced by marginalized groups, two additional concerns arise regarding the use of storytelling. There is fear of the “tendency to romanticize the experiences of marginalized groups” while at the same time exaggerating the “excesses and ideological trends for which the only possible name is chauvinism” (Dunbar, 2008, p. 95). Additionally, results are not wholly generalizable, as narratives are specific to the participants. Although I seek to recognize common themes amongst their experiences in an effort to inform educational practice, these findings are not generalizable to all undocumented Latin@ students.

Given the legally unprotected nature of the participants, I took every measure available to me within IRB protocol to focus on the protection of student participants. These processes included clear, informed consent and working with participants to help them feel safe throughout the process through focusing heavily on additional practical concerns such as participants choosing pseudonyms, utilizing phone or Skype audio interviews with no video so participants had an additional level of separation from me as the interviewer, keeping data in a protected and locked space, and not providing identifying details about participants in my writing.

## CHAPTER 4: PARTICIPANT PROFILES

In this chapter, I introduce each participant as a way to provide context for individuals and to set the stage for the thematic analysis in the next chapter. In providing participant background information, institutions of higher education were assigned pseudonyms, and the institutional descriptors below are based on IPEDS (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System) classifications from the National Center for Education Statistics ([nces.ed.gov/ipeds/](http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/)). Also, all participants identified Spanish as their first language, unless otherwise noted. All 16 participants completed two rounds of interviews except for Michael, who completed only the first round interview.

*Table 4.1. Participant profile summaries.*

<b>Participant Name</b>	<b>Age of Arrival in U.S. (years)</b>	<b>Year in School</b>	<b>Major</b>	<b>Academic/Career Goal</b>	<b>Degree of “out” with status</b>
<b>Kate</b>	6	Senior	Family and Childhood Science	Master’s degree: Childhood Development	Selectively out
<b>Eddie</b>	5	Graduate School	Political Science	Immigration Lawyer	Permanent Residency Status
<b>Maria</b>	9	Senior	Hospitality Management	Community Law or Higher Education Counseling	Fully out
<b>Eber</b>	7	Graduate School	Biology	Physician	Selectively out
<b>Alexa</b>	5	Junior	Human Development and Spanish	Health Services	Selectively out
<b>Zoe</b>	2	Senior	Human Resource Management	Business	Selectively out
<b>Ignacio</b>	10	Junior	Chemistry and Biology	Doctor	Fully out
<b>Michael</b>	2	Junior	Community Health	Community Psychology	Selectively out

Table 4.1. (cont'd)

<b>Ben</b>	5	Senior	Biology/Pre-Med	Physician's Assistant	Selectively out
<b>Aracely</b>	1	Graduate School	Community Development	Social work and community development: Non-profit	Selectively out
<b>Miri</b>	4	Senior	Sociology	Social work; Sociology Professor	Selectively out
<b>Karla</b>	1	Senior	Sociology	Peace Corps or Red Cross	Selectively out
<b>Alicia</b>	1	Senior	History	Teacher	Fully out
<b>Samuel</b>	3	Employed after Post-Graduate Fellowship	Political Science and Public Policy	Government Relations	Not out
<b>Ana</b>	7	College graduate; Currently in deportation in Mexico	Spanish	Court Interpreter	Selective out
<b>Mia</b>	4	Senior	English	Law Enforcement and Newspaper Writer	Fully out

### Kate

Kate came to the U.S. from Mexico when she was six years old because her parents wanted a better life and education for her. She did not find out she was undocumented until middle school, but even then she did not think about her situation often. It was not until high school that she realized what her status meant once she saw her peers applying for jobs, securing driver's licenses, and applying for college. Although she was unsure if she could attend college because of her status, Kate still explored potential avenues to college, and used her personal resources to apply to local universities.

Kate described the college application process as awkward because she did not know what to do, but her boyfriend's mom helped her with applications. Kate lives in a state where most tuition is covered for students who graduated from a local high school and maintained a high GPA. She qualified for this program and pays the remaining tuition out of pocket. She did not have a work permit but found a job at a restaurant as a server. Aside from working at the restaurant for five years, she is involved in her university color guard. She is unable to join other organizations due to scheduling constraints.

During college, Kate felt like she blended in pretty well. She connected with a mentor at her university who has continued to provide her with resources. At her freshman orientation, Kate's boyfriend's mom knew someone at the university who spoke Spanish. Kate's mom only spoke Spanish so they connected and this educator guided Kate through academic advising. This particular educator was in the College of Engineering, but often helped undocumented students in all departments.

Aside from this mentor, Kate used to be afraid of telling people about her status because people might think less of her. However, she realized she would need to disclose her status to receive help in college, and eventually sharing this information became easier each time because of the positive reactions she received. Kate used to feel negatively about her situation, but since Deferred Action, she has more hope for her future, especially maintaining motivation to work towards her career goals. Kate also receives emotional support from her mom, who emphasizes to Kate and her sister that education is the most important value in life. Kate's boyfriend and his family also continue to be supportive.

Kate currently lives at home with her family and is a senior at Snyder State University. Snyder State is a suburban mid-size institution in the Southwest. Kate's original major was



Elementary Education with the goal of becoming an elementary school teacher. As a result of limitations due to her status, her new major is Family and Childhood Science with the goal of earning a masters degree in Childhood Development. She stays focused on her career goals despite limitations associated with her status, and explained, “You just can’t sit there and be upset because you can’t do anything that day but you’re working towards something that’s going to be with you basically the rest of your life.” Katie was recently granted Deferred Action. Prior to securing DACA, Katie worked under the table as a waitress, and she now works on an intervention team as a developmental specialist working with kids who have developmental delays.

### **Eddie**

Eddie arrived in the U.S. from Mexico when he was five years old. Eddie described coming to the U.S. from Mexico as a difficult process and that it took two years to acclimate. He did not speak any English but enrolled in kindergarten where he eventually picked up the language. He said school got better as time went on, but he never considered college. The only thing that gave him meaning in high school was running track and cross-country. He cared primarily about meeting eligibility to run, which he was able to do based on his GPA. His path to college became available when a local community college cross-country coach approached Eddie while he was running with his brother. The coach asked them to join the team, and even though Eddie and his brother had never considered college, two days later the brothers were in their first college class and officially a part of the cross country team.

Eddie is currently in graduate school at an undisclosed institution and lives off-campus on his own. For his undergraduate degree in Political Science, he transferred from a community college to attend Landon University, a large institution in a West Coast city. He had to take

some time away from school due to finances, but his career goal has always been to serve as an immigration lawyer. He is very out with his status except for rare situations.

Eddie does not recall exactly when he realized he was undocumented, but he remembers there were certain things throughout grade school he was unable to do because of his status. At the time, he did not realize these limitations were due to being undocumented. During his sophomore year of high school, he and his brother qualified for the national track championships out of state, but then he realized he might not be able to take the required flight because of tightened security after 9/11. His coach knew his situation and encouraged him to still travel to nationals, but despite trusting his coach, he knew the harsh realities of what could happen if he tried to travel. This was one of the first times he really thought about his undocumented status and what that meant for his life. Despite such limitations, Eddie's life changed when he received a workers authorization card:

If you can actually trace all of my achievements you know they all begin when I received my workers authorization card, which is in 2007. And from there everything just started to get better and better 'cuz I was able to you know fend for myself rather than just you know relying on friends and external forces I guess you can say.

Eddie considers himself to be in a particularly difficult situation because he does not have parents supporting him. His father was deported and brutally murdered in Mexico, so now he is the main supporter for his mother and finances his own education. During the first interview, he was unsure how he was going to fund his last semester of college, but he applied to law school even though he knew if he got admitted, he would have to defer for a year or possibly lose his spot for admission due to finances.

Eddie is currently enrolled in law school in the South. He was admitted as an international student and was ineligible for any scholarships. Once he received his Green Card, he was eligible for federal loans. These loans, combined with his personal work savings, are

how he has been able to remain enrolled and to meet basic living expenses. He says it is extremely difficult being away from home since he was used to being the primary caretaker for his mother and because his younger brothers always looked to him for guidance. The family is able to talk every several days and he knows that getting a law degree will ultimately be better for the family even if it comes at the cost of living so far away for now.

Eddie did not apply for Deferred Action, but recently received permanent residency status through the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act because of his father's situation. Despite now having permanent residency status, Eddie still identifies as undocumented as a political identity beyond a status. In addition to focusing on school, Eddie still spends time running for fitness purposes.

### **Maria**

Maria was born in Mexico and came to the U.S. at the age of nine. Her dad came to the U.S. before the rest of the family and thought he was going to stay for two years to work and then return home. However, he realized there were many more opportunities for them in the U.S., especially in education. Maria came to the U.S. with her parents, older brother, and younger sister, and they have remained in the same city ever since their arrival from Mexico. Her elementary school did not have any bilingual classes so she struggled at school, especially because she lived in an area that did not have many Latino people. However, this forced her to learn and adapt quickly. She recalls difficulties in middle school because she understood English by then, but had trouble communicating with people in English. She did well in school, and excelled in math because it was not connected to English. She eventually did well in school and her parents emphasized that education is extremely important. Her father never had the opportunity for an education in Mexico, so he stressed educational success for his children.

Although she did not know what college was, she knew she had to continue her education and do succeed in school.

Because of her academic success in middle school, Maria earned a spot in a local magnet high school. In this environment, teachers pushed students to excel academically, do well on SATs, and remain focused on getting to college. She had support in taking college prerequisites and on college applications, which helped her gain admissions to her local university. It took her six years to graduate from college and she struggled financially. Because of her uncertain future, she sometimes questioned why she was going through these struggles, but she remained focused on earning an internship in her field.

Maria did not realize she was undocumented until high school when she started to apply for scholarships and realized she had certain barriers to some opportunities. She also learned she could not go to the DMV and get an ID, and she realized that ultimately, her immigration status would have an impact on her educational goals. However, her older brother is also undocumented and he was able to attend the local university, which gave her hope that she could also attend college even though she did not know any other undocumented students in her situation.

During the college preparation and application process, she was mostly surrounded by white and Asian students in her Advanced Placement classes at the magnet school, even though the rest of the school as 75% Latino. Maria felt like she could not relate to anyone and so she did not talk to anyone about her status. Her AP class peers were applying for college and scholarships, so she pretended to be going through the same process, especially because it was expected that all AP students would attend college. She had some non-AP classes too, but her time with these students was limited. Given her experiences in both regular and AP classes, she

drew comparisons between the experiences. In non-AP classes, teachers did not talk about college and “they just had really low expectations of their students... the teachers didn’t have hope for those students” despite them having high potential. Maria explained how teacher attitudes influenced her thinking about education:

And you know, it’s sad because a lot of those students were people, students of color...so it was hard for me because, you know, I wanted to apply for scholarships and colleges. I wanted to go out of state but, you know, I never tried or applied because in the back of my head, I thought I couldn’t. But now I know that I could have. But no one told me that I could... She credits her older brother’s example as the reason she was able to attend the local university.

Maria was able to attend a local university where she has made the most of her situation and college experiences.

A college experience that stands out to Maria as particularly significant was attending a state-based women’s leadership conference two summers ago. The weeklong conference focused on empowering women from various career backgrounds, and there was an emphasis on barriers of being a woman of color. Because of this positive environment, she felt comfortable disclosing her status, which led to her applying to an internship where the leaders knew about her situation. She ultimately got the internship at a large gaming company and they were able to work with her situation, which helped her realize that being vocal about her status was an important factor in this opportunity. Previously she did not want to apply for opportunities and have to explain her situation.

Maria is currently a senior at Mason University studying hospitality management with a women’s studies minor. Mason U. is a mid-sized city institution in the Southwest. Maria previously wanted to work in hospitality, but changed her career goal to working in community law or higher education counseling. She is involved on campus with MECHA and an immigration activist campus organization. She lives with her family and is somewhat out with

her status, as she has disclosed this to one trusted professor, students in her activist organization, and a few select people with whom she feels safe.

Prior to being granted DACA, Maria worked in a clothing retail store. While waiting for DACA, Maria was involved in the Vagina Monologues where she met several key people. She connected with a woman who turned into a mentor and ultimately helped her gain an internship at a law firm. She wanted to attend graduate school and then law school, so this first-hand experience was important to her even though it was unpaid. She started working at the front desk and then was promoted to an assistant case manager. She continued to be promoted in various roles and now has a close mentor relationship with an attorney there. He encourages her to attend law school, which is her next goal.

### **Eber**

Eber was born in a violent city in Mexico where his parents had very limited opportunities. During a particularly violent time in his childhood, his neighbor, who was around his age, was kidnapped, raped, and murdered. This event led his parents to obtain a tourist visa to the U.S., which is how they crossed the border when Eber was seven years old. The family overstayed their visit and moved to the Southwest permanently. Eber realized he was not like other kids because he could not go on trips and could not get in any trouble because there would be serious repercussions for his family.

At a young age, Eber understood “that I shouldn’t be here.” He remembers using the tourist visa and seeing his parents get very nervous crossing the border, so he knew something was wrong. He asked his dad about this, and his dad explained the situation to him and said, “basically we weren’t free anymore.” He was used to not being able to do certain things or go places due to his status and limited financial means, but it was not until high school that he

realized the limitations associated with being undocumented, which separated him from his peers. He knew he did not want to go back to where they used to live, but he did not feel comfortable here. He felt like he was in limbo and did not belong anywhere since he was not free here but did not want to face the violence back in Mexico.

Nobody spoke to Eber about college until his senior year of high school when he took advanced placement classes. He experienced a shift in his thinking when he took the ACT and earned full tuition at a local university. He did not share this with anyone at the time, but this was a huge accomplishment for him that:

made me realize that despite my limitations, I could do things. And that was huge. I mean, I remember I almost felt like a completely different person. So I mean even when I got to college I realized that there were things I could do that I had never even thought about doing. Like going, like getting good grades or being top of a class. Or getting money for my achievements like scholarships. So that was almost revolutionary in my mind. But at the same time, many of the limits that have been imposed on me were still there. And that's kind of the thing. I was given that taste of success but at the same time, it only made my limitations more clear.

Eber is currently in graduate school working on a master's degree in Biology. His undergraduate degrees were in Biology, Microbiology, and Foreign Language at Snyder State University, a suburban mid-size institution in the Southwest. During his undergraduate degree, Eber was not involved in any organizations, but during his masters work, he became involved in re-chartering his campus group focused on undocumented student issues. He was out with his status to one friend during his undergraduate studies, and during his masters Eber has also come out to the registrar's office and some professors.

Eber was out to one person in undergrad who was his peer and rival in most classes, and she was upset when he told her about his situation. Aside from coming out to his friend, Eber usually does not emphasize his situation:

I've never spoken to this about other people in my situation, but I really yea I mean it's hard for me to come up with another way to deal with basically growing up and feeling like you're trapped. Like you're living in, relative to the places that a lot of us have been in. This feels like a golden cage. Even if, even me, we were under the limits, we were under the poverty limit for most of my childhood here in the US. Still, everything that we have was levels above anything that we had in Mexico. So, I mean in a way it was luxury. But still you know, that feeling that you're not free...I've never talked to anyone, but how could you deal with those feelings?

Eber described the best moment of his life as when he realized he wanted to be a physician:

Even if it means putting in all this effort and sacrifice, all the things that I have, and just basically giving up part of my life for it, even if nothing comes out of it. I'm going to do it. Because that's what I want to do. That's my dream and one day when I get that, it is like a huge weight got lifted from my shoulders...it was like it just felt like at least the first time in my life I had something that my peers didn't have. Just something incredibly positive has come out of my situation because up to the point it had just been handicaps and obstacles and things to get in my way but it's like that day, I finally realized something positive came out of this and it's probably the most positive and most uplifting thing that I have ever felt in my life. In a way if I wasn't in this situation I would have never gone through this and I would never be at this point.

During his senior year of college, Eber excelled in a particular course and his professor offered to mentor him in additional lab experience. However, the end of his senior year was extremely difficult because his academic experiences had come to an end:

...the darkest period in my life I guess. Or, my academic life. Because that's when I realized that, as much as I had worked for years, I had done my best to have the best application so I could apply to medical school...It was my way of coping. It's like I hadn't realized that you know I can't. I mean, for starters I can't, there's not a medical school, the only medical school in my state is in [large city]. And I can't get there. And even if I could, you have to be a permanent resident to go. And I mean, I knew that from the beginning of course. But it's like, I didn't really think about it. Or, I never internalized it until the very end. Because I mean, otherwise maybe I would have just quit if there was really no point in doing all of that work when I knew it couldn't happen. Um so it just hit me really hard when I graduated...

He graduated with a 3.9 GPA with honors in three majors and two minors, and did really well on his medical school entrance exam. He had been shadowing a physician and spending time in the operating room for additional experience, "So everything was set, but you know, it was even more, it crushed me even more. That even though my application was as good as it



could get to get an interview, I just couldn't even send it." Currently, Eber does not have a job, but was granted DACA. He lives at home with his parents.

### **Alexa**

Alexa came to the U.S. when she was five years old with her mother and little sister, and still lives in the same place where they originally arrived. Alexa explained that she subconsciously always knew she was undocumented because she was aware her parents could not do certain things that others could. In a certain U.S. location, her family would sometimes encounter an unannounced border patrol checkpoint, and she observed her parents asking others if the checkpoint was set up at the particular time they were traveling in that area. However, she said her status did not really hit her until she was applying for college and realized she could not apply for financial aid. Thankfully, her high school teacher was prepared to work with a small group of students who did not have social security numbers, so she received guidance on applying for a special state-based program to receive in-state tuition. Aside from financial limitations, she explained her limitations compared to others due to not having a social security number:

But I think that's when I did finally realize it and it 'kinda slapped me in the face, you know. You can't do what others can without your social security. It was more of the opportunities that you have with your social.

In high school, she was in a special program that helps students prepare for college by teaching skills such as effective note taking and organizational skills. The program also helps students apply for college, fill out FAFSA and scholarship forms, and provides additional college resources and ACT preparation throughout high school. This program made her path to college easier even though she never really thought she would be able to attend college despite wanting to do so. Thanks to the help of her high school program, Alexa was able to attend a local state

university instead of a community college. She explained not choosing to attend a community college because of the poor reputation they had in her area, and because she had contacts at her local college:

...most of the community colleges around where I live have somewhat of a bad reputation and a lot of students go there and slack off and I just thought that being in that environment wasn't going to be very helpful to me and beneficial to wanting to achieve more. She chose her college because she had a few friends and cousins attend there, and it was close to home and somewhat within her budget.

Due to her circumstances, Alexa has previously had to stop out of college, but she is currently enrolled as a junior at Phillips State University, a large suburban institution on the West Coast. She is a Human Development and Spanish major, with the career goal of working in health services and one day earning a masters degree. She is somewhat out with her status and was granted Deferred Action. She currently works with a tutoring company, and prior to DACA, she worked as a private tutor. She lives with her family and is involved with the campus student group that works with undocumented student issues.

### **Zoe**

Zoe was born in Mexico and came to the U.S. when she was two years old. She identified both Spanish and English as her first languages. Her father experienced depression after his father and brother passed way within a week of each other, so the family decided to come to the U.S. for six months to a year to get away from a space that reminded Zoe's father of his dad. The family ended up extending their stay and, over time, settled in a Midwest city because they had family living there. Within that area, Zoe's family moved a few times to avoid rough neighborhoods. She grew up in a geographic region where she saw poverty and how hard her parents worked, so she knew she wanted more for herself.

Zoe looked to school as an avenue to find a good job and success in life despite being stuck in a difficult immigration situation. She explained that her family has been trying to pursue citizenship through legal avenues, but it has taken an extremely long time to go through the process while on a long waiting list since 2001. Zoe has always enjoyed school and found it easy, and because of her academic performance, her parents always told her she would go to college. She did not know what that meant, but growing up she consistently heard this message about attending college. Zoe witnessed her parents struggling financially, but knew they came to the U.S. to give her better opportunities. She realized she had to work hard to justify this sacrifice since her parents were still poor in the U.S., on top of being undocumented. Her father passed away last October, and she attributes this to how hard he had to work, which she does not want for herself so she studies hard.

Zoe always knew she was undocumented because her parents mentioned it often. Her father emphasized the importance of his success despite the fact that he was undocumented. However, Zoe did not think about discrimination associated with being undocumented until she faced it in middle school when she needed a social security number for a Girl Scouts event. She had to come out in certain situations, and that is when she realized how difficult it was going to be for her.

It was not until her first year of college that she really realized the magnitude of her undocumented status and the limitations she would face. Prior to going to college, she joined a community organization focused on helping undocumented students. She had never heard of a group like this before, but she actively participated and this helped her professionally. Zoe learned to network and embrace her undocumented status. This experience also helped her resolve to not let her status stop her from the goal of attending college. Even though she was

denied scholarships, she kept trying various avenues. She explained that she felt like she could push herself more than attending a community college, so she worked to overcome denied opportunities as a way to get out of a bad neighborhood and attend college:

And so then I figured that I didn't want to go to a two-year community college just because I felt like I was better than that. Not to say that community college is bad or anything but I felt like I could push myself more than that. So I didn't want to stay here. I didn't want to stay in the ghetto. I didn't want to stay. That wasn't for me.

Eventually Zoe found an in-state university that had many multicultural programs and she felt they cared for minority students. She applied for a multicultural academic summer bridge program there, which provided two free courses, free activities, a stipend, and on-campus housing for the summer.

During this experience, she met a mentor who is active with the DREAM Act and provided Zoe with several thousand dollars to pay for the remainder of her first year in college. As a current senior, Zoe reflected on how fortunate she feels to receive so much support at her university, Hubbard State University, a small Midwest university located in a city environment. Zoe lives off campus, but not with her family. She is majoring in human resource management with a minor in Spanish, and recently dropped an additional American Ethnic Studies major. Zoe is somewhat out with her status once she knows people and finds a safe space to disclose her status.

Prior to receiving DACA, Zoe worked as a babysitter, at a retail store, and in a restaurant. After being granted DACA, she began working at a sportswear manufacturing company and in the campus Office of Diversity. She explained that post-DACA she has increased opportunities to achieve her dreams:

For me, my dreams have just been oh my God! Lifted up in the air, like I see stars and everything. But for some people, I don't feel like it, like for my cousin, I don't think it's really changed much now that he has his visa. But for me, it's like oh my God, all these

doors are opening up for me. I see myself with a fabulous job, somewhere when I graduate. So I think that it's just beautiful. I have beautiful thoughts now.

Her goal was for her father to see her graduate and succeed, given all of his sacrifices. However, since he passed away, Zoe feels increased responsibility for her mother. Her father left behind a business, but her brother is not helping enough with that work. Zoe feels pressured to help more with the business while juggling school and spending time at home with her mother. She ultimately feels confused over what to do because she does not like school right now and wants to leave school to help her mom, but she thinks it would be unfair to the many people who have sacrificed to help her remain in school until she graduates.

Zoe's goal is to work for a specific worldwide company that she became familiar with during a high school program. She is drawn to this company because of their diversity commitment, but she knows this dream may not become a reality. If she is unable to fulfill these goals, Zoe said she would move home with her mom and work on business pursuits with her. She explained the expectation to help her mother but feeling stressed about being away at school instead:

You're supposed to help your parents, you're supposed to take care of them and not being able to take care of her more now than ever, after my dad passed away, it's a lot harder because she kinda has to learn to be self-sufficient and she's not used to that. And so I kinda feel obligated to be there for her. It sucks that I'm over here. Like my stress is like I stress out because she's stressed out over there...

Zoe explained her conflicted feelings over receiving DACA because she has a small amount of temporary opportunity, but "I feel like I'm still being cheated. I feel like I'm getting something but I'm not even sure if I'm gonna have it permanently." She is aware of the reality that she could earn her dream job at a company, but in two years her status may change and the company would likely not sponsor her, leading to her getting fired. Also, her backup plan of helping her

mom in business would dissolve because her social security would no longer be valid if immigration reform is not changed in the next few years:

So essentially, like I'm back at square zero and it's like, you give something to me and then you kinda like take it away, like it's that uncertainty that you feel, you know. It's like you're glad that you have it but it's like what now? What am I supposed to do with this now because I still can't get there. Like I'm still trapped. You know, I'm not like fully free. I'm not fully able to take advantage of all the opportunities because you only give me a little. You didn't give me the whole package. And so like I think that's been a really big thing for me, to struggle with, too, because I don't have the same pressures that American citizens do.

Beyond these stresses over her uncertain future, she is also worried about her current situation with succeeding in school and being able to finance her education. Zoe deals with this stress by trying to create her own opportunities and to take steps now that will help her be successful in the future.

### **Ignacio**

Ignacio's father came to the U.S. out of financial necessity and to create a better future for his family. Ignacio stayed in Mexico for a year with his mother while his father traveled in the U.S. and tried to raise money to bring them across the border. One year later, when he was ten years old, Ignacio and his mother were able to come to the U.S. and two days later, he was enrolled in the local elementary school. He recalls not understanding the full reality of the situation at the time. Half way through the school year, Ignacio moved with his family but he was picking up English very well. He was moved out of ESL classes and now recalls this was significant because he witnessed that peers were harmed by remaining in ESL for several years.

As a high school freshman, a community college recruiter visited his English class. The speaker emphasized high school as the beginning of a journey leading to college and a better future, and this sparked Ignacio's interest in higher education. He loved school and now realized there was more academic opportunity beyond high school. He recalls coming home from school

that day excited to show his parents the pamphlets about college, but then his parents explained to him that he was undocumented and could not apply for college:

That's when my parents sat me down and told me, listen, things aren't the way that you think they are. It's time we have a talk. We're here in this country illegally. You don't have a social security number. You can't drive, you can't apply to college. At the time I believed that was the law, that I couldn't go to any community college. That was just as far as I thought I would go. So I was extremely discouraged that year.

His parents told him what they thought to be true about his education ending at high school, so he recalls crying in his room and becoming withdrawn in school and with peers:

Like literally crying in my room. Because it had just hit me. From there on, high school was relatively quiet. I became afraid and I didn't speak out. Like for example, when people started driving and passing driving tests and all that, I was quiet, I never said I was in a class or wasn't in a class.

Aside from math, his grades declined that year because he felt hopeless. However, when he saw his report card he felt hurt and devastated. At that point, Ignacio decided that no matter what, he would try as hard as he could to learn as much as possible while he was still in school.

His junior year of high school, Ignacio decided he wanted to attend college so badly that he was determined to make his dream a reality. He visited his guidance counselor for support, but had a negative experience that he laughed off at the time, but now realizes was based on stereotypes. The counselor was abrupt and, after seeing his last name, asked if he wanted to know if he would have enough credits to graduate on time. When he explained he wanted to know how to get to college, she looked at his grades and was shocked at his academic performance. The counselor did not know how to help undocumented students, so she did nothing to assist Ignacio, who said, "I realize that even as a kid I realized that there wasn't going to come any help from her." So, Ignacio spoke to his chemistry teacher who said he was a bright kid who should explore different college avenues such as private institutions.

Ignacio applied at a local private university, but their policies were not supportive of undocumented students. Next, his chemistry teacher told him about another institution that would have been a great fit and provided full tuition, so Ignacio went for campus interviews. He recalled that the institution was impressed by him and would have given him a full ride if the policies at the time had allowed for his admissions and scholarship. Ignacio was extremely sad after he realized his status disqualified him from the full-ride. Although he stopped talking about college, he still took the SAT. He had a new guidance counselor at that point, and he went to her about his situation because he needed an ID to take the SAT. The counselor made a lot of phone calls and was really invested in finding a solution for Ignacio who saw that the counselor was caring and dedicated. The counselor walked to the SAT exam with Ignacio, and she “pretty much told them, he is who he is, you'd better let him in. I'm not leaving until you let him in.” Unfortunately, this caring counselor left her position and Ignacio was left with a new counselor whose politics led to a poor relationship in which he received no help. Ignacio was deeply saddened at his high school graduation because he thought his educational opportunities had come to an end, despite how he had persevered more than his Hispanic peers in high school:

I graduated from high school with honors and I was the only Hispanic male that graduated from my high school. I was the only Hispanic graduate with honors. It was sad to see that the other four Hispanic girls that graduated in my class literally all were pregnant and none of em wanted to go to school or just continue anything. Um so I just, I was extremely sad. Graduation was probably one of the saddest days of my life. Because I knew that's it. That's the end of the road. No more school, no more learning, no more classrooms, no more nothing.

Two days after graduation, Ignacio's mom had him apply for local jobs. He took a position at Burger King where he worked for four years. He enjoyed his first months on the job because the learning curve reminded him of being in school, but eventually he grew depressed when he was no longer learning new skills. He reflected that he was also arrogant at the time despite being in



a humble situation. Ignacio explained that graduating with honors and being the only Hispanic male to pass the AP test in his school contributed to this, so he struggled to see why he was forced to work at Burger King since he had so much potential. Eventually the money was not enough to support his household so he took another job in construction.

He described the construction job as grueling labor that was humbling because he made real connections with the kind, hardworking people with whom he worked. During a construction job near a university, he saw students walking across campus with their backpacks and decided he was ready to go back to school. He walked in to the admissions office and, despite being taken aback by his unusual approach, the office connected him with a staff member who was an important gatekeeper. Without filling out forms or interviewing, he walked into this staff member's office and recalled that she tried to be nice despite delivering the news about having to pay out of state tuition. Ignacio enrolled that semester and took limited credits hours, and later had to take a semester off to gather his finances. Despite having to stop out of college a few times, he is currently a junior at Owen University. Owen U. is a mid-size university in a southern town. Ignacio is a chemistry and biology major, with the goal of becoming a doctor.

Ignacio loves college and earned a high GPA his first semester, but he had to take time off again to work and earn enough tuition money. He maintained a relationship with the admissions gatekeeper, who was impressed by his determination. She became informed about how to help Ignacio and advised him to maximize his money by enrolling for a full semester. With this plan, Ignacio had to get another job, which meant he had extremely long days that demanded a tight schedule commuting on the bus between classes, home, and work each day.

Due to the strain of this schedule, he tried moving closer to campus during the week, but this has caused tension in his family because of traditional expectations in the Hispanic culture to remain close as a family:

My parents are very conservative. In the Hispanic culture people tend to stick together as family, so this past semester, me moving away to [city] just during the week has become very challenging for them. Very challenging for me. There's a lot of tension in relationships. They feel like I'm abandoning them in a way. But at the same time they're trying to understand that I'm not. Then comes the religious aspect of my parents being ministers and me being a scientist. You have a lot of hindrances. In respect to opinions and in respect to how dedicated should I be to this degree? How dedicated should I be to my religion? So there's several little things that just build up a lot of stress and just become one great challenge.

Due to his parents' faith, Ignacio was raised to also have faith in God, which is now an important coping mechanism for him. He balances his faith with his goal of being a doctor, which he has held since 6<sup>th</sup> grade when he broke his arm and witnessed a doctor healing it completely. He said, "That fascinated me. I was like, I want to be able to fix people. When they're in despair and they think everything is lost I want to be that guy that fixes things." As time went on, Ignacio realized how difficult it would be to achieve this dream because of his undocumented status. He has faced challenges with having to consistently take semesters off from school due to finances. Also, he explained at his small institution there are not enough professors to teach certain classes, so his prerequisites schedule is complicated when the institution puts off a particular course for a full year. Ignacio ultimately wants to move out and be on his own but he still faces the cultural expectation to stay and help his family:

...in our culture it's very family oriented. And I don't think it would be correct for me to just leave. And be like well my situation is better so bye. So I just I stay with them and try to help the out with the usual things, clerical things, translating, going to the bank. Just the things they can't do on their own within the society.

He also said that his culture emphasizes men taking primary responsibility for the family, although he has seen female roles evolving. He explained that his progress in college has opened

the door for his parents to discuss higher education with his younger sisters. He is very out with his status, especially to anyone in a “helping role” that can assist him in his educational journey. He currently lives with his family and, after receiving DACA, began working at a country club.

### **Michael**

Michael came to the U.S. from Mexico when he was two years old and identified his first languages as both Spanish and English. He lives in a state that currently provides a tuition scholarship at a flagship university, but he had to start at a community college branch and pay tuition out of pocket. To earn that money, he would “work in the migrant culture like picking up onions, you know, chili and those types of crops.” He started working at an onion factory when he was 16 years old, and for five summers he worked 70 hours a week to save money for school.

When Michael realized the challenges associated with his status during high school, he thought he wanted to return to Mexico to attend college for financial reasons. However, his parents encouraged him to remain in the U.S. Once Michael began attending a four-year university, he realized he could show other undocumented students, “you have to fight for what you need, for whatever you want. And no matter what brings you down, you have to go for your dreams. Whatever your dream is, you go and you go, and you go.” In the face of challenges, Michael relies on his relationship with God. He explained that relying on God keeps him calm, although it was only a year and a half ago that he “came to God and it was a very nice experience.” After his family had difficult times, he reconnected with God because of his parents, and he attributes this connection to his belief that everything will work itself out in the future:

...once I encountered that love, it was like since that moment I came to God it was like ok I know he’s going to give me my papers. I know he’s going to give me that opportunity to keep on going. So since that time it was like, since I encountered that love

of God, he actually made me, he transformed me, he made me see things from a different perspective.

In addition to religion, he is also motivated by being united with his family. Michael explained that he is the oldest child and he is a role model for his siblings who are U.S. citizens:

Also since I'm the oldest of, well it's me my sister, my little brother. My sister, she's about to enter college. She's graduating high school this May, she's going to start college. I'm like the role model, even though I don't have papers. Both my sister and brother were born here, they're U.S. citizens except for me. Um they see me as a role model you know And I try to keep on going like hey if I did it, I don't have like papers or whatever, you know so you guys can do it. If I was able to get to college, if I was able to you know like get a job, whatever, you guys can do it.

His ultimate career goal is to work with teenagers who are facing difficulties such as their parents divorcing. He wants to serve as a motivator to help teens achieve their dreams despite their situations.

Michael transferred from a community college and is currently a junior at Shaw University, a large institution in a Southwest city, where he studies community health. While in college, he enjoyed involvement with a university dance team that did community fundraisers, and he was sad to quit the group due to scheduling concerns. He has also worked in retail, which started with a seasonal position. He was promoted to management before Deferred Action, but after receiving his work permit he had to speak with his manager about his situation. His manager was not upset and wanted to keep him on staff, but after calling a friend at the Mexican Consulate, he realized he had to leave his position because he could get into serious legal trouble. He recalled how difficult it was to quit because he made good friends at work and was forced to resign because of his situation:

It was hard. To quit. I made this a lot of amazing friends, to the employees there that were like, please don't leave, please don't leave us. I was like sorry guys I have to, I have to leave. I'm leaving because I *have to* not because I *want* to. You know, that was the difference.

Michael is somewhat out with his status, as he has disclosed this information to his advisor and a few faculty members. He lives at home and was recently granted DACA, and is currently looking for a new job.

### **Ben**

Ben came to the U.S. when he was five years old because his mother thought it would provide better educational opportunities than Mexico. His uncle immigrated to the U.S. earlier that year and told his mother the school system was better and there would be a chance for him to attend college. The only possibility the family saw to live in the U.S. was to come illegally, so his family contacted the people his uncle used to come to the U.S. and made arrangements to arrive later that year. Ben recalled the process of crossing the border separately from his parents and waiting at the *coyotaje*'s house for a week before their arrival:

I remember distinctly when I was barely 5 years old, kind of going to [border city] and holed in a hotel room while we waited for more instructions. And then a couple comes, basically without much, much conversation they take me away and I basically just rode in a car in through um in through the border with them. Pretend that I was their son and really wasn't asked any questions. Nothing at all. Rode right through the border and um so at the *coyotaje*'s house a week before my dad got there, then a couple days before my mom got there. So, I guess as a child it's kind of, it is a weird experience. It's almost kind of surprising that it wasn't that traumatizing. Being away from your parents that long and um but eventually I mean we got the family back together.

They stayed with family members on the East Coast for a while until his father heard there were more job opportunities in certain locations in the South. Ben's father moved first, and after he finished high school, he moved with his mother and uncle. He distinctly remembers certain things about the U.S. that he associates with coming to his new home, such as eating cinnamon toast crunch and watching Toy Story with his cousin.

Ben attributes his ability to cope growing up in the U.S. to his connection with his cousin who was also going through the same experience. They lived together until the age of seven and

did everything together until high school when he attended a private Catholic school for a year. Then, an opportunity arose to attend a different private all-male school that focused on low-income families and cultivating future leaders. He did not realize the magnitude of his situation at the time, but now is thankful that his parents tried to give him every educational advantage they could manage. The school program lasted from 7am to 6pm each day, which was to keep kids off of the streets. Outside of school, his parents tried to avoid neighborhoods with gangs and violence, but they still experienced a traumatic robbery that caused them to move to the country.

Once he began college, Ben experienced a few setbacks because of the uncertainty of his future pre-Deferred Action. He described entering a state of depression and losing motivation except for engaging in the social aspects of his fraternity. Partying with his fraternity resulted in poor grades, but once he saw his GPA, he experienced a wake up call and had to retake certain courses. During this time he became a resident assistant on campus. However, due to not having a social security number, he was ineligible to receive the \$3,000 stipend in addition to his free room. He described this moment as when he fully realized the importance of having a social security number. He was upfront about his situation and the department worked with him to remain in the RA role without pay. He is somewhat out with his status and discloses this information to close friends and some people at work.

During college, he was approached about completing a newspaper interview about being an undocumented college student, and his mom invited other people to participate including his cousin. However, he had to dissuade his mother from including his cousin because Ben had to primarily look out for himself and his parents, “to make sure that I come out on top. It’s unfortunate you have to be so selfish... but I kinda have always wanted to give them credit for everything that I’ve accomplished.”

He described how he still tells his cousin about opportunities such as scholarships, but he makes sure he is still “in the lead for it.” Ben does not like operating this way, but he knows the reality of his situation dictates he must put himself first, because “I can’t potentially lose that money to him ‘cuz we work with the same kind of layout, the same kind of academic record and everything.” Despite this type of family tension, his situation has recently brought him closer to his parents. Previously he felt anger and resentment that he did not have the same opportunities to thrive as his peers, and he blamed his parents for this difficult situation. However, over the summer he came to terms with his situation and said he was determined to make the best of it. He connected more with his parents because they said they would not abandon him along the journey, even when he faltered with his academic performance.

Ben thinks he always knew he was undocumented because his parents never kept anything from him, and they were very realistic and honest. He appreciates this openness, but also wishes his parents were more selective in the details they shared because he was stressed out about his situation at a young age. He explained how his parents providing a comfortable lifestyle led him to be overly confident and cocky over time, and during college he needed to “realize who I am, where my background is and, yeah, it’s still appropriate at times to give that façade because not everyone is ‘gonna be receptive of my situation. But try to be as true to myself as I can.” Based on this realization, he considered speaking with a counselor about his struggles, but ultimately decided not to because he shares the same sentiments as his parents that, “counselors and psychologists are for the weak kind of mentality,” and because now he feels better. However, he did confide in one of his closest friends because she understands how hard it is to adjust to U.S. culture since her father emigrated from Iran.

Aside from sharing his experiences with this friend, he has not come out as an activist in the undocumented movement. He believes immigrants should learn English and be more aware of the realities of their situations so they make informed decisions. Ben does not identify with activists who are extremely passionate, and he prefers to make a difference behind the scenes:

I've come to realize that now but in the past, I would be, I would even go to the point of being rude, and just like, and not understanding that, well, these people aren't as fortunate as I have been. So that's why it's been hard for me to enroll into those kind of activist groups and fight for reform and everything. I kind of wish to be more of the silent, like I said, I'm very geeky and kind of corny. That silent guardian in the back where I can do something like this, talking to you to help other people... But just make people realize that we're not as bad as they paint us to be. So I hope this is my contribution and I hope to do many more if I can...it's really hard to interact with those activists that are a little bit too passionate sometimes, become blind by their passion.

Ben is currently a senior at Abbot University, a mid-sized religiously affiliated United Methodist institution in a southern city. He is a Biology/Pre-med major who originally wanted to work in pediatric ophthalmology, but currently wants to become a physician's assistant. He is still involved in the fraternity and in a campus organization for students in the health occupations.

### **Aracely**

Aracely was one-year-old when her parents brought her to the U.S. Her grandfather and uncles are U.S. residents, and they thought they could easily help out Aracely's father. He arrived in the U.S. before Aracely came three months later with her mother and older sister. She was unaware of her status and growing up but knew she was different:

I always knew kind of that I was born outside of the States, but it never occurred to me that it was anything negative. I thought it was eccentric, that I was the only one from my group of friends that was born elsewhere.

It was not until middle school that she began talking about college and she encountered the belief that she could not attend college because of her status. The full reality of her situation became more apparent in college and when she turned 18 and was not legally able to work.



In middle school, Aracely was not living up to her academic potential, but in eighth grade she decided to perform better after seeing her older sister not graduate from high school. She still recalls a substitute teacher who had a great impact on her because the teacher would call her Dr. [last name], which inspired her to dream about accessing higher education in the future:

You're going to be Dr. [last name] one day. It always stuck with me you know...But she kinda like helped me feel that you know like higher education and you want to be a doctor you know. So yea I always look back at that. I felt like she was in a way giving me some sort of indication that I should push myself. You know. And it's always, I dunno I always reflect on that and say yea I will, I am.

In middle school, Aracely received an offer to attend a special school that would give an advanced high school education plus two years of college during that time. Aracely was hesitant to attend because she wanted the typical high school experience, but she knew that due to her situation, having two years of college paid for and completed during high school was a great opportunity.

Despite the relived financial burden, this program also caused her to feel rushed growing up and to be constantly immersed in homework. Right out of this program she was able to attend a local university, but she explained “hitting rock bottom” because she became very aware of her status. She was previously sheltered and did not face the financial burdens of paying for college on her own. She was so stressed her grades suffered and she was not content with her major. Aracely spent her days commuting and going straight from classes to work and back home, and, “...aside from that, I really like not integrating well, and not meeting anyone or not having anyone you know that I knew around. I think I was very...shy or very afraid. In her second year, she heard about a student group serving undocumented students, and once she joined, “that's when it really changed for me. I felt like I actually belonged. I made friends.”

Despite feeling more connected due to her student organization involvement, Aracely still faced challenges at home because of the family pressures on her as a Latina woman attending college. Her cultural expectations were constricting when she needed to be on campus late. Her family did not really discuss being undocumented and how that had an impact on their lives, but through her organization she learned to be more open and confident with her identity. This has helped her become more passionate, and when her family questions the value of her college education given her uncertain future, she uses this to become even more motivated to succeed. She explained, “So I think I'm able to take all the negatives and want to prove everyone wrong, and so I work harder towards things.”

Aracely's family is also a motivator because she wants to be a positive role model for her younger siblings who are citizens born in the U.S. She wants to show her siblings she is struggling, but still completing her education. She explained she is motivated because she values education and wants her siblings to know they can also attend college. She also emphasized the importance of having a good work ethic and choosing her studies over social activities.

Aracely recently applied to graduate school and received her first letter of acceptance at a nearby university. She was also admitted to a prestigious institution in the Midwest, but “because of my status I felt like they weren't willing to work with me.” She received the formal acceptance note but the institution said they were still working on issues related to her citizenship status. A month passed and she still had not heard anything by the acceptance deadline, so she contacted the institution again, when she “kind of felt like they were giving me the cold shoulder.” She thought it might have been the first time they were working with an undocumented student, but she was disappointed because the university staff members did not

attempt to work with her, “So I ended up just not even bothering with the school. And I felt really disappointed in that actually.”

She is happy with her current institution and, “They knew about me, they knew about my status, were willing to work with me. With me it’s definitely a lot more welcoming here...”

Aracely contacted the other institution to share her negative experience, but she feels they were not particularly responsive. Although she is happy at her current graduate institution, she has still faced challenges navigating the system. Aracely does not know anyone else in her current situation, so she has had to seek help by courageously sharing her story:

...put my wall down and I have to email people and I have to explain people my situation. It’s not easy, you know. It’s not easy and it takes a lot of courage. I should say. ‘Cuz I don’t know what they’re going to say. Just it’s a process I guess. And so I think if we were to just open up a dialogue or in some way you know, then that would make a big difference.

Aracely is currently in graduate school for community development after attending Wilson State University where she majored in Liberal Arts and History. Wilson State is a large West Coast institution located in a city. She originally wanted to be a chemistry teacher, but due to legal restrictions, she switched her career goal to social work and community development with a non-profit. She is involved in an on-campus undocumented student group and lives off-campus with her family. She is somewhat out with her status and has shared this information with one professor, faculty with a visible undocumented safe zone sticker, and with friends in her student organization. She was granted DACA and has worked in a retail store, babysitting, and cleaning.

### **Miri**

Miri lived in Mexico with her grandparents until she was four and a half years old. Miri was raised by her grandparents and refers to them as her parents. Miri’s biological mother stayed

in Mexico and she does not know anything about her biological father. Miri's grandfather stayed in Mexico for a while, but eventually joined the family in the U.S. on a visa, but the visa expired and they never returned to Mexico. Miri had difficulties learning English at first but she described herself as an average student who tried hard and attempted to fit in by perfecting her English. Miri failed English for several years, but some of her undocumented friends, along with her parents, helped her realize the importance of education. Her parents emphasized that she should go to college. Miri did not know what that meant at the time, but she knew she wanted to go and be successful.

Miri always knew she was undocumented and could sense she was in a unique situation when she was young. She remembers crossing the border to the U.S. and has vivid memories of her personal experience because she crossed the border separately from her parents. She thought nothing wrong though, because she anticipated visiting the U.S. and then returning back to Mexico. However, she knew her family hid from ICE, but she did not fully understand how her status would impact her life:

You know, I left all my toys and stuff. Well, not a lot of toys because I didn't have many toys but the few toys that I did have in Mexico, I left them behind. And I thought, well, I'm gonna' come back to them. When we got here, I always knew that this wasn't my home at first and I wanted to go back. So I kind of always knew that I didn't belong here. And then later on, as I got older, you know, students would ask, or my friends would ask at school, so have you ever been to Mexico? I'd be like, no, I was born over there. Well, have you gone back and I said, no, I can't go back. So I don't know if I understood fully what that the fact that I'm undocumented didn't allow me to go back but I certainly knew that I couldn't go back. And I knew that, you know, we were always hiding from ICE or Immigration because I know my parents would be scared. What if, what if ICE comes up or this thing? So I kind of got this consciousness of what ICE was and what it did to families and what it could do to our family.

Even though she realized she was undocumented, she did not fully understand the repercussions until "I started growing up and going through the parts where everybody else can do something and I can't. For example, the driver's license or things like that." She also realized she could not

visit Mexico or fly within the U.S. In high school, she thought she could not apply to college. Her senior year, she realized she could apply but that it would be extremely difficult to finance her college.

Miri graduated with honors from high school in the top five percent of her class, but she had difficulties navigating the college application process given issues with social security numbers, the FAFSA, and scholarships. However, her high school program gave her the opportunity to go on a field trip to some in-state colleges where she fell in love with a particular institution. She told her dad how excited she was about the institution, but he was hesitant because of the cost and encouraged her to look at more realistic options. Miri “could see in their face that they were saddened that I had all these aspirations and these dreams to attend these schools but that I wasn’t able to.” Miri found another institution that was closer to home that she really liked, but then she struggled to work with her dad to pay expensive application fees.

When she received an acceptance letter, Miri started crying from excitement when she showed it to her father. He agreed to talk about the details of paying for college then, but ultimately said it was not realistic to attend that institution unless they wait and save a lot of money. He suggested attending community college first, which left Miri extremely frustrated. She outlined financial sacrifices she was prepared to endure so they could save money for her to attend a four-year institution. However, her father kept pushing for community college so she could transfer later, but Miri was so upset she ran to her partner’s house and resolved to make her dream come true.

Miri explained she did not apply for scholarships because in her predominantly white high school, the educators did not know how to help an undocumented student. The school found out about her status “because one brave teacher did something she wasn’t supposed to” and

asked Miri if she was undocumented and then vowed to help her. The teacher, “cried with me and she said we’re going to help you get to college. I know you can do this...I know how much potential you have.” Miri gave the teacher permission to speak with other educators who wanted to help her, and they ultimately worked together to help her find scholarships. However, Miri was not qualified for many of the scholarships because she was not involved in extra school or community activities. She said this was mainly because her dad did not want her driving around without a license and because she did not have the chance to fulfill her goal of being on the swim team because her father said they could not pay for activities or the required insurance.

Regardless of having a small resume, Miri’s teachers and counselors helped her fill out applications and provided emotional and moral support during her college selection process. Ultimately, these educators were the ones who encouraged Miri to try speaking with her father again about attending the four-year institution. Miri was able to enroll and become involved in a campus organization for undocumented students. A family friend also connected Miri with a job in a hotel laundry mat working through an agency that paid her under the table. The agency received the paychecks directly from the hotel that did background checks, so the agency was able to pass background checks and then pay their employees under the table. Because of this situation, the agency paid the undocumented employees a lower rate than if they were able to work directly for the hotel.

Miri used to be scared to tell people about her status, but her student organization helped her share about her experiences. Once she opened up to professors in her academic department, “they opened their arms and always tried to help me out of whatever I could. Which is something that has really helped me out in college...You know that not a lot of students have that.” She reflected on the tremendous support her faculty provided when her brother was arrested and

facing deportation. The faculty members checked in with her consistently and provided emotional support, which she thinks would have not been the case in another department.

Miri has had other positive experiences with the faculty in her department. They have called her on multiple occasions to speak to their classes about policies affecting undocumented students. The faculty members prioritize her visits on immigration because peers relate to one another to better understand what undocumented students experience. In these classes Miri feels safe despite hearing dehumanizing comments:

And of course the professor, she's an AB540 ally as well, she, the first time before I even did the presentation, some students did, were talking about undocumented people in a very bad way and she stepped right in and she stopped that. And she gave them the right information. So I always felt safe knowing that she was there and that she was going to control the situation. If it went out of hand. But it has never happened when I was speaking.

One of the biggest ongoing challenges for Miri has been paying for school. Her father was unable to help her financially as time went on, especially when her brother was in jail, which required financial support from her father. Finding money for gas and parking was a challenge in getting to campus, but Miri's high school teacher found out she was undocumented and decided to help her by offering free parking in front of her house, which is near campus.

Miri struggled to convince her dad of how the workload in college was different and the importance of her involvement with her student organization, but her mom encouraged her to speak with him again and explain the importance of her college obligations. Eventually he began to understand, and Miri has remained determined to be involved and succeed in college. She explained, "I also don't give up. And because I, like if somebody dares me to do something or tells me, you won't do this, I prove them wrong. I want to prove them wrong." She credits her family with supporting her, and also mentions her partner as an emotional support. Miri's partner is a master's student and is also undocumented, so he motivates her to not give up on her

education. She also acknowledged a group of five mentors at her university who have presented her with opportunities to build her resume or resources to navigate the system. One professor loaned her car to Miri when she was going to get her driver's license after DACA.

Miri is currently a senior at Wilson State University, a large institution located in West Coast city. Miri is majoring in Sociology with a minor in Spanish. Her new goal is to earn a master's degree in Sociology to work with children or in social work, with a long-term goal of earning a PhD in Sociology to teach at a university. She is somewhat out with her status and recently disclosed this information to some of her sociology professors. Miri sees her role in the undocumented movement as teaching others how to navigate the system, especially regarding processes that are new to people who have recently been granted DACA, such as getting a driver's license. Prior to being granted DACA, Miri worked odd jobs in professors' homes, and post-DACA she became a supplemental instruction leader on campus and started working at Home Depot.

### **Karla**

Karla was born in Mexico and came to the U.S. with her mother when she was one month old. She remembers as a little kid visiting a local university's library and wanting to attend that same university one day. She did not understand what it meant to attend college, but she knew education was important and that was where she wanted to go to college. High school is the time when Karla realized her status and some limitations, but "I always had the support of my mom to always keep going, never give up and there was going to be a way to get through whatever I wanted to get through or wherever I wanted to go."

Karla's mother started saving money for her to go to college, along with her older sister who is undocumented and her middle sister who was born in the U.S. Karla was graduating from



high school as her older sister was in her fourth year of university, so Karla did not want to financially burden her mother any further. She decided to attend a community college first and sought financial support from her college, but her mother managed to help with books and some tuition. Karla knew she wanted to attend the same university she visited in her childhood, so she moved to that area of the state to transfer and live with her grandparents.

Karla transferred from a community college to attend Wilson State University, a large institution in a city on the West Coast. Karla is a Sociology major and a Spanish minor, with the goal of earning a master's degree and working for the Peace Corps or Red Cross. She is currently a senior and is involved in a campus-based Latina sorority focused on scholarship. She is somewhat out to others, but mainly only to close friends.

Karla's parents recently divorced so she feels obligated to work more hours to help with finances. She used to have side jobs such as babysitting, but post-DACA, she has a work permit and plans to work more. Prior to receiving DACA, Karla always felt different because of her status. She missed experiencing otherwise-routine markers of independence in young adulthood such as driving, which was particularly difficult because Karla identifies as being extremely determined and independent. She expressed that she "felt a little trapped" during college, especially because, "I knew was good for me and was the best way to go, but I also felt a little like I didn't know how far my education was going to be...be able to go with it."

Karla said because she came to the U.S. at such a young age, she does not know about her country of origin and, "I don't think we know how to speak about it and there's not, we don't speak about it at all. We kind of ignore that about ourselves...we don't expose ourselves so it's just we stay quiet." This silence extends to the college classroom where she avoids discussing immigration and her status. Karla gets frustrated at explaining herself repeatedly, but she deals

with rejection from opportunities by telling herself that particular thing was not meant to be, so she can remain positive. She receives support from friends, family, and her sister who is also undocumented. Although she is the youngest of two sisters, she is a role model because she is a risk taker in working to achieve her dreams. She also copes with her situation by trying to hide weakness and positively reframing her situation. She also reads, listens to music, and writes poems to help her stay positive.

Although she received her work permit, she is aware of the uncertainty of her situation in two years. Her backup plan if immigration reform does not improve, is to leave the U.S. and continue her education elsewhere where she can travel. Her ultimate goal is to join the Peace Corps or have a job where she can travel the world and still re-enter the U.S. She also wanted to get involved in a campus organization that relates to her identity. Karla attended a welcome week involvement fair where she discovered a Latina-based sorority that she was interested in as a way to improve her leadership skills and to be a role model for her cousins and sisters. She used to work as a babysitter, and post-DACA got a job at the campus game center where she spends a great deal of time. She enjoys her campus job because it helps her have the full college experience.

Karla does not recall the exact moment she realized she was undocumented, but she learned from her older sister who is undocumented. Her sister was completely unaware of her status until high school, but then realized her limitations with not being able to get a driver's license or work in high school like her peers. Karla's sister asked their mom about this and that is when their mother explained the situation. Her sister became depressed, which Karla identified with because she previously avoided thinking about her situation and she felt depressed about her status growing up. She recalls, "I quickly learned...I had those limitations as well...in a sense, I

was depressed growing up. And I didn't want to talk about it. I didn't feel like sharing this information about myself.”

Karla's mom raised her to speak Spanish first but also encouraged her and her sisters to excel in education and learn through community involvement such as joining the Girl Scouts. Her mom also learned English by attending night English classes. Karla recalls trying to assimilate and feeling supported by her family in learning English. Her father spoke only enough English to communicate at work, and he spoke Spanish at home and the rest of the family would respond back in English. Now that Karla is minoring in Spanish, she speaks to her father in Spanish for her own benefit.

Once Karla moved in with her grandparents, she experienced more traditional cultural gender roles and language expectations. Her grandfather expects Spanish to be spoken at home, which was nerve racking for Karla at first. She recalls stuttering a lot but improving over time. She is grateful for her experience with her grandparents but moving out on her own has been her dream for a while. However, she realizes the great responsibility that comes with this independence, and she is not in a position to deny the support she receives from her grandparents living rent-free.

### **Alicia**

Alicia came to the U.S. from Mexico when she was one year old. She transferred from a community college to Wilson State University, a large institution in a city on the West Coast. Alicia had to stop out while at Wilson State due to feeling overwhelmed and lonely on the large campus, but she returned one semester later and is currently a senior majoring in history with the goal of becoming a teacher. She is very out with her status, including most everyone such as faculty and in the political activism arena. She is involved in both campus and community

organizations regarding immigration. She lives with her family and was granted DACA. She previously worked at a summer camp, in professors' homes filing papers, as a community center tutor, and cleaning homes with her dad's janitorial business.

Alicia has faced economic challenges in her family, who runs a maintenance business. She started working as a janitor when she was 17 and she did a night shift cleaning restaurants. She experienced the realities of being working class and what her parents had endured for so long. This made her realize the importance of scholarships and finding help to attend college. She did not want to use a fake social security number, so she sought outside resources for financial assistance.

Alicia was a good student in grade school, but was not at the top of her class. She had an older brother who is also undocumented and she saw him graduate before her and struggle to decide what to do next. This scared Alicia because she was a high school sophomore and did not know what life held for her after graduation. She was told since she was ten years old that she would go to college, and that would give her opportunities. However, she realized she was limited in social aspects such as getting a driver's license. She did not let this hold her back though because, "And I say this often in undocumented circles or pep talks. Your status is temporary but your education is forever. And so I really meant to embrace that." She knew she would not have a traditional college experience but she wanted to make something of herself, be proud, and contribute back to her community.

Alicia found empowerment through involvement with social activist groups and learned more about the Chicano movement, which inspired her to realize there will always be struggles but she cannot be a victim of her circumstances. She had the support of her parents and friends, and "a support group of these young, politically active students and that was a privilege and I had

to take advantage of that.” Her political involvement in high school, “really gave me that agency to feel like I can make some change, and change needs to be made.” She wanted to be a positive influence for students who came from her community, especially because of the lack of cultural understanding from staff and teachers. Her goals have remained the same, and her political activism has continued as she focuses on raising awareness of undocumented student issues. Occasionally Alicia will “test the waters first” by seeing what they think about immigration in general before coming out to someone. She remembers approaching her high school French teacher about signing a DREAM Act petition, but the teacher made hurtful comments and turned her away.

Alicia emphasized the mental and psychological effects of being undocumented and how many students get angry or depressed when they learn their status, which is often in high school. Alicia explained the difficult reality of being undocumented and the decision to share one’s status as a means to empowerment and finding support. She said “it can take it’s toll on you... It has very big implications in the way you're going to live, if you're going to be able to work, if you're going to be able to support yourself and your family,” which can result in cycles of anger or depression. However, some students are able to become empowered and politically active instead of following “that path that our parents took...in being very almost invisible about their identity. But we're trying to open up these spaces and let people know that you can't be quiet about your identity, you shouldn't be ashamed by your identity.”

When Alicia was in the summer bridge program for her community college, she stayed after class to work on her papers. During this time, a counselor came to introduce himself to her and the two formed a relationship, resulting in the counselor helping Alicia get a scholarship for her first semester. Alicia explained the importance of assistance from the campus network

because her dad does not make enough money to fully support her financially. It was very important to seek help through “finding those networks, finding those people who will pull those strings to help you, really help me navigate the system, at least when I was in community college. The campus is just so much smaller.” Alicia struggled with the transition from community college to a state university on a much bigger campus. She was unsure of where to go for assistance and did not know if professors would be supportive of her situation. Eventually Alicia found undocumented student support groups on campus and in the local community. Involvement in these organizations helped her feel safe and empowered on campus.

She has benefited from the support of her family and her brothers who are also undocumented, but her friends are a solace outside of her family where they sometimes do not want to face the reality of how hard things can get. Her friends also provide her with a physical space to stay and regroup when she is feeling emotionally unstable. She knows DACA is temporary, but is still so important that she worked various odd jobs to earn the \$465 required to apply. She did not have to pay an attorney for assistance with the DACA application because she saw one for free through her involvement in the community organization. She recently got her work permit but has had a long process waiting for a social security number. She looks forward to using her new documentation to apply for consistent jobs so she can take care of herself financially.

Alicia’s relationship with her dad was strained for a while because he emphasized education, but did not realize what it meant to grow up as a Latina woman who was in school and involved as a social activist. Alicia always knew she was from Mexico, but she did not understand her status until high school. She recalls an incident where she wanted to write about her experience, but a classmate discouraged her:

I wanted to write about my experience in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and I remember that my classmate telling me you don't write about that. You don't tell 'em that you came here without papers. But I didn't exactly know what that meant.

She saw her older brother struggle as an undocumented student who attended community college, which caused her anxiety as early as ninth grade when she realized she would face similar educational challenges. By her junior year in high school, Alicia became politically empowered and was determined to find a way to finance her education, but despite this she felt “completely isolated...because everyone was getting their acceptances, everyone was replying back with housing preparations and financial aid and I didn't know what to do because I got none of it. So that was really hard.” She decided to attend community college with the goal of transferring, but she was mentally exhausted and frustrated.

During college, she learned to speak out about her situation as a means to find resources, including a summer camp job that allowed her to support herself financially. She received a summer internship related to her status that provided a stipend that helped her transfer to a four-year university. Although she was relieved to transfer, Alicia felt lonely because she was starting all over with making connections. She decided to limit her organizational involvement so she could focus her energy on eventually getting a job, but the undocumented-related group she stayed with ultimately helped her get involved in the community and discover new aspects of campus.

### **Samuel**

Sam was born in South America and came to the U.S. with his parents when he was three years old. Sam's family came to the U.S. on a visa and stayed beyond the time limit. They lived in the Midwest and he was raised with values from his native country as well as from U.S. culture. Sam knew he was undocumented around the age of twelve. He was in high school

when he fully started to understand the implications of his status as barriers arose regarding college opportunities and financial aid. He started working when he was 14 years old, and that is when he realized his status would impact his future, so he had to stay out of legal trouble, keep a low profile, and not share his situation with others. He thought he would not be able to attend college due to access and financial issues. Sam was in the JROTC military cadet program and wanted to serve in the U.S. military, but then he found out he was ineligible to join because of his status. In high school he realized his career and economic limitations:

So, I can't join the military to serve the country, can't go to college to acquire and get the skills and a degree to economic prosperity and all that kind of stuff and get a job. So I was pretty much stuck at a dead end.

Sam was at work when a colleague told him about a college that had evening programs, so he saved his money and paid for one semester at that institution. He did not know how he was going to pay for an entire degree program, but he took a risk and invested everything he had in the first semester of classes. He attended evening classes so he could still work during the day. Due to the economic downturn, Sam had trouble finding a job, but he was awarded a fellowship to go to D.C. and work on Capital Hill. During this time he also attended college at an institution in D.C., where he took political sciences courses. Sam graduated with a bachelor's degree in Political Science and a master's degree in Public Policy, but many of the opportunities he was afforded came from him avoiding certain questions and finding loopholes in documentation so he did not have to disclose his status. Eventually he got a full time offer for work in D.C. over the summer, and he was paid very well. Everything was going well until HR requested information for e-verify and, since his information did not match, he had to resign. Despite excelling so far in work and school, he reached a barrier because of his status:



...been here for years, I'd done all the proper academics, and the proper experience, and the leadership components and building networks and all that kind of thing. I beat out the general pool for a second job, because of that situation I had to give it up.

During his undergraduate studies, Sam lived with his parents and attended a nearby commuter institution. He worked about 30 to 40 hours a week and was very involved with his institution. He started some student organizations, participated in model United Nations competitions, helped create a new bachelor's program at the university, and was elected five years in a row to a student position representing the entire university at the higher education committee in the state of Illinois. He was eventually elected to serve as a student trustee and, in his final year, as student government president. He advocated for student rights in these roles, and carried this work into graduate school when he was elected as a vice president for external affairs, requiring representing the university and graduate students in D.C. where he lobbied for federal research dollars for the university. Sam tried to ignore his status and remain focused on work and helping others:

...was always in the back of my mind. You tend to forget about it. I tried to keep myself very busy where I don't think about that situation and so forth. I just uh put the best work forward, had the best attitude, tried to help others.

Very few people knew about his situation because he was aware that a friend turned foe could start rumors that would get him into serious trouble. Sam is guarded with his status and is aware his situation prevents him from taking opportunities such as travel, study abroad, exchange programs, internships with the federal government, and running for government office. He explained feeling demoralized because of blocked opportunities that he would otherwise qualify for if his immigration status were not a barrier:

All those opportunities are not afforded to me. As much as I would like to get into that, get into that type of field. So that's been the challenge that sometimes brings you down a little bit and demoralizes you. Because you want to do something and you can't do it.

And it's not because you don't have the ability or the money or anything like that. It's just because we've been stuck in a broken immigration system.

Sam did not apply for DACA because he is at the top of the legal age range to qualify, and he did not want to risk bringing attention to himself for fear of detention or deportation. Samuel is not out to many people except for a very few when it is crucial. Due to the nature of his professional position related to politics, Samuel was unable to disclose the exact institutions of higher education he attended, but he described his undergraduate institution as a large university located in the Midwest, and his master's institution as a large university in a city on the East Coast.

Sam is currently lives on his own and is employed full-time after completing a post-graduate fellowship in D.C. interning with a Congressman. Sam wants to work in government relations and run for office, eventually leading to work in the U.S. Senate. He also wants to start a foundation to promote education for Hispanic American communities. He ultimately wants to write a book about his experiences as an undocumented person in the U.S, but he is waiting for immigration reform before he shares his story due to potential legal repercussions.

### **Ana**

Ana moved to the U.S. from Mexico when she was eight years old, with her mother, sister, and two brothers. Her family did not have a visa or legal way to enter the U.S., so they used the help of a *coyotaje* and crossed the border at night:

...found the *coyotaje* right there and he crossed us over. Um we were there for like not a complete day but until almost dark so that we could get across, since it was dark it hides us. I remember it was really cold and there was lots of like going up and going down. It was really bad so I was 8 and I remember I couldn't get off the ground. I kept falling so many times.

When her family arrived at their new home, they lived together, along with her sister's kids, in a small one bedroom, one bathroom apartment where some family members slept on a mattress on the floor. Ana knew when she crossed the border that she could not do certain things and she

knew that most people felt being undocumented was taboo, but many people were aware of Ana's situation. During childhood, Ana knew she was undocumented after crossing the border at night with her mom and sister, but she did not realize the associated limitations until high school when she could not apply for financial aid programs or get a driver's license.

Although she eventually transferred to a four-year state university, Ana started at a community college where she had to commute 40 minutes each way on a bus. She was unprepared for the amount of work in college and she struggled with writing. She speculates her difficulties with writing are due to English not being her first language, but she was an average student despite feeling stressed in school. Her first year in college she did not have a social life because she was constantly studying and stressed about money for tuition. She had to support herself financially because her mom did not have money to help her.

Ana noted that her university website did not have visible representation of people who looked like her, but she thinks it is important to see someone you can relate to in college. She met an important support person through her stepdad's work on a horse ranch. This support person used to be a professor and developed a relationship with Ana and her sister over the years. When Ana told her about her goal of transferring to a specific in-state four-year university despite not having the money to do so, her support person hosted two fundraising parties and gave Ana donations to pay for school. Ana is still in touch with this person who is currently helping her navigate her immigration status.

Ana reflected on the lack of resources for low-income students in the U.S. During high school, she was not encouraged to apply for college and her parents did not know how to guide her through education. She also had very limited financial resources. In light of these challenges, Ana felt great satisfaction in achieving her goals. She also served as a role model for

her nephews and works to promote the value of education in her family. Ana's mom has progressive views and encouraged her to look beyond staying home and getting married. Her mom was open minded and emphasized being independent and educated as a woman.

Ana's education path led her to transfer from a community college to attend Crawford University, a mid-sized institution in a West Coast city. Ana was involved in two different campus student groups for undocumented students and another student organization focused on helping high school students consider college. Despite these successes, she described the ongoing tensions related to her status, especially after recently being deported to Mexico:

My life has been on hold ever since I went to the US...I mean not completely on hold because I was able to go to school and that's something good. But then from there on I couldn't move to do the thing that was next. I couldn't move on with my life. I couldn't get a job. I couldn't get a driver's license. I couldn't get a car. I couldn't help out my mom with things. I couldn't travel. I couldn't do like so many things. And I feel like it's kind of like the same thing over here in Mexico. I can do those things, but it just doesn't feel right. Because I'm still waiting for the final decision.

After six years of college, she graduated as a Spanish major and currently has the goal of returning to school in the U.S. to become a court interpreter. Currently, she is somewhat out with her status to some friends and as needed for her court case. Due to her legal proceedings, she is ineligible for DACA.

Through two Skype audio interviews, I spoke with Ana while she is currently living by herself in Mexico in the midst of an on-going deportation legal battle. While living in the U.S. she fell in love with the bus driver whose route she often took, and eventually they got married. Her husband is much older and their relationship caught the attention of immigration enforcement officials, leading them to a formal questioning about their relationship and citizenship statuses. During the hearing, Ana was separated from her husband and questioned in a different room. English is her husband's second language, and due to a technicality and

miscommunication regarding some questions, their answers varied slightly on a few questions. Therefore, officials ruled that her relationship was a fraud and Ana was deported to Mexico.

It was hurtful to Ana that others thought her marriage was a fraud, and she explained that she would not have raised red flags by marrying someone like her husband that was an atypical relationship due to his age if she was trying to subvert the immigration system. Ana described her frustration over the interrogation process that ultimately resulted in a drastic change to her life because of her deportation:

Like this woman that was interviewing me, she had no idea all the things I had gone through, all the things I had suffered. She had no idea, she just said ok well you didn't pass. You know, you don't get to go home. What bothered me the most was she said, oh if you say the truth now, everything is going to be ok. It's not going to be in your record. And I told her, well if I tell you that this, that I am lying, that would be me lying because I'm, you want me to say something that's not true. You want me to say something that you want to hear. But that's not true.

With her current situation living in Mexico, she has difficulty finding a job because she is either overqualified or the positions do not pay a living wage. She is living in stressful conditions in Mexico, and described not having running water and poor health care, which was problematic when she recently contracted Dengue fever and salmonella. She is currently waiting for some paperwork to be processed between her husband, a doctor, and an attorney, so she can get a permit to have an immigration interview where she could potentially be approved to return home to the U.S.

Ana is learning vocabulary words for an interpreting school she hopes to attend when she returns to the U.S. She knows her future is uncertain and she may never get to use these study materials, but she chooses to stay positive and stay “in study mode” with the vocabulary. She wants to be ready to jump right back into school and working towards her professional goals when she returns to the U.S. In addition to this preparation for return to the U.S., focusing

heavily on hundreds of vocabulary words serves as a positive way to take up the time she is trying to pass in Mexico so, “I don't have to think about things that are just going to make me go crazy and stressful and anxious.” She explained feeling cranky and depressed, and losing weight over her stressful situation.

Ana described the stress of being in a holding pattern in Mexico because government officials do not understand the impact their actions have on others' lives. She does not feel like Mexico is her home, and she is unhappy. She is frustrated by all of the waiting for the last year and a half,

Like oh let's just wait for another letter. And we have to turn in more papers. And like government and congress people, they have no idea. They're just sitting there...But they have like no idea all the lives that they're moving around. They just see a paper with letters and words and turn up their face and a pen, and if they sign or not, but they don't know. They don't see the faces. They don't see what people are going through. They don't see what they're doing to the lives...

Ana is feels like she is stuck “in this limbo or like not from over there and not from over here so it's like I'm in the middle waiting.” She is able to stay in touch with loved ones in the U.S. through the use of technology, and she is trying to remain optimistic about returning to the U.S. so she can attend school and reunite with her husband.

### **Mia**

Mia arrived in the U.S. from Mexico when she was four. She remembers, “how I crossed the desert in the night with my mom and a bunch of other immigrants. How the *coyotaje*, he helped me by carrying me on his shoulders.” Mia identified Spanish and English as her first languages growing up. Ever since elementary school, Mia loved school and wanted to earn good grades. She was social with a “nerdy group” of kids and loved to read. She said these activities filled her life instead of being drawn into gang activity. She was also in a relationship in high

school, which gave her something to focus on other than negative activities that would get her into trouble.

She described her upbringing and her environment that led her to want to work in law enforcement. Her community had a lot of drug use and gang violence, and there was a culture of teen pregnancy, but she chose not to get involved in this because she liked school and identified school as creating a family-like space for her:

I guess since I didn't really have that loving social support at home...Like school was my second family, that I could just go to in the mornings and come home and bring homework and it's a brain booster and it's a happiness booster to know that I'm learning and I'm gonna be something special in the community and I'm going to contribute...I could've been out on the streets right now, like just doing a drive by with someone but I'm here instead, going to [college] and I am like doing good and I am standing out from the rest and I'm going to be in law enforcement.

Mia is currently enrolled at a private university in the Midwest. She applied to this institution because the application did not request a social security number, and she received a full four-year scholarship because of a partnership with local public schools. This partnership applied to Mia because she graduated from a local school and had good attendance, a high GPA, and at least a 21 on the ACT. The tuition waiver also works at other in-state institutions, but these places required a social security number to apply. Mia left that section of her applications blank, but eventually she received notifications that these institutions could not accept her application until she completed this section.

Mia was recently in her university newspaper about being undocumented. Even though it was anonymous, people knew the article was written about her given the details shared. However, Mia does not feel discriminated against, even when she tells professors about her status when they try to help her with internships and other opportunities. She explained,

“They're open-minded and they asked me questions about my life. But I don't feel threatened or anything. Or I don't feel scared to tell people I'm undocumented.”

She recalled one negative situation in her sophomore year college religion class. A student from Iraq became very upset during a class session on undocumented students. At this time, Mia was very quiet in her classes and her classmates likely did not know she was undocumented. The other student became hostile said really negative things about people who are undocumented and Mia became upset, but her teacher intervened to deescalate the situation. Mia's motivation is her family, and she realizes her mom has no other opportunities other than waiting for immigration reform. Mia's father has not been a role model for her because he is a heavy alcoholic and was abusive when she was younger. She suspects he may get deported one day because of his attitude. Also, he is unmotivated to get a good job and so Mia feels pressured to be a provider for her family.

Aside from enjoying school, Mia is a talented poet and has won awards in college for her poetry. She has written about drug cartels in Mexico, machismo and domestic violence in the Hispanic community, and about being undocumented and her journey in the U.S. Mia is also passionate about awareness of domestic violence issues, especially in undocumented communities where people are afraid to report sexual, psychological, or emotional abuse because it might result in a family economic crisis if the husband gets deported. Mia has experienced the psychological effects of being undocumented and growing up in a tumultuous family environment, which she thinks is the reason many undocumented students struggle:

...those kind of situations can have long-term effects on families. And students. Maybe students that have to deal with those issues don't have a healthy environment to come to at home, then that's one of the reasons they turn to the streets. Um or turn to gangs. To have that love that the family doesn't provide. So that's you know a really big issue. A lot of undocumented families don't even tell anyone that they're dealing with those issues because they're ashamed of it and they're afraid and it's just really important for them to



know that there is help. I grew up in this kind of environment and I'm still dealing with some of the issues now. But this has affected me as a woman, as an undocumented, because I've been afraid to come out of the shadows and been afraid to tell others. You know I have psychological effects... And those that have a really negative family environment that just makes school even worse. If you come home from school and you don't feel safe and you're at school and you don't feel attracted to studying then there's no, some of them, some people just don't feel like there's any point in life.

Mia went to counseling to help her through these struggles, and she connected with a social worker every week over the summer. She also had friends to talk to about her stress. One day when she was experiencing bad depression and anxiety, she made a driving mistake that drew the attention of law enforcement. Because of her negative state of mind at that moment, she appeared shaky and irritable, and the law enforcement officers took her fingerprints and picture and questioned her about how she got to the U.S. Thankfully, at this time Mia had DACA and was able to show this to the law enforcement officers. She is still nervous this incident is on her record and is very afraid she will be deported. Mia explained, "I'm scared right now. That's one of the reasons why my depression worsened. Like I couldn't sleep because I was scared that border patrol would be knocking at my front door and they'd like arrest me and my whole family." Two days after the incident, Mia spoke with her lawyer but she was casually brushed off and counseled not to worry about the issue.

The issues with her family's past, combined with her brush with the law, led to Mia experiencing a deep depression this past summer. She described feeling so depressed that she did not maintain proper hygiene, she did not clean her room, and she stopped reading, writing, and enjoying academics. Miri "didn't think about school. I was just thinking about agony and sadness and like I was even contemplating suicide for like two weeks. It was horrible..." Miri missed several deadlines for school and did not keep up with scholarship applications during this

time. Her depression also continues to negatively impact her peer interactions because her appearance has declined and her sadness is visible:

I was just like that person that people like don't want to approach because...it was just so obvious, you could see my sadness and people would look uncomfortable when talking to me. And even to this day now, like it's already been like two months since school started, and people still kind of like feel kind of awkward when they have conversations with me because I look sad. I smile. I do. I try really hard to smile but it's like a fake smile because it's forced and people think I'm fake and that gets me kinda down because some of my friends notice that and I've only told a select few that I went through a depression and suicide, and contemplating suicide, I only told a select few but the other ones that I haven't told, they look at me weird. They look at me differently.

Mia explained that having friends is very important to her because she needs that social support on a large campus. However, she still switched her minor and lost several weeks of classes when she was battling depression. She was able to bring her assignments up to date and wants to heal so she can balance success in school with her health and well being:

I'm still trying to heal myself emotionally and psychologically...I'm not that good at balancing my, my work right now with my personal life...school makes me happy but I want to be happy with myself in order to be happy with my books, you know.

Because of the depression, Mia stopped writing poetry and listening to music. She wants to be able to express herself again as a way to let go. Mia explained the crux of her depression stemmed from her tumultuous relationship with her father.

Mia described barriers in her college experience such as not getting financial aid or certain scholarships, and is particularly frustrated that she cannot study abroad. She has always wanted to participate in her school's China trip, and "when [educators] come up to me and they're like, hey, do you want to go to study abroad in China, I'm just like, why would you ask me that, you know." Mia suggested a program targeted at undocumented students with counselors trained to identify realistic career opportunities for students. She is also interested in promoting Hispanic/Latino studies at her university. Mia's career goal is to bring back a law

enforcement gang squad in her home community. She wants to promote education awareness and help others overcome the temptation to become involved in negative life patterns:

...just show them that like there's more to life than just like drug use, gangs, parties and like just cruising because that's one of the main attractions in [city] is like getting a good ride and just cruising around...streets and looking cool, drinking like liquor or something, or smoking and, you know, people don't realize that instead of like riding around the neighborhood, they could be reading a book and learning something that'll be useful.

Mia is a senior at Jefferson University, a large private, non-profit Jesuit university located in a Midwest city. Mia originally majored in criminal justice with a minor in journalism with the goal of working in law enforcement in the Border Patrol, Customs, CIA, or FBI, and also potentially becoming a writer. Due to legal restrictions, she changed her major to English, but she still hopes to work in law enforcement with a local police gang squad and also for a local newspaper. She was granted DACA and is very out with her status to almost anyone, including counselors, professors, friends, and in a campus news article about her status. She is on a state-based four-year scholarship and lives 20 minutes from the university. She is involved in a Hispanic American student organization and is a peer facilitator for girls in middle and high school regarding healthy relationships. Prior to DACA, she worked at a thrift store, liquor store, as a cashier, and as a waitress, but she is currently unemployed.

### **Conclusion**

The participant profiles in this chapter provide relevant contextual information for better understanding the lives of the undocumented college students in this study. Although there are important commonalities across the students' experiences, there are also unique individual circumstances that have shaped participants' journeys regarding higher education. The following chapter builds upon these stories by highlighting the findings in exploring the experiences of

undocumented Latin@ college students who demonstrate resilience while navigating higher education.

## **CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS - QUESTION 1**

### **How Does Being Undocumented Shape a Student's College Experience?**

The primary goal of this study is to explore the experiences of undocumented Latin@ college students who demonstrate resilience while navigating higher education. Undocumented Latin@ college students are an often hidden, yet growing student population, and learning about these students' experiences will help inform practice for university educators. I interviewed 16 participants on the phone or via Skype audio for a first round of interviews in winter/spring 2012, and I completed follow-up interviews with 15 of the participants the following fall of 2013.

Participant experiences highlight challenges faced by undocumented Latin@ students related to areas such as experiencing marginalization on campus, facing stigma and fear based on immigration status, having limited professional development and career opportunities throughout college, and challenges to having a "traditional college experience" such as involvement in campus organizations. Despite these concerns and having an uncertain future, participants demonstrated resilience in navigating higher education with the use of environmental and personal factors, leading to persistence towards graduation. This chapter explores findings related to the first research question about how being an undocumented student shapes students' college experiences. Chapter Six addresses the second research question regarding the factors that contribute to overcoming challenges undocumented Latin@ students encounter in higher education.



*Figure 5.1 Themes that emerged from research question one.*

## **How Does Being Undocumented Shape a Student's College Experience?**

The opening section of this chapter addresses the first research question: How does being undocumented shape a student's college experience? This answer covers themes related to students' perception of campus climate, emotional challenges, academic and career limitations, and organizational involvement. Based on the study findings, each of these areas relates to the frameworks of CRT, LatCrit, or resilience theory in various ways, although these connections are not as evident in existing literature on undocumented Latin@ college students.

Students' perception of campus climate relates to having a sense of belonging versus marginalization. Participants experienced various levels of belonging based on social interactions such as coming out, peer interactions, and experiencing educators who were unaware or unsupportive of undocumented students on campus. Emotional challenges surfaced related to stigma and fear students experienced. Academic and career limitations were present due to status-related barriers to participation in opportunities such as study abroad, internships, or majors requiring background checks like education.

Students expressed a desire for a traditional college experience, which they saw as including involvement in campus organizations. However, participants faced challenges to joining multiple groups because of scheduling issues related to commuting, work hours, and family expectations to be at home. Despite these challenges, students still expressed a desire for a traditional college experience, which ties together multiple themes rooted in their perceptions of the campus climate.

### **Perception of Campus Climate**

Students' perceptions of campus climate affect their sense of belonging on campus. This section addresses various student experiences regarding campus climate that lead to students'

feelings of belonging versus marginalization. A key theme in LatCrit is how language and phenotype affect the experiences of people of color. In this study, I found that undocumented Latin@ students face challenges fitting in on campus due to language and phenotype. Specifically, several students reported that speaking Spanish as their first language, having an accent, and having dark skin were often sources of feeling like an outsider or being treated poorly by others. CRT also highlights how racism is a reality of daily life for people of color. Participants spoke about routine discrimination and racial tensions on campus. CRT and LatCrit also assert the importance of centering race and racism within intersecting subordinations, which was highlighted in student experiences with tensions between Latin@ cultural expectations and broader U.S. culture. I delineate the details of each aspect of these challenges in the following sub-sections.

In the first section of this chapter, I highlight student experiences with social interactions and feeling connected to campus. These areas involve varying comfort levels with coming out as undocumented and the importance of forming connections to other undocumented students. In the second section of this chapter, I address participant reports about educator and non-peer interactions that range from positive to challenging. Positive educator interactions helped students feel like they belonged on campus, while challenging educator interactions left participants feeling marginalized. Negative educator interactions stemmed from faculty and staff who were unaware of issues facing undocumented students, or who were unsupportive of this student group due to perceived personal and political biases.

The third section of this chapter highlights emotional challenges related to stigma and fear. These challenges include daily emotional strain as well as struggles with mental health issues such as feeling hopeless, lack of self-worth, and depression. The final section of this



chapter highlights academic and career limitations that prevent students' opportunities for full participation in campus life. These limitations led to further isolation for undocumented students.

### **Sense of belonging versus marginalization**

After citing financial and emotional struggles, students' most commonly shared challenge was the strong desire to have the "typical college experience," which is limited due to their status. For this group of participants, a traditional college experience meant living on campus, having a large group of friends and an active social life, being involved on campus, traveling with new college friends, studying abroad, working and gaining internship experiences, and feeling like campus was a home-away-from home. Participants often compared their situations to that of their non-undocumented peers, and realized the isolation caused by their status.

Physical appearance and language played important roles in students' experiences. Most participants arrived in the U.S. at a very young age, and despite some of them having difficulties learning English in grade school, students were fluent in English by the time they reached college but often still had accents noticed by others. Students also highlighted that others reacted to them differently based on their skin color, including the level of racial discrimination they faced or reactions of surprise if the participants did not fit a physical stereotype of an undocumented person in the U.S.

The LatCrit themes of phenotype and language were particularly apparent in students' stories regarding fitting in on campus. Some students spoke about stereotypes of undocumented students, including how phenotype related to fitting in on campus. Phenotype was especially salient when some students shared they were not subject to as much stigma as their darker skinned peers. Maria felt intimidated because nobody in her classes looked like her:

Especially because when I would go into classrooms, most of the people were, didn't look like me...there was a lot of international students and a lot of white people. And I really didn't see any other people, so I was a little intimidated.

Also, Sam explained that his light skin and speaking English well provides him with some privilege over his Hispanic peers who may face more racial discrimination based on their looks:

Being raised here at a younger age and being able to dominate the English language and speak Spanish and to a certain extent, skin color. Had to play a role into this in terms of educational opportunities or career opportunities and so forth. Although I am Hispanic, I tend to be a little bit lighter skinned than my colleagues and so forth. So individuals in a hiring position or decision position might not anticipate that I'm Hispanic and so forth so I might not fully embrace the brunt of racial discrimination or other things that are a factor in terms of opportunity. I've had friends say yea but you're lighter, you're almost white. So that plays a role into the differences between opportunities that are afforded by me that are made to navigate, compared to some other Hispanics who tend to have more of a brown skin or more of a traditional look.

Another participant, Karla, expressed her frustration over peers forgetting the reality of her situation because they did not think of her as undocumented due to her physical appearance. She described having to re-explain her situation to others and the reactions of surprise at disclosing her status:

I'm realizing that people don't really understand. And they don't really know. And even though I explain it, after I explain it, a month later they just brought up like oh yea you're 'gonna get a job, you're looking for a job. And I'm like yea but I can't get one yet. Don't you remember? They just don't, I just, I really do feel like they see this, like there's a stereotype or a profile, there's a look or something of an undocumented person. That they can't think it's me. Like I don't fit it or something. So I think that gets kind of frustrating, but at the same time I have to re-explain myself again. Explain my situation. I think so. I think, yea when people think of an immigrant I think they think of like all of us are Mexican and none of 'em can even speak English, or yea. Yea some of the responses I have are like wow I would have never thought. Although participants learned English as a second language at a young age and worked to get out of ESL classes in school, most reported speaking primarily Spanish at home.

Students also said that despite speaking English fluently, having a Spanish accent could lead to stigma in the college classroom. Some participants felt that speaking Spanish as a first language

influenced their college experience by making writing more difficult. Zoe also talked about language and how she does not fit a stereotype, which surprises people:

Because I speak perfect English, I go to a 4-year university. You wouldn't expect someone, a smart person to be undocumented I guess. So people are surprised because they always picture, I dunno what they picture, some farm worker I guess. I dunno. They never picture someone like me.

Meza (2011) summarized challenges for undocumented Latin@ students regarding a negative institutional climate with higher rates of racial and ethnic discrimination and tension compared to what Caucasian student experience. This finding resonates with CRT, as it is an example of racism existing as normal and ordinary in these students' lives, while White students benefit from privileges placing them in the position of perpetuating this circumstances, rather than being on the receiving end of a racially or ethnically hostile campus climate. LatCrit emphasizes areas such as race, class, gender, language, immigration status, accent, and phenotype, which are foci represented in student stories about hostilities and discrimination. For example, some participants cited their Spanish accents as a source of feeling otherized on campus, while another participant mentioned that his lighter skin tone afforded him more acceptance than his darker skinned Latin@ peers.

In a study on Latino students, scholars found that their perception of a hostile campus environment negatively affects their sense of belonging to their college, which directly impacts their transition, persistence, and success in higher education” (Meza, 2001, p. 9; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996). These challenges likely relate to undocumented Latin@ college students as well, and understanding their counter stories is one way to highlight how resilience-related themes such as environmental and personal factors help students overcome these challenges regarding campus climate.

In addition to LatCrit themes of language and phenotype, culture was also an overarching theme related to sense of belonging while negotiating worlds often at odds with one another. These often competing cultures include Latin@-based expectations within the broader U.S. culture. Traditional Latin@ expectations often conflicted with the culture of being a “typical” college student who fit in on campus. Ben addressed this challenge with negotiating integration into the U.S. Despite his perception of other Mexican people who feel inferior to white people, Ben described feeling equal to white people and contributing to society like U.S. citizens, despite not having government-sanctioned status. Ben described his loyalty to Mexico since he is not a U.S. citizen, yet he struggles internally because he has also gained a lot from being in the U.S. Ben also balances his two cultures through being bilingual, eating Mexican food and living other parts of Mexican culture, while also dressing in a U.S. fashion and paying taxes:

And it’s funny because my whole family has become Americanized. We’re not afraid to involve ourselves with the white community you could say in quotes. We don’t, I feel like with my culture, with my fellow Mexicans, we’ve always kind of felt inferior to the whites because that’s the kind of way they express themselves. That’s not the way I’ve expressed myself. Of course we’re all equal. But because of this [social security] number they feel inferior, I believe. That’s one thing my family and I have not done. We felt entitled to everything this country has given us, at the same time we don’t take away from health care...My family has always had private insurance, health insurance. We’re not really asking for anything in return from the government. Always paid our taxes and everything. So we’ve done everything as straight as possible and we’ve made ourselves American without the actual status from the government...

Ben describes how this approach to living in the U.S. as an undocumented family relates to his personal identity:

It’s a lot...to do with identity because... I still hold, I mean I’m not a U.S. citizen so my loyalty you could say is to my country in Mexico. But at the same time my, the country that has given me so much is the U.S. So it, that’s more of an internal struggle where you hear the star spangled banner come on at a sports game and they are like, hey why don’t you put your hand at your heart, and I’m like I don’t. I can’t pledge allegiance to this flag yet. It’s something that’s more psychological than really a problem. But at the same time it reflects who I am. I eat all types of Mexican food, and live the culture. If you met me now, I dress like any typical prep guy... Yea it’s kind of a thing because my parents

have seen me grow up and it's been quite a ride seeing you grow up and seeing you have to deal with both of the cultures.

Ben reflected on current circumstances that have an impact on his identities, and he also described how language played a role in his past regarding his family and his college application process:

My parents made sure that I was completely bilingual. So language has never really been an issue. I spoke English as soon as I could. Hasn't been an issue yet. The only issue there was my parents you know kind of it harder for them to learn the language being older so I had to, I always was like the translator and always helped them with certain documents for applications or you know I mean applying to college was truly my own. My parents didn't really know that much besides having to sign whatever they had to sign and making sure I got to the place I needed to get to.

This ongoing negotiation of cultures was salient for most participants with regards to several aspects of balancing their birth country and growing up in the U.S., especially regarding interactions and expectations with family.

Students reported several ways their undocumented status influenced their perceptions of campus climate. These themes relate to emotional struggles and stemmed from practical limitations and interactions with peers and educators. Karla described feeling like an outsider at college due to her status-related limitations such as not being able to obtain a driver's license, study abroad, or get a job, which she sees as an important part of developing into an independent adult:

...another step of growing up. And I think I dunno it made me always feel different. Not being able to just have that. Those little simple things. Or just like that driver's license, taking yourself to school. That small independence, I still feel dependent...I think as of in my college years, I noticed I felt a little trapped...You just, you feel like you're kind of an outsider...I don't feel like I get the full experience of a college student. Or just of my age, what I should be doing right now.

Maria felt like college "wasn't a friendly environment," and she struggled to connect with peers at first. Eventually she surrounded herself with supportive people, and she "made it through the

environment because of the people I surrounded myself with.” This feeling of belonging occurred after two years of going straight from home to school and back home, without having any friendships on campus.

Alicia described feeling connected at her community college but then experiencing isolation when she transferred to a larger four-year institution. The large size of her new institution made it more difficult to find support, and Alicia felt unnoticed and lonely. She “was incredibly overwhelmed my first semester that I lost sight of everything” and stopped out for a semester due to finances and “because I couldn’t go back. I felt so lonely...it was awful. The feelings of having to start over again.” Eber also felt isolated from campus and described feeling frustrated over his status-related limitations in college. He did not have the chance to experience college like his peers: “...you know how sometimes people say that college is about experimenting and having fun and going out with friends? But that wasn’t really the case.” He skipped social activities like parties for fear of encountering law enforcement, which could result in deportation.

Like Maria, Eber went straight from home to class and back home, and, “I guess when you’re young, you just get frustrated that there’s things that you can’t do. But it’s one of those things, you realize other students that don’t have to go through that.” Mia also shared feeling alienated on campus, and felt like she was “not really pushed to succeed that much.” She described that, “I just don’t feel like I belong. Even though I have a four-year scholarship...I didn’t deserve it or...I might not make it.” Several students reported a feeling of not belonging on campus despite the deep desire to fit in during college.

Due to financial constraints and cultural expectations, none of the students in the study were able to live on campus, which also led to students feeling isolated from peers and campus

culture. Also, not being able to legally obtain a drivers license impacted students' social freedom and ability to commute efficiently, which caused complicated travel logistics and limited students' time for out of class activities such as studying with peers or involvement with student organizations. Overall, time and geographic constraints translated to limited opportunity to be on campus interacting with peers.

**Social interactions.** Students' undocumented status influenced their social interactions with peers and educators on campus. Most peer interaction occurred in the classroom or in select student organizations. Self-selected student organizations were often the site of positive, reaffirming interactions, while interacting with other peers, especially white students, in the classroom often led to feelings of isolation. The second half of this chapter addresses the importance of participants' involvement in Latin@-related or undocumented-focused student organizations, while this section explores challenging social interactions participants faced as a result of their status.

Participants faced challenges in peer socialization because they had limitations with identification cards, transportation, finances, and living at home with family versus living independently on or near campus. These issues stifled opportunities for students to spend out of class social time with peers, especially in settings that required commuting long distances or having identification to participate such as attending events at a pub or club. Students also commented on missing out on the "traditional college experience" because they were unable to study abroad with an academic program. They also had to frequently dodge questions from peers about why they never went on group vacations such as flying out of town for spring break trips. Sam explained the burden of not being able to vacation with his friends and having to lie about why he can never go with them. His childhood friends are unaware of his situation and

have asked him to travel to Mexico and Europe, and “I’m like yea sure let’s plan it! Then...you gotta come up with an excuse, say yea the money’s not there, or work is crazy now, or I’m in school and stuff like that. And try to get around it.” Students yearned for the opportunity to bond with other students via travel for academics, professional conferences, and vacations with friends, but the risk was too great given identification restrictions even for travel within the U.S.

One of the several participants who had to stop out of college multiple times to work and earn enough money for the next academic term explained that this cycle also negatively impacted his ability to form friendships. Ignacio said he never really formed college friendships because his classes build upon one another and, “through the semester I may talk to one or two people but then I’ll never see them again after that semester. Because I’m not going at the same pace everyone else is.” It is common for undocumented students to stop out of school multiple times, and this attendance pattern makes it difficult to maintain a coherent, close friend group.

Zoe described trying to reach out to other students on campus, but facing hostility from white students. She experienced culture shock on her predominantly white campus because, “when I first moved, like up here, it was huge culture shock because [at home], everybody is brown.” She tried being nice to white students, but “they just didn’t want anything with me. Like they’d just turn around and walk away or, you know, they’d say really rude things as well. A lot of racist comments. I just kinda got used to it...” This outright hostility and blatant racism was compounded by marginalization due to the limited presence of other students with whom participants could identify racially and ethnically.

Ana recalled not seeing very many Latin@ people on campus, which initially made it difficult to connect with others and to feel welcome on campus. She recalled, “...when I went to [university], it was like not very familiar faces. Like all those faces you see, they’re white faces



or they're Asian or they're Black or this. I didn't really see much Latino faces," aside from in the Spanish department. However, Ana still said that at first her campus is a welcoming environment for people of all backgrounds who may be far away from home, but eventually this feeling wears off. She began to question where she could go for help and she felt alone until "once you start mingling with other students like yourself I think it becomes easier and a bit more welcoming and you don't feel so alone when you're in school." However, her initial experience did not allow for social interactions with Latin@ peers because the demographics of the campus were overwhelmingly non-Latin@.

Students explained the importance of connecting with peers, which rarely occurred outside of student organizations focused on Latin@ or undocumented student issues. Participants reported difficulties maintaining classroom friendships because of stopping out of classes due to finances, experiencing hostility from white students, and having to spend a lot of time at home due to family expectations and because of limitations obtaining a legal identification card.

**Coming out.** Students' perceptions of campus climate affect their likelihood of coming out with their undocumented status. Participants who felt safe disclosing their status to certain people reported feeling connected to campus, but only when reactions included acceptance and understanding. However, negative reactions to coming out also occurred, such as facing rejection or misunderstanding. Also, students experienced isolation on campus when they felt forced to hide their status due to fear and uncertainty.

As highlighted in the previous chapter, participants shared their memories of first realizing they were undocumented and how this understanding came about in their everyday lives. Several students were completely unaware they were undocumented and what this truly

meant until it was time to apply for college. Once students learned of their undocumented status, they faced the decision of who to come out to with this personal information. Students spoke about encountering some negative reactions including confusion, hostility, and hatred when coming out to others about their undocumented status. Several students reported having positive reactions when they disclosed their status, but they attributed this to only coming out to selective individuals in a safe space.

Participants were out with their status to varying degrees, and each person shared a rationale for their decisions regarding this disclosure level. Sam is very closeted with his status because he said that if “a friend who used to be a friend or no longer is there now is causing me trouble or starting rumors,” it could cause him to lose all he has worked for in life. In contrast, Alicia is very out with her status due to becoming politically active in high school and carrying this activism into college. Because of embracing her identity earlier than many other students, she feels the responsibility to raise awareness of her situation. Alicia focuses on creating dialogue on how undocumented students are present in everyday life and that, “you think it may not affect you but, it affects the people around you and in some way it will affect you.” Alicia pushes boundaries with this approach, but occasionally she gauges situations extra carefully to adjust how she is addressing certain people because, “I’ve definitely learned that through organizing, that some people are going to react different.” For all of the students, choosing to come out with their status was an ongoing process and a calculated decision based on safety.

Miri also explained testing the waters before disclosing her status, and the importance of coming out after identifying professors who are allies. She feels uncomfortable in classes at first because “I dunno the dynamics of the class, I don’t know who could be my ally and I don’t know who could not be.” She does not disclose her status in class right away, but eventually if she

feels comfortable, she shares her status with her professor. Even when others' reactions were not blatantly negative, students reported frustrating reactions to coming out because peers would be shocked or forget the limitations associated with having an undocumented status.

Students shared several stories of peers who reacted in frustrating ways due to ignorance, although not with outright hostility or negativity. For example, students who came out often faced reactions of disbelief because they did not fit a stereotypical profile of a person who is undocumented, or disbelief that a person who is undocumented could be in college. Alexa discussed overcoming feelings of intimidation to come out recently. She was hesitant to come out because, "sometimes when you tell some people you know their perspective changes about you and they think less of me, and sometimes they don't even want to talk to you." She has also had conversations with people about undocumented students without the person she is speaking with realizing her status. Because of this, people share their negative opinions without a filter, "And so for me to realize that they think that way about the undocumented community is quite upsetting and sometimes it makes me not want to talk to that person anymore." At all levels of status disclosure, participants faced hearing others' negative opinions on undocumented immigrants.

Zoe explained the frustration over seeking understanding about her status, especially when talking to white students. She is used to being the only person of color in her classes, "especially the higher up I go, the less [students of color] I see, and like the harder it is to explain to people, you know, like you really don't understand...what's going on. They just don't get it." This lack of understanding is frustrating because Zoe has to teach people about these issues repeatedly, which causes an extra burden on her as a student of color in college, "And so it's kind of frustrating, having to teach it over and over and over again. Like...it's a lot harder to be

a person of color and go to school...” Zoe took the responsibility of educating her peers upon herself, even though it was an ongoing process.

When students were not out to peers with their undocumented status, such as in a classroom, it was not uncommon for participants to hear negative comments about people who are undocumented. Participants reported feeling marginalized in the classroom when these incidents occurred. Students also reported feeling like they did not belong in other campus spaces too. One participant who struggled with mental health concerns related to her status attended ongoing counseling group with other students. In this group, the student spoke about the struggles she was facing due to her status, and another student group member went on an emotional rant degrading people who are undocumented. Zoe described her experience with a strong negative reaction from a peer in her counseling group:

I felt so bad about myself. That's why I was working on it. I was working on myself and accepting the fact that I was undocumented. I was going to therapy in the summer for it and then I ended up going to group therapy and towards the end I was really feeling a lot better about myself. I was feeling a little bit more refreshed. We were talking about something about being able to let go and stuff like that. So I talked about it and this girl that was there was just so angry. Like she was just like you could see the anger in her face. I didn't understand how she was so nice to me before and then all the sudden she was just full of anger. She was shaking. Her legs were shaking, her hands were shaking. She was red in the face. You could obviously tell that she was really uncomfortable. Everybody was just kind of, I was balling my eyes out, and she was just angry. They asked her what do you think about what [she] had to say, and she was just like you don't want me to go there. You *don't* want me to go there. And as soon as the session ended she just stormed off.

This counseling session fueled with hatred had a negative lasting impact on Zoe and her self-perception:

I don't feel like I had ever felt so bad about myself. That was the first stroooong, stroooong negative reaction I'd ever felt about somebody because of who I was. Something I had no control over. None. And so afterwards she stopped going to therapy and she didn't want to meet with the therapist any more and she didn't want to meet with the group any more. Because her hatred towards me. I had never seen hatred so real. In

my life towards me. So it was just like oh my God. She's just kind of set me back a little bit.

Outside of the counseling context, Zoe also experienced struggling with the decision to come out based on others' lack of awareness and understanding. For Zoe, this lack of awareness includes others' ignorance of history such as lack of knowledge about the Chicano movement and Civil Rights movement, as, "...I don't think there's enough people that really truly understand the huge amount of contribution that people of color have had on this country. And you know, for them to really understand what people have gone through here." Zoe described the importance of people becoming educated on these issues so they can become more accepting. She described how white people are ignorant about issues people of color face in the U.S., because, "I don't think that they really understand it and if you don't understand it, you can't like accept it...it's one of those things that like you can't, unless you experience it, you can't understand it." Therefore, it is important to tell one's story. However, this is a complicated approach because it is difficult to share a personal journey with someone undocumented students do not feel they can trust. Zoe also spoke about people of color serving as racial spokespeople for white people who have never had to critically examine race due to their privileged status in the U.S. This burden is enacted in the classroom:

And being one of the only people of color there, you know, like you're just kinda like the spokesperson for everything so, you know, I think that it takes a lot because a lot of these white folks, they've never seen, they've never really had to learn or had to like be put in a situation where they felt uncomfortable or put in a situation where like, you know, they know or understand what it is like to be a person of color...So they don't have to worry about it.

Zoe, along with other participants, chose to come out as a way to educate others on undocumented student issues. In contrast, Ben disclosed his status to a select few as a safety measure.

Ben discussed coming out to two peers on campus as a safety precaution in case he ever needed help. However, he said that aside from these two peers, he is very closeted and has to hide his true self from others out of necessity. He described acting fake because of his situation and having to lie to his peers about having a license and being a legal resident of the U.S. His friends ask questions about these topics and joke with him, “Because they don’t understand. Naturally if someone doesn’t understand they joke around about it. So, I’ve had those jokes all my life about you know where’s your green card, or immigration is going to come and get you.” I could sense the anger and frustration as Ben recalled these situations, but to his friends, Ben reacts with feigned indifference because, “It’s always a struggle but... I’m just like fuck you, I don’t care. And I’ve gotten to the point where it’s just like, yea make those jokes, I don’t care.” Ben has become accustomed to living dual lives, and “I’ve lived the lie long enough that you do start to believe it in that moment of need where you’re just so confused that yea it’s crazy. It’s crazy how basically I come to school with a different mask almost.”

Many students were unaware they were undocumented, or did not fully realize the implications of this identity, until they were applying for college. After being faced with the realities of their status as a young adult, students also had to deal with deciding to come out to peers with their undocumented status and had to deal with peers’ reactions to this disclosure. Students also had to choose whether or not to come out to educators and navigate complicated social interactions with educators who were uninformed about relevant issues or held biases about undocumented students. Some students dealt with these issues by embracing their identity and becoming politically active and vocal about their situations, while others were more guarded in gauging safe spaces before coming out. It was common for participants to feel they had to

teach others about immigration issues and to be the spokesperson about stereotypes regarding undocumented students, especially when educating white students.

**Other undocumented students.** Participants reported limited opportunities for peer socialization. However, participants benefitted greatly from finding safe spaces where they could connect to other undocumented students who could empathize with their situations. CRT and LatCrit illuminate the ways in which race and racism link to the marginalization of Latin@ students in education, and undocumented students were able to process this reality together. Undocumented students bonded over shared experiences while also supporting one another through subtleties in their individual educational journeys. These connections within the undocumented student community helped participants remain focused on persisting in higher education despite multiple challenges.

Several students described that their early semesters in college were socially isolating because they would go straight from home to campus and then back home, often with under the table work tightly scheduled in too. As such, participants had limited opportunities for socialization with peers, especially when it came to finding peers with whom they felt truly comfortable and connected. Most often, the source of true friendship bonds occurred with other undocumented students. The importance of student organizations specifically serving Latin@ or undocumented students is the topic covered in the following chapter. This section addresses the theme of challenges related to connecting with other undocumented students on campus.

There is no obvious or simple way to identify undocumented students on campus, as this is a diverse and often hidden group of limited numbers, but networks through Latin@ groups often led to students becoming aware of others' presence in the university undocumented community. Participants did not mention identifying undocumented students from groups

outside of the Latin@ community, which may be due to even more limited numbers of these students on campus. Based on connections with undocumented Latin@ students, participants shared their perceptions of how other undocumented college students in general are not able to overcome their challenges in higher education, and a common theme was witnessing students giving up hope due to an uncertain future combined with lack of family support and financial struggle. Several students described the frustration of witnessing this depressing reality in others' experiences, although their peers' struggles provided an example for them to work against in striving to beat the odds.

Zoe had a unique view of connecting with other undocumented students, as she discussed having a negative self-perception as a result of comparing her situation to other undocumented students' realities. At her university, "there's probably maybe six of us that are undocumented. We all have really different stories...I didn't even realize there were different types of undocumented. I feel like I'm just the worst of the worst. I don't have anything." She explained how she felt alone, especially after discovering that some other undocumented students have identification, a work visa, or driver's license. When she realized this she thought, "I really am at the bottom of the barrel. If they have limitations, I have limitations to the max. Because I really don't have anything. And so it was, it's been really hard."

Aracely explained how she felt disconnected on campus and isolated from everyone at first, including other undocumented students. She was not involved on campus her first year, and "would just go home, go to school, go to work, and come home. And that was my daily routine." She was "really like not integrating well, and not meeting anyone or not having anyone you know that I knew around. I think I was...I dunno very shy or very afraid." Even once Aracely found an undocumented student organization on campus, she was still hesitant to step



out of her comfort zone to attend a meeting full of strangers. Although feeling shy about stepping into a new group of peers is likely a common experience for college students in general, Aracely had the additional uncertainty of attending an identity-based group related to an often hidden and complex piece of her life.

It is not always initially apparent who identifies as an undocumented student on campus, which makes it particularly difficult for students who share this identity to connect when dealing with common adjustment issues in their early stages of college life. None of the participants mentioned connecting with other undocumented students in their classes, which is likely due to limited odds that another member of a relatively small portion of the student population would be in the same courses as one another. Outside of the classroom, overcoming hesitation to step into a new social circle was a worthwhile risk for students who overcame challenges and sought membership in Latin@ or undocumented-based student organizations. Despite Zoe's negative self-appraisal after comparing her situation to that of other undocumented students, most participants reported personal and academic benefits from the friendships formed in student organizations, which will be explored in more depth in the second half of this chapter.

### **Educator and Non-Peer Interactions**

In this second main section of Chapter Five, I address participant experiences with educator and non-peer interactions. A key point of CRT and LatCrit is that racism is normal and ordinary, which also relates to the need for culturally relevant ways of teaching and learning. In this study, I found that educator and non-peer interactions operate within a broader system of racial oppression while overlooking the need for culturally relevant practices that consider undocumented students' experiences. In this section, I detail ways in which participants' positive interactions with educators and other non-peers helped students feel like they belonged

on campus while students felt marginalized after negative interactions. Participants' reports of negative interactions stemmed from educators who were unaware of issues facing undocumented students, or who were unsupportive of this student group due to perceived personal and political biases.

Educators were key figures in students' experiences in both positive and negative manners. The next chapter explores the importance of educators who serve as mentors and allies. However, this section focuses on themes from participants speaking about the negative impact unaware or unsupportive educators had on their college experiences. These encounters are particularly important in light of CRT, which emphasizes the need for challenging dominant ideologies to shift to offering culturally relevant ways of teaching and learning (Solórzano, 1998). Many educators were unaware of the presence of undocumented students on campus. When students did interact with educators, they reported often feeling hostility. Participants perceived these negative interactions to be rooted in some educators' anti-immigrant beliefs. LatCrit helps highlight the complexities of these interactions, as "Chicana and Chicano students live between and within layers of subordination based on race, class, gender, language, immigration status, accent, and phenotype" (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001, 335). These multiple layers must be considered in understanding students' holistic experiences as a way to raise educator awareness and to help build supportive educator networks on campus.

Majority students are likely less inclined to encounter negative educator and non-peer interactions based on their identities such as those rooted in race, ethnicity, and immigration status. On the contrary, majority students are likely to encounter a system of educators built to support them during stressful and challenging times during college. However, undocumented Latin@ college students are not afforded this same automatic safety net, so they must rely on

creating their own buffers to difficult times in college. Participants demonstrated this resilience, which is defined by Collins (2009) as the ability to adapt to risk factors by using protective factors, which requires actively handling stress and challenges.

### **Unaware and unsupportive educators**

Every participant reported encountering educators who were completely unaware of issues facing undocumented students, including high school counselors and postsecondary educators such as faculty members and student affairs practitioners in various offices. Several participants mentioned encountering educators who were uninformed on a basic level, such as unawareness that undocumented students could attend college. Other staff members were unsure how to complete basic administrative processes for undocumented students.

Miri explained an emotional situation that occurred in public regarding her identification being questioned in the campus payroll office. Staff members were not properly trained on the type of identification card she had and the staff members caused an embarrassing scene in the small office in front of a line of other people. Staff questioned Miri's citizenship status in front of everyone, which caused her to feel:

...really angry at first. I felt really sad and I felt humiliated.... But then afterwards, I felt very angry because it's a fact how they treated... how they responded to the situation...they should've treated the situation a little bit different. Maybe asked me to step to the side and asked me more quietly, instead of asking me in front of everybody.

Zoe recalled a stressful situation where a campus staff member was rude when she was seeking help in the financial aid office. The staff member realized Zoe was undocumented based on her paperwork that did not have a social security or FAFSA listed, so "She was like I can't even help you, so there's nothing that I can do, so you can leave. So I was like oh my God. I felt so low." Zoe said this level of ignorance stems from people seeing undocumented field workers on TV but not realizing that undocumented students are also in the classroom. Because many faculty

and staff members have not had to deal with this topic, it is difficult for them to understand and creates barriers to students disclosing their status.

Ben also explained encountering educators who are unaware about undocumented student issues because, “we have to keep it a secret, we’ve had to keep it a secret from other people. If you don’t you’ll get you know there’s prejudice.” He emphasized the importance of educating people on their privileges as U.S. citizens because a lot is taken for granted, such as having a social security number, which is “something that we desperately need to make sure that we have a normal life.” Even though undocumented student issues are coming more to the forefront through research and students sharing their stories, Ben is skeptical, “Because I can sit and talk to them and hopefully they might understand by the end of the day, but I don’t believe they actually will.”

Beyond basic knowledge, there are many related legal intricacies, but some educators still took the time to find answers for students and to go the extra mile to find a work-around to policy barriers. Students continually stressed the need for educators to be informed on relevant issues because a lack of caring and effort has far-reaching negative repercussions. Sam explained how a lack of effort by educators to serve undocumented students is negatively impacting broader society because young talent is not being cultivated through education, resulting in stifling contributions back to the U.S.:

You know one of these individuals could be your next Bill Gates or your next Steve Jobs or your next Golden Apple teacher of the year or someone who is going to cure cancer. But we’ll never know and you’re really limiting the talent pool to who these individuals are, whether they’re valedictorians, or they just have creative ideas outside the norm...So it’s definitely important for campus administrators to not, to work with this special group of their population. Grant them access to the university and provide certain financial aid awards and scholarships and things of those nature. You know partner with stakeholders, external stakeholders that can contribute to that. And fully cultivate the opportunity to have them.

Several participants also spoke about educators who were complacent with their unawareness and inattentiveness to undocumented student issues due to apparent biases. Students perceived when some educators had personal and political biases that resulted in negative and unhelpful interactions when seeking help on campus. Students felt tension in some educator interactions that were particularly challenging due to what students perceived to be personal and political biases against undocumented students.

### **Emotional Challenges**

In this third main Chapter Five section, I discuss the emotional challenges participants identified related to the stigma and fear associated with their undocumented status. A main point made by CRT and LatCrit is that individuals of color live within an interlocking system of multiple subordinations based on various marginalized identities. I found that this complex reality affects students' emotional well being as they navigate higher education. I delineate the details of this challenge in the following sub-sections related to stigma and fear.

One of most common challenges students identified relates to the emotional toll of being an undocumented college student. This is a theme not yet heavily addressed in scholarly literature, but that was highly prominent in this study. Participants reported an ongoing, steady sensation of emotional struggles related to their status, but as addressed in the second half of this chapter, students found multiple ways to demonstrate resilience in working through these challenges. Beyond the daily emotional strain, several participants also shared their struggles with mental health issues such as feelings of hopelessness, lack of self-worth, and severe depression as a result of the burden of being an undocumented college student.

These daily struggles were also related to the reality of broader public sentiment on immigration reform, which participants explained took a toll on them because White people

forgot the humanity behind the issue. This relates to issues of power and privilege within CRT, as it argues that white males hold power over marginalized groups (Taylor, 2009). Students were aware that privileged people in the U.S. making decisions that affect undocumented immigrants are almost all white men. These decisions often created fear and stigma in the daily realities of undocumented Latin@ college students' lives, and also had broad implications for how they were perceived within the educational community. Lopez (2007) explained that, "research has found that undocumented immigrants face racial prejudices regarding beliefs in their innate inferiority and inability to continue on towards higher education" and that, "many in the American public see them as less deserving of public resources and 'membership' in U.S. society" (p. 2). Participants were fully aware of the hatred many U.S. citizens felt towards them, which they generally felt was the root of anti-immigrant legislation and educational policies. Participant viewpoints regarding prejudice reflect the CRT foundation regarding the centrality of race and racism, which both intersect with other forms of subordination (Solórzano, 1998). These complex and multiple layers of discrimination were the source of much stigma and fear for participants.

The students' experiences show the emotional stress they face. Mia described a recent situation that was particularly difficult when the pressures of being an undocumented college student culminated in a deep depression and contemplation of suicide. Her emotional stress led to not maintaining her physical appearance or her physical space, and she struggled to connect with others during this time, leading to social isolation. Mia explained the significance of the social toll this took because, "having friends is, it's kind of really important... going to school with friends that support you and like a big, on a big campus like [university], it makes you feel good...But it just got really awkward..." Her academics also suffered during this time of

depression and she fell behind on coursework, which she is still trying to catch up with after switching her minor.

Ben described how his uncertain future caused a lack of motivation and had a negative impact on his grades:

I had a few setbacks a couple of years. Last year, actually, all semester. But before this whole Deferred Action I didn't know if whether if anything would happen for us. For students, if we'd be given a break or not. So I almost entered into a state of depression and was like well nothing is going to happen. I've been wasting an entire year. I had no motivation really. It got that bad where I had no motivation at all to do anything and I wasn't really depressed but it was like why am I here...I just didn't really care about that whole semester until I saw my grades. That was a wake up call. That semester kind of set me back. I do have to retake certain courses to make sure that I can graduate on time.

When students did experience emotional challenges, some participants spoke about the cultural pressure to not reach out for help, especially when seeking support outside of the Latin@ community, which is often the case when students seek assistance on campus where a majority of educators are white or non-Latin@. Issues of stigma and fear further compound daily emotional challenges.

## **Stigma**

Some students spoke about the stigma associated with the label undocumented. This stigma usually related to images of undocumented immigrants as less than human criminals. Sam explained that on campus, "There is a stigma that if you're undocumented, you're unwanted. Or you're an illegal alien or you're breaking the law and shouldn't be here." Participants perceived that stereotypical media images surrounding a politically charged issue resulted in others negatively judging them. In classes where participants were not out with their status, they faced listening to peers' hateful and hurtful comments about people who are undocumented and about immigrant rights. Mia recalled the most intense time she had a negative reaction to her status, which occurred in her sophomore year religion class where she

normally kept to herself until a student from Iraq used his immigration status to express resentment towards undocumented immigrants:

...basically we were in class talking about undocumented people. And in that class I didn't really talk to many people. I would just go to class, sit down, listen, take notes, and just leave. I wouldn't make conversation with anyone.

However, Mia felt forced to become vocal in this particular class session in response to the hateful sentiments her peer expressed towards people who are undocumented. Eventually the professor intervened, but Mia was left with the painful memory of her classmate reacting with extreme hostility towards her and her immigration status. This situation was particularly complicated because the other student sparking the hurtful conversation was an immigrant from another country, but unlike Mia, his situation allowed for a direct pathway to citizenship.

In situations where students were out with their status, they still faced some negative reactions based on others' assumptions about people who are undocumented and based on common misconceptions regarding immigration reform. Zoe stated how media images distort reality and how interacting with a person who is undocumented can change peoples' perspectives from thinking undocumented people are all criminals:

I feel like once you have that first hand experience with a person that is undocumented, it's like you're whole perspective changes because like I said, when people see it on TV, they see us as criminals, they see us as people who are just here, like they don't actually get the first, the real life thing. And so when they do, their perspective completely changes.

Alicia expanded on the impact facing this stigma can have on students when she described feeling depressed over the uncertainty of one's future:

But um just sort of the mental and psychological effects of being undocumented. Many students when they find out, when they're in high school, they're very angry or some of them get really depressed. And um it can be take it's toll on you because you're not sure what to do with yourself.



She discussed how anger and depression often result from the reality that people's immigration status indicates how they will live, and how it also dictates their potential for future opportunities for upward mobility.

Zoe explained how facing stigma had an impact on her grades and led to feeling depressed and questioning her self-worth. Her morale was deeply affected by others' hatred because of the perceptions of her as less than human and as a criminal because of images that are on TV:

...why am I going to go somewhere where I know I'm already going to be shut down, where I know I'm going to be not wanted. When they're going to tell me I can't, I'm sorry. Because there is no step after this. There is no like goal for me to get after college. Because there is nothing being offered to me. So it was just really hard for me to want to keep going because it was hard for me to think outside of that small reality or that limitation. It was hard for me to get past that limitation. So my grades really went down and I just didn't really want to, I didn't really care about my grades and about school for a while. And it caused me to just go into a really depressive state of mind. Because I just felt like there was no hope for me you know, that I might as well just go finish school in Mexico. I was having really crazy stupid thoughts that I was, you know, and then it got to me feeling kind of worthless.

Zoe described the roots of her negative feelings, which relate to negative stereotypes about undocumented individuals perpetuated in the media:

Because in the eyes of the American, I am criminal. I'm not really worth anything. I am this crazy thing they see on TV every day. It was really hard watching TV and hear them talking about you. They're not talking you know about, they're talking about everybody in general. Like I'm not a person to them, I'm just some thing that is invading their country. I've been here all my life just about, you know. Before I could even really talk. I spoke English. It's hard to think that people are so, have so much hatred. It was really, it just really got to me really bad. That to people I wasn't a person. I was just some alien, some criminal, something that was just not wanted. It just affected my morale a lot. It affected it a lot, of what I thought about myself and my self-worth.

Mia's grades also suffered as a result of identity-related stigma, and she also experienced depression that stifled important outlets in her life, such as poetry and music:

... I haven't like really written things lately. Part of my depression was suppressing the good things about me. Like I was feeling really shitty, that all I could think about was the

negative things about myself. So I didn't, I did not partake in any kind of poetry writing. I stopped listening to music entirely. Which was bad. And I didn't like draw. I can draw, too.

Facing the stigma associated with being undocumented was hurtful to students, and took an emotional toll in their daily lives. Several participants' grades suffered as they experienced periods of serious depression related to feelings of hopelessness due to blocked opportunity and uncertain futures, combined with facing others' hatred and misperceptions.

## **Fear**

Students reported fear of experiencing discrimination or rejection from others who discovered their status. Fear also stemmed from dire financial circumstances, forcing students into unsafe working conditions as a way to help finance their educations while also supporting their families. Family life also led to fear for a few participants who spoke about abuse and violence in their home lives. Due to the harsh reality of legal repercussions such as detention or deportation, students also experienced fear about discovery of their status by others. This fear of legal repercussions was especially complicated by the reality that students' actions could result in detention or deportation of their families as well. Eddie described how he initially thought education would protect him from these fears:

Well certainly in the past it was education for me, well I looked at education as a blanket to protect me from deportation, discrimination, things like that. But the older I get, the more I realize that it's not, well let me put it this way. I have many friends that have college degrees and have been deported. So that's not, college isn't the best protector against that.

Zoe described her fear of being turned down for opportunities or facing discrimination from others, which makes it difficult for her to seek employment:

... now I just have a huge fear of being turned down...But I'm scared. Of you know being turned down or being discriminated against. But I just always have that constant fear of working somewhere and then them finding out and you know it's just a really big

fear of mine. So I just, you know if I can avoid it, I will. That's why I don't really want to work. Cuz I'm too scared.

LatCrit highlights socioeconomic status and related issues, and in this study, this theme permeated every aspect of students' experiences. Worry about finances was the number one theme students shared, and this worry intersected with family obligations, gender expectations, and educational opportunity. Despite working very hard and maintaining multiple paid positions, undocumented students lived payday to payday and were forced into many under-the-table jobs that were sources of stress due to poor working conditions.

Each student shared a story about working “under the table” without papers, either by knowing how to work the system during the application and interview process, finding positions that did not require documentation such as for-cash jobs like babysitting, or by disclosing their identity upfront with certain employers that were willing to overlook legalities. Due to the unofficial nature of these positions, several participants faced extremely difficult, long work hours in poor working conditions for little pay, with no avenues for addressing workplace concerns. For example, several male participants worked in manual labor such as in construction or doing hard labor in difficult work conditions at an onion factory, while some women worked cleaning jobs with dangerous chemicals and other health hazards that went unaddressed because they had no rights as undocumented workers. Miri explained that she worked long, hard hours around harsh cleaning chemicals and was subject to less pay because of her status:

So the agents, we got paychecks from the agents and not the hotel itself. And the hotel itself actually went through a whole life scan and everything. So the agency was the one who actually hired undocumented people. They paid us at a lower rate than the hotel would pay us if we had been U.S. citizens or U.S. residents. So that's the difference, I was hired for the agency and I got paid \$9.50 and if we would have been under the hotel we would have gotten paid \$10-\$11 there.

Mia also discussed unsafe working conditions she faced because her status did not afford her avenues to address concerns in the work place. She dealt with long work hours for little pay in an environment with health hazards such as bleach she was allergic to and being harassed by men in her waitressing job:

Yea I couldn't really ask for much because they were paying me under the table and they don't really have benefits or any kind of you know how people have the union that supports them or other employee programs. Since I don't benefit from any of that I would have to go through the job working long hours for really little pay, or like a health hazard in that job was that I'm allergic to bleach. And other cleaning chemicals and they would still force me to clean with bleach. Even though I would tell them look I'm allergic to this. They'd just tell me put on gloves and clean it. I would do it, but it would still affect me. Like my skin would start peeling. I'd even show them and they'd be like oh well... So either way I was not in a position to do anything and get anything really done. I couldn't demand for them to give me some kind of compensation for what happened to me... and I couldn't really tell the boss hey you need to fix this because you know I was getting paid under the table and I'm not really, I don't have papers to really say anything. I'm just another undocumented person working under the table... I guess not having that nine digit number places me in getting under the table paying positions. Before that I was a waitress, like it was a Mexican Chucky Cheese basically... And I was a waitress there. Waitressing sometimes isn't the best job for females because we would get sexually harassed or we would, men are just flirting and they don't understand when no means no. So getting a job has been really hard.

Without financial aid, scholarships, or legal ways to access a safe and well-paying job, finding a way to finance their education was an ongoing struggle for participants.

Practical limitations such as not having a driver's license but needing to commute to school also cause fear during daily activities when students do not have a viable alternative. Mia explained her fear about driving without a license when she uses her boyfriend's truck to commute to school:

Well one of the things that I'm struggling right now with is getting my license. I haven't gotten a license and uh I'm, I have, a truck and it's under my boyfriend's name and the plates are under his name. And when I drive to and from campus, I'm like always just very cautious about the way I drive. Cuz I don't want to get pulled over by a public safety at the school. You know. Cuz if they were to pull me over at school they would ask me for my license, and I don't have a license. They would ask me for the registration, and it's not under my name so that's one of the problems that every time I go to school I

feel really scared or just really cautious just driving on the freeway. When I would see state police or things like that or seeing public safety I would get scared.

Mia also explained how fear of legal repercussions could have a negative impact on undocumented students' quality of life and ability to exist in safe living situations. She described how growing up, her father was abusive, which is not a rare situation in her community even though this rarely gets reported. She explained the reality of domestic violence in her community and in her life personally:

I guess the domestic violence issue. A lot of undocumented people are afraid to report any kind of abuse. Sexual, psychological, or emotional. And I think it's really important for a lot of undocumented people to know that there are assistance programs out there to help them. A lot of undocumented families deal with that and the wife is scared to go to the police. Or to anyone for help because of their status and they don't, they since both of them are usually housewives, then they don't want to report their abusive husband because of the fear that they will get deported or he will get deported and the family will have to have an economical crisis where you know she doesn't work and he gets deported. Who else is going to support the family? I think it's important for undocumented families that deal with those issues to know that there is help out there... A lot of undocumented families don't even tell anyone that they're dealing with those issues because they're ashamed of it and they're afraid and it's just really important for them to know that there is help. I grew up in this kind of environment and I'm still dealing with some of the issues now. But this has affected me as a woman, as an undocumented, because I've been afraid to come out of the shadows and been afraid to tell others. You know I have psychological effects.

Students often planned and adjusted their day-to-day activities to minimize risk of coming to the attention of authorities, which might result in serious legal trouble. This fear was related to activities such as commuting without a driver's license in emergencies or to get to school, disclosing one's status on paperwork or to university officials working with issues of admissions or financial aid, or when seeking under the table jobs to help finance students' education. One student also highlighted the reality of undocumented families living in fear of reporting domestic violence conditions at home because law enforcement could deport family members, leaving everyone in a precarious survival situation. Students also dealt with fear

related to their status because of denied opportunities, and negotiating daily activities to minimize risk of drawing the attention of law enforcement officials or from facing discrimination from others.

### **Academic and Career Limitations**

Although participants were academically high achieving, they were blocked from multiple academic and career opportunities due to their immigration status. Professional development experiences requiring background checks or specific identification documents for travel exclude undocumented students. Although many participants had to change majors or career goals based on these realities, students still maintained high educational aspirations and aimed to work in their chosen career fields. CRT and LatCrit address the need for a commitment to social justice to create political and social change for communities of color, and most participants spoke about their educational and career goals as a way to achieve this goal of equity and giving back to their communities.

Similar to findings in scholarly literature, the students in my study were academically high achieving as defined by the traditional measure of school GPA (Contreras, 2011; Pérez, 2011). In his study on college-bound undocumented Latino students, Pérez (2011) found that this student population was “not typical. Despite attending similar schools and sharing similar socioeconomic characteristics, their academic profile is very different compared with the general academic profile of Latino students in the United States...” as they are particularly high achieving academically and involved in their schools and communities (p. 65). Similarly, Contreras (2011) found that the undocumented student population “is made up of high achievers who have overcome personal adversity to overcome challenges of being in a country that refuses to invest in their human capital” (p. 96). Despite stressors on students, including time and

money constraints, participants achieved high GPAs with ambitious career goals, and were eager for academic and professional development opportunities while in college. However, legal barriers due to their status frequently blocked these areas of development.

Undocumented Latin@ college students have blocked opportunities preventing full participation in campus life regarding professional development opportunities which, in turn, negatively impact their collegiate experience and opportunities for success post-graduation (Dozier, 2001; Ortiz & Hinojosa, 2010). Although limited, the existing scholarship in this area stresses that, “many facets of the typical career counseling and planning process conflict with or are not relevant to undocumented students” and that “career assessments do not necessarily take into account students’ values related to ethnicity or familial commitments” (Ortiz & Hinojosa, 2010, p. 3). The authors emphasize that career services professionals need to be informed about what majors undocumented students qualify for given restrictions on areas like site visit clearance, background checks, and travel restrictions.

Sam talked about his changing academic and career goals due to external constraints and explained that it “changes constantly just because of again the situation I’m in and stuff that I want to do versus stuff that I’m allowed to do. So trying to navigate that and trying to deal.”

Kate explained how she realized her status meant she had to change majors from education to one that did not require background checks:

Um because I did want to do education but I couldn’t do it. So that’s one of the reasons why I switched my major. And I have thought about doing other, um, careers and stuff but they too involve all of that process where you do need a social security and stuff. So it was almost going to put me at a stop. So whenever I did choose my career I knew I was limited to the options that I was going to choose. Well I think I figured it out by my sophomore year whenever I was doing an early childhood class, we had to go to a daycare and we were going to be working with the kids one on one so that required me to do a background check and everything like that. And I talked to my professor about it and told her and she was kind of the one that explained like, well she didn’t want to be rude or anything, but here’s the reality. You’re going to need all of that stuff so you can

eventually get into the whole environment and the teacher program and stuff like that. So basically she suggested that I look for another major. But she was very helpful and that. So it helped me.

Several students were unaware of many of these barriers as they started college, and when they were out with their status to academic advisors, they were inappropriately counseled to remain in unrealistic majors or to seek opportunities that are not available to them such as study abroad or education-related internships. For example, many of the students in the study wanted to become teachers or work with children, but after progressing to the later stages of the related majors, students realized they could not complete the major requirements because they did not have the required identification to pass background checks at internship sites.

It is particularly important for undocumented students to be efficient with the credit hours they are paying high amounts for, and many students were forced to switch majors later in their academic career with little guidance on how to transfer certain courses to a new major. Even when students switched to new majors such as business or science instead of education, they were behind on professional development and resume building because they were not legally allowed to hold paid internships or to secure paid positions on campus researching with faculty members. Miri explained how this limitation leaves undocumented students with empty resumes, which limits employment options even if a student is granted DACA:

Because even after Deferred Action I mean our resumes, some of us haven't worked at all. So and if we have worked, it's on our own time as tutors or something else. So they don't have a real resume to show that they have experience working or to show their work ethic or anything like that, so they have a hard time getting a job because they don't have experience in anything. And that's what a lot of employers look for.

Zoe spoke of her disappointment when picking up friends from a job fair on campus because she witnessed their excitement at the internships and interviews they received, which Zoe was ineligible for due to her status. She explained, "It's been really hard this, these last two years I



feel. Just because I've always known I am undocumented but the fact that I couldn't do certain things that my friends could do, it just really started to get me.” Her limited opportunities compared to her peers’ opportunities left Zoe feeling hopeless about her uncertain future.

These status-related barriers also resulted in changing career goals for many students once they realized the realities of legal restrictions. Many students found careers related to their original goals that did not have barriers in place while they are in college, while other students kept the same career goal despite the reality that there may be no legal way for them to secure any position in their chosen career using their degree post-graduation. Zoe described this frustration and uncertainty, which led to her depression in the sophomore year of college:

Why would I put myself through this crappy situation when I know I'm going to get denied? So it was just really, really, really hard for me to accept that. Because then I got to thinking, what's the whole point of me going to college if when I get my degree I'm going to have to go bus tables? I can't even network correctly without them telling me oh I'm sorry I can't help you, you know. What's the whole point of me finishing college when it's not going to be worth anything after I finish I'm going to have a degree and I'm going to be bussing tables? Because I can't get a real job with my degree. It was just really hard for me to accept it and to want to keep going. Because I feel like it had a lot to do with me kind of falling into a depressive state the spring of my sophomore year because I couldn't accept it. I couldn't, I just kind of gave up on myself. And that was something that I had never done because like I said when I was in high school, everything was different. I don't remember ever feeling down on myself because I was undocumented. I don't ever remember like bringing my own self down like oh my God like if you had papers you know I don't remember ever wanting to quit. Because I have this huge drive you know. Getting to college. And making it. But now that I was there it was like what am I going to do now?

Despite this uncertainty, students still expressed the strong desire for maximizing their time in college. For several students, this meant hoping to study abroad, which they quickly realized was not a legal possibility. Mia expressed her desire to study abroad and to learn about other cultures first-hand, but realized she is blocked from this college right-of-passage. She was especially interested in her institution’s China study abroad program, and suggested how helpful

it would be to have university educators trained in offering programs specifically for undocumented students because her advisor was uninformed on her restrictions:

We can't even go to, like we can't even participate in study abroad, which I wish I would've participated in so much. My school has gone to China and it's interesting because I adore the Chinese culture, like I wanta go over there and find myself a Chinese dude and like have him show me the world over there. But I can't participate in that because I'm not documented so, you know, when they come up to me and they're like, hey, do you want to go to study abroad in China, I'm just like, why would you ask me that, you know?

Some students knew they could not travel abroad because they would not be allowed to return home to the U.S., but still wished they could travel more freely in-country to conferences or summer internship and research programs. Sam explained feeling demoralized over the blocked opportunities for travel and internships because of his immigration status. He described, “that there are amazing opportunities out there to travel abroad as a student, do exchange programs, um to do great internship programs with the federal government, opportunities to run for office...” but it is his immigration status blocking these opportunities, and not a lack of skill or desire to participate.

These barriers to academic and career development, along with students staying focused on long-term goals despite these challenges, speak to CRT/LatCrit and resilience theory. For example, CRT stems from the concern that marginalized groups do not have power, which leads to unbalanced opportunities (Taylor, 2009). LatCrit themes also relate to these blocked opportunities, as they are a direct result of immigration status. However, these challenges based in LatCrit themes such as language, race, and ethnicity might also be seen as assets in achieving many campus missions for creating diverse educational communities.

CRT also relates to the topic of education resilience for marginalized students, as CRT stems from “a long tradition of resistance to unequal and unjust distribution of power and

resources along political, economic, racial, and gendered lines in America” (Taylor, 2009, p. 1). This CRT tenant is upheld by blocking undocumented Latin@ college students from equitable access to academic and career development opportunities, as these educational outlets would promote the potential mobility of undocumented Latin@ populations, which could be seen as a threat to the status quo. Despite these barriers to students’ academic and career goals, participants demonstrated resilience in maintaining hope and using their environmental and personal resources to stay focused on their educational persistence.

Due to their undocumented status, participants could not complete certain majors or pursue careers requiring background checks. Also, undocumented students are limited from full involvement in internships, study abroad, and travel. As highlighted in the following chapter, a few students were able to rely on coming out to campus educators who found ways to provide unpaid, local developmental experiences for them. However, students were aware their overall professional development experiences and future prospects were limited compared to their peers, but they still had the goal of attending graduate or professional school and ultimately working in their chosen career fields one day.

### **Organizational involvement**

As highlighted in more detail in Chapter Six, involvement in identity-based organizations was a crucial component of students’ college experiences, especially for facilitating students’ social connections. Student group involvement was seen as a way to have the desired traditional college experience, but many undocumented students faced challenges in participation because of family expectations to be home after class, or because of scheduling and commuting conflicts with work schedules.

Aracely explained a typical challenge participants faced in negotiating campus involvement with working enough hours to pay for school:

Because of work I wasn't able to get as involved as I wanted to. As I hoped to. When I was going to college I couldn't do the late night meetings, I couldn't do the volunteer sometimes, to volunteer or go to the events the organizations have because I was constantly working. So I feel like ultimately I didn't have the college experience aside from being in a group here and there and being at a couple of events. That financial, it ultimately came to, do you... I was constantly faced with decisions whether it be going to an event and being a part of this organization or going to work to actually keep myself in school. So I'm pretty sure a lot of students, undocumented students, face those types of decisions.

Some students felt their schedules and finances did not allow for active involvement while other students were able to balance finances and family expectations with campus involvement.

Finding a way to navigate involvement in an organization was one of the main avenues students could have as one aspect of a “traditional college experience,” which most participants cited as a goal they were unable to attain due to their status.

### **Chapter Summary: Findings From the First Research Question**

Several themes are highlighted in the findings regarding how being undocumented shapes a student’s college experience: Concerns about campus climate, emotional challenges, academic and career limitations, and concerns about involvement in campus and community organizations. The campus climate themes include students’ concerns about belonging versus marginalization, situations affected by social interactions such as coming out, connecting with other undocumented students, and encountering campus educators who are sometimes unaware or unsupportive of undocumented students. Emotional challenges include experiencing stigma and fear. Students also experienced limitations in academic and career development because of status-related barriers. Students wanted a traditional college experience, including involvement

in campus organizations, but they faced challenges to joining groups due to logistical scheduling concerns regarding commuting, work schedules, and family expectations.

In this chapter, I highlighted significant challenges participants faced in achieving higher educational goals. Participants reported that being undocumented shaped their experiences related to perceptions of campus climate, emotional challenges, academic and career limitations, and organizational involvement. Many challenges participants shared parallel themes and concerns raised in CRT and LatCrit. The following chapter explores how undocumented Latin@ college students demonstrate resilience in successfully navigating these challenges in higher education.

## **CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS - QUESTION 2**

### **What Factors Help Undocumented Students Overcome Challenges Encountered in Higher Education?**

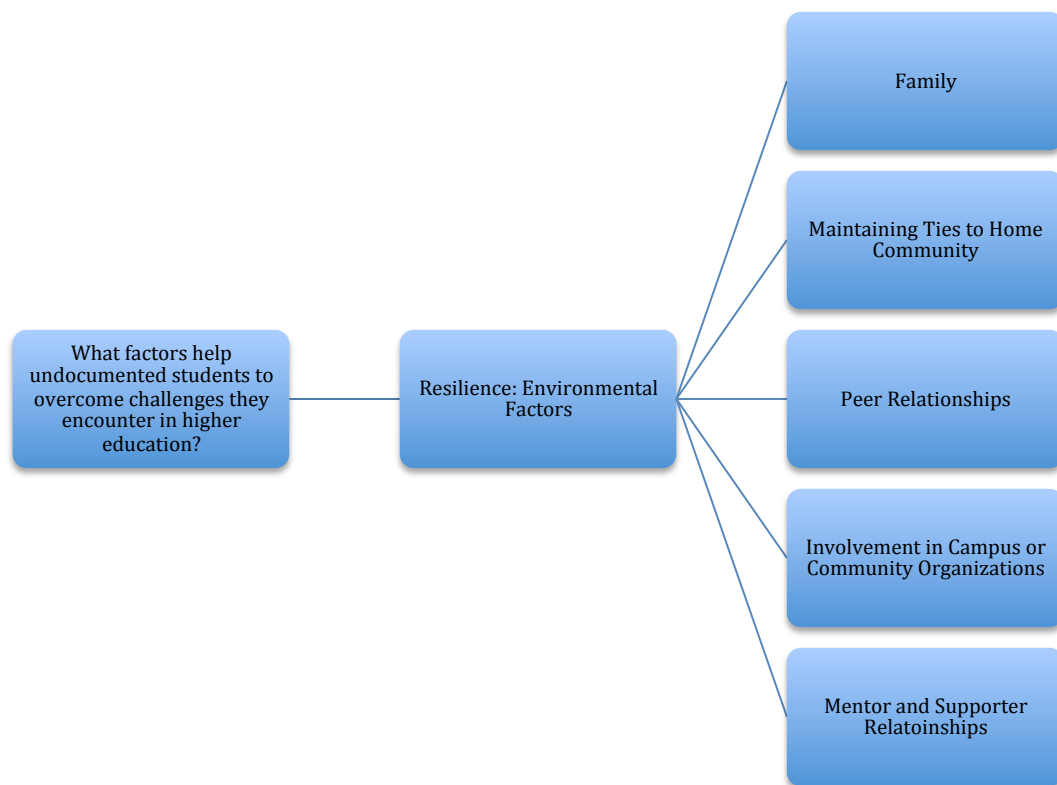
This chapter addresses the second research question: What factors help undocumented students overcome challenges they encounter in higher education? Both environmental and personal factors are important. Pérez (2009) said undocumented Latino students, when faced with many challenges, “draw on available personal and environmental resources” (p. 37). Environmental factors include themes related to family, maintaining ties to one’s home community, forming peer relationships, being involved in campus or community organizations, and developing mentor and supporter relationships. Personal resilience factors relate to being future oriented, effectively navigating the system, demonstrating effective coping behaviors, and embracing the connection between the personal and political. The final section of this chapter includes a discussion of participants’ lives post-DACA, which leads into the final chapter of discussion including recommendations for practice based on findings from this study.

#### **Resilience: Environmental Factors**

Environmental Resilience factors are forces external to the participant that provide positive influences on students overcoming challenges in their educational journeys despite barriers related to their undocumented status. These factors include family, maintaining ties to one’s home community, forming peer relationships, involvement in campus or community organizations, and developing mentor and supporter relationships. These themes are all interrelated while also being unique. As highlighted in one study by Pérez and colleagues (2009), environments are significant in that they:

...may contribute to a person’s risk of various problems, but can also provide protection to enhance the likelihood of positive outcomes. Resources are positive factors

that are external to the individual and help overcome risk, such as parental support, adult mentoring, or community organizations that promote positive youth development. (p. 6)



*Figure 6.1. Themes that emerged from research question two, part one.*



## **Family**

Although family pressures sometimes contributed to challenges students faced in college, participants also consistently identified family as a main source of support and motivation for earning a college degree. Participants did not often allude to extended family, but referred mostly to parents and siblings. A key point of CRT and LatCrit is that individuals of color encounter layers of marginalization based on issues related to race, class, gender, language, immigration status, accent, and phenotype. The foundation for these themes, physical or cultural, is rooted within the family, which participants reported as a key area affecting their educational experiences. Several students spoke about the positive pressure of serving as role models for younger siblings while fulfilling their parents' vision for life opportunity in the U.S. Students also spoke about the complexities of gender and cultural expectations in their families. Despite some challenges related to these issues originating in their families, participants reported ultimately receiving support and motivation from their families.

Participants also consistently acknowledged that the opportunity for a good college education leading to overall upward mobility was the primary reason their parents immigrated to the U.S. Therefore, participants knew that earning a college degree was a way to give meaning to all of the sacrifice their parents made by immigrating. Most parents actively encouraged their students to succeed in higher education, even when the process to achieve a degree was unfamiliar to them.

Students emphasized that access to a good education and increased life opportunities for their children were the primary reasons families immigrated, so families offered emotional support and, when possible, financial support to help students achieve this family dream. As such, students felt an obligation to their families to succeed in college as a way to justify the

struggles stemming from immigration. However, students did not speak of this obligation as a burden, but instead spoke of this responsibility with a sense of pride and determination. Maria explained that her parents sacrificed for her and her siblings to have a good education, so despite feeling lost at times, she stayed focused on making her parents happy through her educational success:

...my parents are the ones that also helped me... Even though they don't tell me like you have to go to college, you have to do this, just the fact of them bringing me here and you know, sacrificing a lot of things for, for my, for us, when I say us, it's like my sister and my brother, for us to have an education. It kind of like always keeps me kind of focused. It's hard because I know I have a lot of down moments where I'm like, I don't know what I wanta do or I kinda feel like I don't know where I'm going. Kinda feel lost. But I was thinking about that, like they sacrificed so much and they still are sacrificing because they're not able to go back and see their family members, you know. So I just think about that, like that kind of keeps me focused on always doing better and always striving for, you know, for reaching my goals. Kind of like helps me stay motivated and also keeps me focused to finish something, for them to be happy. To see that, you know, that they're, their struggle and their sacrifice was actually worth something, you know.

Zoe talked about seeing her dad struggle and work extremely hard to help support her educational dreams, and how this was motivation for her to succeed in college:

I've always told [my mom] and my dad that I want to show you that everything you had to go through was worth something with me. I want to pay you back for everything that you did. All those late nights that you worked, I want to give something back to you with my education.

She wanted her dad to see her working for a big corporation where "they won't look down on you. Somewhere so nobody will ever say anything bad to you." Her dad's vision for this type of positive work environment for Zoe stuck with her, and she emphasized how, "I didn't want to be a part of the labor force that worked really, really hard to get crap pay. I wanted to be something greater." Because of her dad's inspiration, "...now more than ever I just want to show him and my mom all that I can be. Because they brought me here."

Ignacio spoke about the magnitude of his family's situation and how he must be able to provide for his family through his educational success:

And I realized that just having a job outside of school without any education would maybe suffice for me alone but wouldn't be for family. And it also more importantly wouldn't be for me to help my parents. A lot of people would go oh that's a noble reason to go to school, you want to help you parents, they helped you go to the country. But sometimes they don't realize the magnitude of the situation when it comes to them actually stepping foot here in the U.S. The moment my parents set foot in the U.S. they let go of everything at home. From family to property to anything they owned. Not only that but establishing themselves in the country took years and years and years away from their time in Mexico.

Zoe's father worked hard to give her access to higher education opportunities, but he passed away before he could see her graduate. She explained the desire to make her family proud and to support them with her education and achieving the "American Dream:"

...I wanted my dad to see what he did. That's the whole point of the majority is that Hispanics have come, any immigrant actually, is to bring a better life to your offspring. And to give your children something better than you had. And so I wanted to give that to my parents. To tell them everything that you worked for, all of the discrimination that you had to face. Everything that you had to go through was worth something. And it was worth something for me and it was worth something to you. I was able to do this because of you. I was able to accomplish the American Dream because of your immigrant dream. I was able to do this because of your help...I think that honestly deep down inside, I think that's all the undocumented students' dream, to be able to provide for their family.

Most students, regardless of gender, successfully navigated family expectations and navigated college life. However, gender was a particularly salient LatCrit-related identity for several participants, and this significance stemmed from familial expectations rooted in traditional Latin@ gender roles.

**Gender.** Gender is a main component of LatCrit, as there is an inequitable distribution of power and resources along gendered lines. This refers to broader inequalities in U.S. social institutions, but participants spoke about gender in relation to the micro-culture of family life. Most students felt that gender played an important role in their experiences, especially as it is

tied to cultural expectations. However, women and men experienced these cultural gender expectations differently. Despite the pressure for women to juggle these gendered roles with academics, the women in the study reported ultimately having family support for working towards a college degree even if families did not always understand what obligations this entailed.

Despite having family support, women also faced constraints such as being responsible for housework in addition to academics, which also caused tension when schoolwork required being on campus late at night or when students wished to socialize outside of the home. The men felt different pressures, such as balancing academics with bringing in enough income to support their families. Older male siblings were also often looked to as role models for younger siblings who were learning messages about the reality of succeeding in higher education.

The women spoke about cultural norms dictating that they remain in the household and not leave to pursue higher education, so several participants had to convince family members of the value of higher education, especially when pushing for attending a four-year institution requiring a commute from home. Women also faced the familial expectation to be present in the household when not at school, thus restricting their ability to stay on campus late to study or to be involved in co-curricular activities. For example, Aracely described how being Latina conflicted with her having to stay at school late, which her parents did not fully understand:

It's from being Latina too. Like, I think of nights where I stayed at school till probably nine o'clock because I knew if I came home I wouldn't be able to get a paper done or whatever the case was. And I'd get calls about not being home and where I was. I know that you know as a woman I shouldn't be out late. Or just you know cultural. Problems arise too and so that was hard to try to explain to them you know, what I was doing and them not totally really understanding it.

Several women also had additional household responsibilities that took away a significant amount of time from academics. Karla explained that her workload was heavier than what her peers faced because culturally she was expected to do housework as a woman in the home:

I think also I think the gender roles that women do the housework, I think that's still like a practice here at my grandparents' house. And I just know that it does, if anything, it's just another, it does add to my workload of all the things I have to do. I know that before I leave my house, this house gets cleaned. Unless I really have, I woke up late that morning and I really have to be somewhere. It's like a routine and I think like when I go, when I do that, I finish my routine and I go meet up with like if it's my sorority sisters or someone else, I just know that my morning was completely different than theirs. They just rolled out of bed and got there, and for me, like I did step one through four before I got there. I think for me, like that's how I have to automatically think my mornings and how to they go and what needs to get done before I do leave the house. And I do think like yea it's part of my culture.

Maria spoke about how her parents eventually grew to understand what it means for her to attend college as a woman, but she had to directly address this topic with her parents. She spoke to her parents about gender roles while she was enrolled in a women's studies course, and this helped her show her parents that life as a woman and student in the U.S. is different than cultural expectations in Mexico. Ultimately, Mari's parents understood her academic obligations and were supportive of her stepping out of traditional gender roles from Mexico:

I think what helped me and my parents kind of like, you know, kind of break that barrier and that cultural, I don't know, values or I don't wanna say cultural...beliefs I guess was that I was in women's studies and I would always talk to, you know, my parents about like gender roles and I guess that was one of the things like I'm really open. Well, I mean, I talk to my parents a lot about like, you know, things and issues in society. So I guess being in women's studies and kind of like knowing gender roles and like, kinda like just knowing how society wants us to be or kinda fit like in a box or gender role kind of... I don't know. So that kinda helped me talk to my parents about, okay, you know, now I need to be at school, you know, all this time. You know, to study or whatever.

Miri described having these gender and culture-related conversations with her family, which ultimately helped them come to an understanding of the differences in her educational life in the United States:

And they kinda understood that it's different. It's, you know, it's a different kind of society and I mean, they always, I mean, that's why they brought us here to the United States because they wanted education. So they kind of understand like whatever it takes for us to like graduate or to like do certain things, it's not gonna be like how it is in Mexico or how, you know, they believe it's supposed to be. Like, for example, me coming home, you know, a certain time, like can't stay out late or whatever. They kind of understand, you know, that it takes more than, you know, it takes breaking barriers in order to accomplish certain things, you know, like education. Like a degree, like English. So I was lucky in that sense, I guess. That my parents kind of understood and how, you know, kinda understand how, you know, gender roles play in society in our culture. So you know, I kinda had an easier way knowing they were supportive and helping me out by doing all that stuff.

The male participants spoke about the pressure to be breadwinners for the family, to financially support their family unit while also paying for school, and to role model higher education to younger siblings. Eddie described barely making ends meet in being able to provide for himself and his mother. If he missed work for one weekend, it would have such a large impact on his finances that it could mean they are unable to eat and could risk his mom having to live on the streets:

But you know I think the thing is that at times I felt on the brink of failure and success. If I don't work a weekend, that means I'm not going to be able to eat. That means that I'm going to risk being on the street. But more importantly, that means that my mom could be on the street. And that's just one of the worst and biggest responsibilities that I have. I can't have that. I can live on the street. I don't want to. But can my mom go too? No. Not at all.

Ignacio spoke about gender in his family and the expectations placed upon him as a male. He expressed his desire to move out on his own one day, but also acknowledged that this would be frowned upon due to his family-oriented culture. So, as the oldest male, Ignacio upholds his family responsibility and remains at home to help with daily tasks. He is also aware that his success in higher education has opened up conversations in the home about his younger sisters attending college one day:

...Eventually move out and be on my own, but in our culture it's very family oriented. And I don't think it would be correct for me to just leave. And be like well my situation

is better so bye. So I just I stay with them and try to help the out with the usual things, clerical things, translating, going to the bank. Just the things they can't do on their own within the society...Yea definitely so. Well I feel like culturally speaking at least at least in my culture for Mexico, there seems to be a trend with the males having a big responsibility for the family. The oldest male. And the females, their expectations are evolving because I remember there were times when girls weren't even encouraged to pursue higher education, but now that my parents see me in school and struggling and making some progress that's noticeable to them, now I hear conversations at home that were never there before to my younger sisters. It's s gonna be hard, try to do this, try to do that. You can make it. You're able to. And our brother struggled and he's making progress but I mean you were born here, you can do it. So the expectations and then in the academic world are beginning to change because of role models set by older brothers.

Ana provided her cultural observations of how Latino men have different family expectations while trying to attend college. She explained that school is not a priority for men because they have to focus on earning money and supporting others. It would be a cultural anomaly for a male to be supported by a woman:

But for them, I don't think school is like a priority I guess because they're men. They have to provide. And they have to earn money because noone is gonna support them. I guess that is kind of a difference, right. Like women, you can expect to be supported by you know, your partner. But men, it's kinda weird to be supported by a woman. So I guess they have to be the breadwinner and look ahead. So they didn't really have much of a chance, well, I guess they didn't have school, not that they didn't have the chance to go to school. I guess for them it's not like that important. As long as they have a job, in making ok money, they survive. They're not suffering through any basic needs. They're fine. I guess they think different. They think different than I think. So but for someone undocumented, like a guy that wants to go to school, I dunno, I imagine it would be different. I don't think it'd be the same experience.

Overall, traditional gender roles dictated that men were expected to be breadwinners and role models, while women juggled household responsibilities and overcoming restrictions on time they spent out of the home for academics. Although men and women faced different cultural expectations based on gender, the participants addressed the importance of remaining close as a family unit. All but a few participants still lived at home with their families out of financial necessity and cultural expectation.

**Cultural expectations.** Families were a foundation of support for students, although family life was also a source of challenges. In addition to traditional Latin@ gender expectations, participants faced additional layers of expectation related to cultural expectations in the family. Students were expected to role model the value of educational success while also maintaining close ties to family and giving meaning to the sacrifices families made in coming to the U.S. for increased life opportunity. Participants often interpreted these realities as motivation to succeed while relying on family support in overcoming challenges. For example, participants spoke about the demands to role model educational success for younger siblings while also feeling pressured to achieve educational goals to give meaning to all of the sacrifice their parents made in coming to the U.S. Participants also consistently acknowledged that the opportunity for a good college education leading to upward mobility was the primary reason their parents immigrated to the U.S.

Despite this foundational belief that students would have great educational opportunity in the U.S., family was often a primary site of cultural tensions between home expectations and college life. Ignacio described his family's conservative Hispanic culture and the importance of living in the same place to remain close as a family. He experienced tension when he moved away for a semester to attend college because his family felt abandoned while also trying to remain understanding of his academic situation:

My parents are very conservative. In the Hispanic culture people tend to stick together as family, so this past semester, me moving away...just during the week has become very challenging for them. Very challenging for me. There's a lot of tension in relationships. They feel like I'm abandoning them in a way. But at the same time they're trying to understand that I'm not.

Several participants explained their parents did not fully understand the intricacies of higher education in the U.S. in general, nor did their parents have college experiences in their country of



origin to rely on for context. Aracely experienced this lack of parental understanding, which translated to her parents not knowing how to show support. Ultimately, her parents avoided talking about college with Aracely because they were so unfamiliar with this part of her life. Not having her parents ask about her academic life had a negative impact on Aracely:

You know um my family, it's funny 'cuz I laugh, but my family they're supportive in the sense that they're like yea go get it, but they don't really ask you know. They never really ask about my day or my schools or you know um how I was doing how I'm paying for it or any of that. So I think that um that really that was something that has affected me. Due to the fact that they were unaware of why I was going to school. So because no one in my family, no one in any of my generations have ever gone off to college, it was new. And they didn't know how to provide me that support. But the fact that they didn't really even ask, it really affected me.

Eddie had similar experiences with lack of support, and shared, “And when you don’t have any support, you know it’s coming home is so depressing because you have no support and nobody to go to when you want help with ah something so simple as like how to spell a word...The whole experience it’s just horrible.” Similarly, Miri explained how her loud and crowded home environment made it difficult to study, but that her parents did not understand why this caused her to stay at school late to do work. Miri’s parents also did not understand that college life meant there were afternoon classes and evening obligations with organizations. Her parents questioned why college demanded this type of schedule, and they were also afraid of her driving late because she did not have a license. Miri knew her peers did not face these same struggles that stemmed from her being undocumented, which her parents reminded her of frequently:

And I think the other challenge has been I think because I live in a house where there’s a lot of people, it’s a lot of family members who live there. And I don’t have, for part of my college, I didn’t have my own room. And it was really hard for me to study. So I had to stay at school late at night to study at school because it was quiet and I knew that I could have all the resources available there. But my parents didn’t understand that. They were always, home come you get home so late? How come you’re always at school? You know I thought you were supposed to be home at three, like in high school. So they fully didn’t understand what the college life really meant, as far as even academics because I didn’t go out and party or anything like that. It was just doing my homework

but they didn't understand that I had classes in the afternoon and they didn't understand my community involvement with the organization. So they were like how come you have to go to that meeting every Tuesday or how come you have to do this for them or how come you have to do that? So that was my biggest challenge because my dad was like well you know you don't have a license so I don't want you driving around and being out too late. Because you're undocumented this and that could happen to you.

Miri describes her status-related limitations as a great challenge for her, especially because her family was so worried about her doing things that her peers could freely do without concern:

So they kind of, that was a challenge for me. Knowing that I was undocumented and because of my status I couldn't really do all these other things that other students' parents weren't so worried about. I think that was one of the big things that I had to deal with my parents not understanding the college life. Or what really went on in college. And then on top of that them telling me and constantly reminding me that I'm undocumented. On top of the other things that reminded me that I was undocumented every day. So that was difficult to overcome while I was in college.

Zoe experienced tension when juggling attending college with being present to help her family. She spoke about the cultural importance of being home and taking care of family, yet she has to live two hours away for college. Her mother does not speak English and often needs help in daily activities, yet Zoe is unable to be present to help her mother:

You know, I think I just, I miss being home, you know, and I think that, like growing up in the culture is very different. You know, like we're always very, we're really home people. You know, family is always really important and I think that's one of the hard things that I've had to struggle with, is like being... Although it is two hours away, like not being, you know, with my mom when something happens or like when she's stressed or like when she needs something that she can't like do because she doesn't speak English or she doesn't have the license. And you know, things like that. Like being undocumented and my mom being undocumented and my brother being undocumented. You know, kinda just put, they put up another barrier, you know. like I can't help them. I can't go down and help, you know. I can't go down and open up the business for her. I can't go down and do certain things to help her that are so easy if I were back at home, helping her because I think, you know, within our own culture, that's what it's like. You're supposed to help your parents, you're supposed to take care of them

Maintaining these cultural expectations are difficult for undocumented students in college, and requires ongoing negotiation of family expectations rooted in culture, and the expectations of academic life in college.

Based on the literature review, I anticipated that students might discuss the importance of maintaining ties to their home community while navigating the unfamiliar environment in higher education. However, beyond speaking about family and a few other individuals such as childhood friends or a high school teacher, participants did not emphasize the role of maintaining ties to their home communities. Most students still lived at home though, and this separation of environments provided a unique perspective on the campus climate.

The topic of religion was discussed by participants as a part of cultural expectations rooted in the family. Religion is generally important in the Latin@ culture, especially family traditions surrounding Catholicism. Surprisingly, only a few participants spoke of the role religion plays in their lives. For students who did mention this area, religion was significant in their family and cultural upbringing, and in overcoming challenges in higher education by relying on faith in a higher power. Ignacio explained how religion helped him emotionally and mentally cope with being an undocumented college student:

And I feel like having faith in God has kept me emotionally sane. And psychologically sane. To the point where I can these things and finish them or do the best I can in them without breaking down and just despairing and letting everything go and everything fall apart.

Michael also described how faith in God has kept him calm and centered throughout his educational challenges. During difficult times, he will “cry out to God” and “leave it up to God” because “He is the one that has moved everything and placed me where he has placed me.”

Michael said it would be difficult to face his situation without God because he would “get freaked out right away, but instead he approaches challenges by staying calm and leaving things “in the hands of God.” He described developing this connection with God:

You know, but ok once I encountered that love, it was like since that moment I came to God it was like, ok I know he’s going to give me my papers. I know he’s going to give me that opportunity to keep on going. So since that time it was like, since I encountered

that love of God, he actually made me, he transformed me, he made me see things from a different perspective.

Miri's religious views led to moving out of her parent's home due to conflicting beliefs, but she still identifies God as playing an important role in her experiences, but not as much as other factors such as educators and loved ones:

It's mostly them, and in earlier colleges, I was really involved with church. My dad is a pastor at this evangelical church and you know at the start of my college I was really involved with it and everything but as I'm going through my college career, I started going less so I'm less involved. Yes. I recently moved in with my partner. Yea so just my parents' religious views weren't the same as mine I guess you could say, into what I was doing. So I was basically cornered or taken to the route to move out with my partner. And I moved in with him and his family for a bit and then now we are currently living with my brother. But I still believe in God and I still think that he has helped me out and he has been there to help me out and has provided all this financial resources and that I have acquired along with my, along with my academics or the extra curricular that I'm in now. But I feel like he's there for me too. God. So. I think that also pushes me but I don't think it's as strong as my family, my partner, and the teachers, the professors that I, has been.

Students who identified religion as an important support factor did not mention particular figures from their place of worship, but rather a general sense of putting faith in God. Family and traditional cultural norms influenced the religious aspect to students' experiences. Relying on faith provided students with a sense of calm and hope in the face of uncertain futures.

Students' families also provided support and served as a motivating factor for educational success. Participants emphasized the importance of achieving their educational goals as a way to honor the sacrifices their parents endured to bring them to the U.S. for educational opportunities. Students also reported the importance of role modeling educational attainment to their younger siblings, regardless of their siblings' immigration status.

### **Maintaining ties to home community**

Many undocumented Latin@ college students come from traditional Latin@ cultural backgrounds that value collectivism, family, and close community relationships. Aside from

living at home with family due to financial constraints and cultural expectations, most students did not mention maintaining ties to home communities. Students did not feel completely integrated into campus as a new home-away-from-home, but they also did not report continuing or expanding previous relationships from home. This could be due to time constraints with academics and work, and having to negotiate two different worlds. Zoe explained negotiating home and college life where two cultures collide:

Or like you can't go home and, you know, expect things to be normal because I have a lot, like I don't really talk to anybody that's back at home anymore because this whole, you know, oh, you're in college now. You just think that you're, you know, the shit. Like nobody's gonna, nobody wants to fool with you. Nobody wants to talk to you because they think that, you know, you're white now. Like you just... and that was kind of hard. That's kind of hard to juggle both, both cultures, you know.

Ben discussed the tensions between his identities and communities where he presents himself as a preppy student with the same socioeconomic status as his peers, while his undocumented home life is a separate identity:

And I've been, I've been like, my whole, my whole thing this summer was coming to terms with who I really am. And I don't know, this is, if this will make sense at all but there's that whole, like identity dilemma in me that I had and still kinda face, you know. Am I the Ben that presents himself to the, you know, Anglo community where I'm, you know, went to prep school, went to [university] which is also really incredibly preppy and I put on this façade of having the same kind of socioeconomic status and same... just kind of background. But then when I go home, it just hits me hard, that that's not where I'm from and, you know, it's kind of like I was playing two roles. And I have been and those lines kind of just, they were separate, which Ben I truly was. And that, yeah, that's very much part of me being undocumented, having like I said, keep saying, playing two roles...

This contrast in lived experiences was briefly touched upon when a few participants spoke about the motivation to use college success as a way to overcome situations other family members or peers from home were unable to work through. For example, some participants spoke about family members or peers from home who got involved with gangs, were in jail, or started families at a young age and were unable to continue in education. These ties to home

influenced participants by pushing them to succeed as a way to avoid having similar experiences to those at home. Overall, participants emphasized juggling the roles of two separate identities between their home and school lives.

### **Peer relationships**

This section focuses on how participants emphasized the important role peer support played in helping them navigate challenges on campus. Given the challenges limiting students' time on campus and restricting access to social venues requiring transportation or identification, there were few opportunities for students to connect with peers in social settings. Participants who were able to negotiate involvement in a campus student organization were most likely to identify the importance of connecting with other students in these venues. Specifically, most peer connections occurred in student organizations focused on Latin@ student issues or in undocumented student groups, which is discussed in further detail in the next section.

In addition to providing tangible resources such as financial support through student-raised scholarship funds or providing an occasional place to stay or study, peers also offered a great deal of emotional support to one another. Students felt a sense of community with peers in student organizations and often student groups were sites of connection due to being a safe place for disclosing one's undocumented status. Aracely explained how important it was for her confidence to connect with peers in a student organization, especially because in contrast to her home environment, her peer group provided a space to discuss her identities:

When it came to like my feeling of integration, actually, my whole first year I didn't do anything about it. I just kind of like wandered around campus. I guess I dunno what I was, I dunno if I was hoping for someone to approach me or whatever. But um it was when I went into one of the meetings of the organization I became a part of and you it took one person to sit down and talk to me. And um he just asked me questions to feel welcome for me to come back. After that I think it's just easier for me to walk into anything and not be as afraid...Another thing is probably being more confident. Even

with the identity that I hold. You know, not being afraid to disclose my identity or not being ashamed when to disclose my identity when I need to.

Aracely shared that this prior lack of confidence regarding her identity likely stemmed in part from her family, but that learning about Latinos as a young adult helped her gain confidence:

You know I felt like before something, at least in my family, we don't even really discuss it within my family. You know like the hardships, it's kind of like we all just live our lives and it's going good or it's going bad. But you know having that open discourse, learning more about this community, learning more about Latinos, it really helped me ultimately gain that information within myself, to get more confident, just you know. Be more involved... Aside from the friends that I met in the group, in the organization that I'm in, it provided a lot of emotional and a lot of support. They were always very encouraging knowing that we all have different struggles, we all have different stories. We ultimately always push each other to do our best and to stay in school and help each other out when the resources were limited. Or when the resources were gone. We always found a way to just join together and help each other. That was very important.

Miri also got involved in organizations where she could connect with peers to seek advice from others who have similar experiences. This involvement led her to become politically involved at school, as well benefitting from emotional and practical support from her peers:

They were just a support group for AB540 undocumented students. And so I found them and I was able to connect with them and they really also helped me go through and navigate school. Not just in a moral way or in an emotional way but also they gave me tips on how to choose my classes so I could finish faster, or that I wouldn't take up time or money. And I made really good friends with them and that's when I started getting involved politically at school. I became the secretary that my first year in college. And the second year I became co chair. I was really involved with them most of my time, other than school, was given to that organization. And they really helped me in a lot of ways. My first semester in college I got a 4.0 and my parents were happy.

Only two participants mentioned a current romantic relationship. The first was Ana, as she explained her legal battle to return to the U.S. after deportation related to her marriage, and the second was Miri who said her partner is extremely supportive and his family has also been of great emotional support for her during college.

Overall, it was difficult for students to connect with peers because of limited time on campus due to barriers such as family expectations to be at home, not being able to live on

campus, and facing long commutes without being able to legally drive. However, students who found a way to navigate these barriers to connecting with peers often did so through involvement in a campus student organization. Most participants spoke about connecting with other Latin@ students and other undocumented students through these groups. These peer relationships provided critical support ranging from emotional and tangible support to encouraging students' identity exploration and political activism in a safe environment.

### **Involvement in campus or community organizations**

Students' involvement in campus and/or community-based organizations is a common factor contributing to resilience. Finding a way to navigate involvement in an organization was one of the main avenues through which students could have a piece of a "traditional college experience;" so many participants cited this as a goal they were unable to attain due to their status. Some students felt their schedules and finances did not allow for active involvement while other students became politically active through organizations. However, involvement in organizations provided students with the opportunity to engage in political activism and find support, which helped participants reduce feelings of isolation while becoming increasingly visible with their status. The organizations students spoke about were either campus-based or were in the community near the university, as opposed to organizations directly related to their home life outside of college. Campus and community groups were important sites of connection with other undocumented students and educators as allies. Many students reported finding support in these organizations, reduced feelings of isolation, and the motivation to become increasingly visible with their status.

With only a few exceptions of student activities in which participants are no longer involved, such as a dance team, each student who is involved in an organization chose to



participate in a group that works directly with Latin@ students or undocumented student issues and immigration reform. This finding is consistent with literature highlighting that undocumented students are often civically engaged with political activism surrounding immigration reform (Abrego, 2008; Gonzales, 2008; Pérez, 2009; Pérez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2009; Rincon, 2008). Students were active in these organizations primarily on campus and sometimes in the broader community.

Most students saw their involvement in organizations as being socially beneficial, while political involvement was often an important part of the experience as well. Many students spoke about identity-based political awareness and how this intersected with their organizational involvement. Alicia explained how she felt empowered through the exploration of her identities that occurred in her organization, and she also felt it was a privilege to give back to other undocumented students seeking higher education. She emphasized that her status was temporary but her educational success would be with her forever. She knew she was not “going to have that traditional [college] experience but what was more important - my education and making something of myself that I'm really proud of, and contributing back to the community that helped foster me.” Alicia described the importance of her political awakening after learning about the Chicano movement and connecting with the historical context of her situation. She also extended this involvement to work with community organizations including an active community rights coalition.

Karla's student organization provided support for her and others in the undocumented student community. She explained some of the support her group offered such as scholarships for AB540 students, and also providing a safe space for undocumented students to tell their stories. Her sorority is Latina based, and her sorority sisters have shared experiences leading to a

collective desire to bring about immigration change. Karla finds support in this group that strives to “do some change in the community and I think that helps a lot that we work together. Work together doing something good for our communities and you know we all have a similar role of...we’re there to support each other.”

Eddie described the importance of support among minority students and how an identity-related student organization is important. His institution is in a small town without many Latin@s, which has led him to “realize how much I confided in my Latino brothers and sisters, coming out here.” Eddie has found connections within the Black law student group, which is an example of his observation that, “It seems like the minority students seem to stick together regardless of color you know... So the Black law student association seems to be the center of support for every other minority student.” Despite some cultural differences between various racial and ethnic minorities, these marginalized student communities formed a bond together in the context of the broader white campus environment.

Alicia explained that as her activist identity grew, she chose to become increasingly involved off-campus to make a bigger political impact than remaining active only on campus:

...but as I got more involved again with the movement, the movement isn't just limited to campus. It's much more open to the community. And so um I began to get more involved with community organizations who push policy. And um as a senior now while I really admire these student groups, I've sorta expanded to more community groups, trying to get more involved and engaged in policy at the local, at the regional, at the state, and federal level. Because I feel that's where we're really going to make some change, not only for ourselves, but for our families. For example, comprehensive immigration reform. Some campuses are doing something about it but some aren't.

Alicia also highlighted the importance of being in a politically active group because she can facilitate dialogue and break down barriers about what it means to be undocumented:

But I think getting involved and not being afraid to say that I am undocumented and unafraid. And opening up discussions with people that traditionally don't have them is also really important because a lot of people have misconceptions of what being

undocumented is. Being able to have discussions, as hard as they can be, can really break down some barriers that we have when we're organizing. Because when you're organizing, you're trying to push for some policy change, and you can't do that if you can't sit down with the people making those changes and have a discussion with them. So yea, that's another really important aspect of how I got here. Finding a support group, being politically active, feeling empowered.

Aside from Zoe's negative experience comparing herself to other undocumented students and feeling like she was in the least privileged position possible, all of the other participants reported connections with other undocumented students as a source of great strength. Alexa explained the crucial role her undocumented student organization played in her motivation. In their weekly meetings, she benefits from "just being surrounded by those people who have really big dreams and aspirations and really won't stop until they get them. That really helps me, helps me go more than anything. I think it's just inspirational being around them."

Alexa finds inspiration in this situation and the group members positively influence one another to stay motivated and persist, because, "We all kinda influence each other to keep going and to not stop, this is only like an obstacle. So we just motivate each other." Aracely also found motivation in her group, but initially she was hesitant to step out of her comfort zone to attend a meeting for her undocumented student group. However, she credits taking this leap of faith as one of the best things she did because she found emotional and academic support through her undocumented student group, and, "I really don't know if I would have finished school had I not met this group of people."

### **Mentor and supporter relationships**

The support of mentors and other adults is an important reoccurring theme for participants. Students spoke about the importance of having a mentor or educational supporter to help with tangible and emotional concerns during college. These helpers provided important emotional and tangible support for students, and visible allies in positions of power and privilege

helped students develop a sense of safety in their academic community. Some students identified with mentors who shared similar cultural backgrounds as them, or because these educators were informed and involved with issues in the Latin@ or undocumented communities.

Due to these personal connections with mentors and supporters, several students reported the motivation to succeed as a way to not disappoint those who have helped them so much. The support students received also helped them feel validated and worthy of such positive attention, which helped them persist through challenges. In addition to expressing a genuine interest in the personal and professional success of students, some educators also had a positive influence on students by sharing their own experiences. This reciprocal sharing of life journeys breaks down barriers and fear of connecting with educators on a deep level, and resulted in significant connections between students and mentors.

In deciding to come out on campus, Miri sought the assistance of a few counselors and advisors on campus who are AB540 Ally trained. She reached out to these particular individuals because, “I know they already have gone through the training and they are gonna exactly know kind of what I’m going through...” Not all gatekeepers or supporters were full-on mentors with a close, sustained emotional relationship with students. However, adults willing to provide financial assistance or help working through campus policy loopholes were still a significant part of students overcoming challenges. In addition to providing this support, students identified mentors who they connected with on an even deeper and more ongoing level. Several of the mentors students spoke about were university-affiliated, but a few were also non-university affiliated community members. Mentors and supporters helped students navigate the system, connected them to resources and other supporters, provided emotional encouragement, and often provided financial support as well.

Several educators were not initially aware of how to help students navigate campus policies, but participants reported success stories when educators were willing to work with them to research options for meeting their needs. Oftentimes, an understanding university educator was a key player in helping students navigate technicalities related to areas such as admissions, financial aid, registration, seeking a job, or securing an internship. In addition to mentors, helpful gatekeepers and other supporters were essential in helping students work through loopholes in the system or in forming creative solutions to common barriers.

Ignacio explained the importance of genuinely trying to help undocumented students and showing an ethic of care regardless of outcome. Even if educators cannot change a student's circumstance, simply demonstrating the desire to help makes a positive difference for the student. This willingness to help often opened up opportunities for Ignacio, but was still important even when a solution could not be reached, because, "Sometimes you won't always get the answer you want...but it makes a whole lot of difference when you know it's someone who tells you and they show that they care." In contrast, encountering educators who express, "you can't be here, with an attitude of I don't want you here" is "extremely dis-encouraging."

Several students spoke about the importance of mentors and supporters in helping them change their outlook on their educational progress. Alicia described how it is scary to be in such an uncertain situation with restricted options, but "when I met the mentors what they really did was pull it outside of me and empower me in a way that I couldn't let my status bring me down." She worked on coming to terms with her identity and has found supporters who willingly work with her situation. Her summer camp payroll officer provided her a special stipend to navigate her situation that did not allow for a regular paycheck, which had a positive impact on Alicia, because:

...partners like that, that can really understand your struggle and not be frustrated with it, and really sympathize and go the extra mile to make you feel not ashamed or bad about the situation, definitely makes it a lot easier.

Showing sympathy and not making students feel ashamed about their situation is a key way to show support for undocumented students.

Maria said she knew her mentor was supportive because she served as an advisor to an undocumented student group, worked with immigrant movements, and formally researched immigrant rights. Maria described the role her mentor plays in her life, which includes serving as a positive female role model who offers advice and invites students into her home:

I consider her my “wo-mentor”...because I would always visit her, ask for advice. You know, and like whatever I needed, she will be there in her office. And a lot of undocumented students know her and...she’s just open, you know, she opens her office, you know, for us but she also opens her house. She always has like gatherings.

Because this particular educator is so welcoming to undocumented students, Maria described her as an extended family member who is always there because, “I always like call her, you know, even if I don’t need anything, if we just wanna have coffee or eat or even just celebrate anything, she always comes up.”

Zoe also described university supporters as becoming like family, and she said they are her number one factor in overcoming challenges in college:

But in terms of resources, I definitely feel that the faculty at the university have just been really wonderful to me. It's something really important that I feel has helped me more so than anything else. Because I'm there with them more than I am with my mom now, so they've kind of become my other family. And so seeing as how different we are, but how much they care. How much they really want me to succeed because I'm like facing so, the statistics are really against me, you know.

Zoe faces a multitude of challenges in college, but one of her university supporters, “Dr. M,” knows how to navigate the system to help Zoe since she has worked with undocumented students before, and “she just really outreached to me. She's taken me out to lunch a million times. She's

just really concerned on how I'm doing, if I need help with anything, whether it be financially, emotionally, anything. She's always there.” Dr. M is also a connector to other networks of university educators who are supportive of undocumented students. Dr. M connected Zoe to a financial aid advisor who is supportive of Zoe and her situation. The financial aid advisor has been a gatekeeper for Zoe for finding funding and in showing support for Zoe’s plans and for immigration reform overall. This network of university supporters has become like family to Zoe while she is away from home at college:

... so they've all kind of just been on this journey with me. Dealing with everything. That's kind of just how that networking grew. Through Dr. M and her sending me to people that are as well pro-undocumented students and DREAM Act and things like that. I've just kind of held them really close because I don't really have family outside of [here]...

Ignacio also spoke about how important it was for his educational supporters to serve as connectors with other faculty and staff allies on campus. One administrator connected him to a professor who understood his situation because he is Hispanic and this faculty member connected Ignacio to another educator who he has become very close to ever since the connection was made. Every semester, “she contacts me, she asks me where I am, where I stand. How we're going to take care of my account hold, how I'm going to be able to register.” She has enough power on campus to serve as a gatekeeper that can help Ignacio bypass certain barriers such as overrides. These educators have also worked to help Ignacio finance his education, even if it meant working on a solution until the last day a bill was due. Even if these educators are not able to help Ignacio overcome all of his challenges, he is extremely thankful for all of their ongoing hard work and support:

Regardless of the outcomes, I understand not everything's going to be perfect. I understand that there's going to be hindrances and that. As much as I want to go to school every semester and be like every other student with the same advantages to build

upon each semester, I'm just in a different boat. But I really sincerely appreciate every single ounce of effort they've put towards my situation.

Miri also spoke of educators who took an interest in her personal situation and reached out to help her. She described difficulty in opening up to her professors about her situation but, “once the professors found out, especially in the Soc department, that I was undocumented, they opened their arms and always tried to help me out of whatever I could... not a lot of students have that.” When Miri’s brother was arrested and faced deportation, her Sociology professors took the initiative to help Miri and provided emotional support. She expressed how much these faculty members helped her in college, which is a situation she thinks is likely unique to her department compared to other disciplinary areas.

Much like with familial ties and expectations, students consistently identified the desire to not disappoint mentors and support individuals as a motivating factor in overcoming educational challenges. Students wanted to succeed to demonstrate to mentors that their help did not go to waste. Zoe explained that her supporters’ assistance made her feel like she was worth all of the help she received, so this gave her motivation to persist through challenges. She felt trapped by the uncertainty of her future and limited opportunities, including extreme financial burden:

Like I’m still trapped. You know, I’m not like fully free. I’m not fully able to take advantage of all the opportunities because you only give me a little. You didn’t give me the whole package. And so like I think that’s been a really big thing for me, to struggle with, too, because I don’t have the same pressures that American citizens do. Of course, like you have the pressures of being a minority and finishing college and not falling into that statistic but then put on top of that, like not having financial aid.

The pressures of financing her education despite an uncertain future led Zoe to question the worthiness of her remaining in school:

You know, like those pressures are real and they’re there and they affect me every day because I sit in class and I’m like, you know, this is stupid. Like I don’t know why I’m



here. This is so expensive...I don't feel like I want this anymore because, you know, you work so hard to get it but then when you're there, it's like you're so exhausted that, you know, you just kinda have to start questioning whether you want it or whether it's worth it anymore because of all of the things you have to go through.

However, she understood that not all undocumented students have the same level of support she has, so she wants to justify the sacrifices of others who have helped her pay for essentials such as food, rent, and books. She realizes, "that that is so special and strange and it's very rare for people to want to help so bad. I must be worth it, I guess."

Students found mentors through various avenues, often resulting from disclosing their status to a trusted university educator who then became personally and professionally invested in the success of the student. Other mentors were found through involvement in campus organizations focused on undocumented student issues, or by students approaching a faculty member who expressed support for undocumented student issues inside the classroom during class discussions.

Mia talked about several educators who had a positive influence on her by taking an interest in her personally and by sharing their own experiences with Mia. She also connects with a particular professor across racial divides because he is informed about the political conditions in Mexico, and he knows about Hispanic issues that he discusses with her often. Another professor who is a lawyer is really talkative and positive when interacting with Mia, and is particularly supportive of her career goals, including checking in on her future plans and offering to write a letter of recommendation for Mia. Overall, these educators play an important role because she said, "I identify with them because they point me out. Like they're not afraid to talk to me and I'm not afraid to talk to them back. It feels good to know that they, that they notice me, you know." These educators created an environment where Mia felt like she mattered on campus.

Several students identified their mentors as also members of the Latin@ community, and many students spoke about how meaningful it was to them to have role models on campus that visibly looked like them or who personally understood Latin@ culture. Ana explained the importance of seeing visible representation of others who look like her on campus publications:

This is not a big thing, but, where you go on the [university] official site, you don't see Latinos on their pictures. You see these white people or these you know Vietnamese or Korean. You don't see them in there. So it's like, we're they're saying oh these people are the ones that we have here, or the ones that we want here. But maybe that's not necessarily true, but if you see someone that you can relate to, that's going to make things a lot easier.

Zoe explained how a relationship with an educator who identifies as Mexican turned into a family-like bond. At first she was skeptical of this educator teaching Latino perspectives because of the professor's perceived privilege, and Zoe entered the class angry. However, once Zoe got to know more about the professor, she realized she had also overcome some life struggles. Eventually the two bonded and Zoe now explained her as a second mom:

Like I have to talk to her, like at least twice a week. I have to go to her office and just like talk to her about my life and what's going on and she gives me a lot of really sound advice, professional advice and life advice and she's helped me with my process.

This professor offers advice and has also given support to Zoe regarding struggles in her family, whom she has met. When Zoe was struggling with academics and life overall, she wanted to quit school, but this mentor supported her in regaining her drive, focus, and good work ethic. She has also “supported me through a lot, a lot of stuff and she's been in there when I've been having panic attacks and crying and she celebrates my victories with me.” Their shared Mexican cultural value of having something to eat led this mentor to buy Zoe meals when she was too poor to afford food. This has reminded Zoe of the cultural importance of looking after one another, and has ultimately led to Zoe feeling accepted as a part of her mentor's family too:

Like she's one of those people, you know, that would buy me lunch because I was so broke that I didn't have food, you know, at home. We'd go to lunch and she'd buy me lunch or she would like buy me dinner or like, you know, things like that, that she would do that, you know, or like the thing to do, she's Mexican, too, so like you know, like over anything, like, like you have to have something to eat. Like she's one of those people that like reminds me of, like what we're supposed to do. Like we're supposed to help our fallen brothers and sisters. Like you're supposed to help them and like she has been a great example of that and her family has been so accepting of me and like I'm part of her family now, too. Like I come for dinner.

Although some students spoke about having Latin@ individuals or people of color as supporters, none of the students spoke about having a person who is undocumented as their mentor or role model on campus or in the community, which is likely due to a lack of undocumented people having access to serve in these formal university roles. Therefore, formally trained allies are important. A few students who attend the same institution spoke about the significance of a university-led ally training program for faculty and staff who support undocumented students. Upon completion of the program, allies receive a Safe Zone sticker for their personal office space. Aracely described the importance of this program for identifying supportive educators where students can feel comfortable and seek help:

Yea, and even if you didn't know the professor, it wasn't your professor, just having that, seeing that visible sticker on their door, made it you know made it easy to even go up to them and talk to them or thank them for being a part of it without needing to know them. So I've encountered a lot of faculty and staff that were very supportive. And that made it easier...Because a lot of times students are intimidated, they don't want to say anything or they feel like maybe they won't be accepted but just even some sort of simple or anything that shows that they're, they stand in solidarity will make someone automatically feel comfortable and able to speak or seek that help.

Miri described the importance of supporters in positions of power serving as visible and active allies on campus because these educators can “understand what it means to be undocumented or have somewhat of an understanding.” She thinks the ally program on campus has helped many undocumented students and it is important for professors to declare their stance as allies, especially in opposition to others who disagree with them. Miri explained that, as a

whole, people who are undocumented benefit from the support of allies in positions of power and privilege because they can create safe, helpful spaces:

...need people who are in positions of power, in somewhat of power, or who have privilege or citizenship that stand up and say I support these people openly no matter who is hearing. And that the students and people in general, undocumented people in general, will feel safe and will know that that person is there to help.

Participants' experiences echoed a common theme found in literature regarding mentor relationships as crucial for students (Castellanos, Gloria, Mayorga, & Salas, 2007; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000). In addition to mentors, participants also identified other educators who were supportive and helpful, but on a less ongoing and personal level than mentors. Most participants stressed the significance of a mentor, university gatekeeper, or other older adult who was of assistance financially or emotionally. Although several negative interactions with campus educators left students feeling detached from campus, there were also consistent success stories of educators serving as mentors in students' college journeys.

### **Resilience: Personal Factors**

In this section I detail personal resilience factors, which are characteristics internal to the student that helped participants overcome challenges in their educational journeys. These personal factors include themes such as being future oriented, effectively navigating the system, demonstrating effective coping behaviors, and embracing the connection between the personal and political. A key aspect of CRT and LatCrit is hearing the verbal journeys of marginalized groups who can share their experiences as a means to feel empowered and to create a more positive present and future. In this study, participants reflected upon personal resilience factors used to actively deal with current status-related challenges while also helping them focus on working towards a successful future.

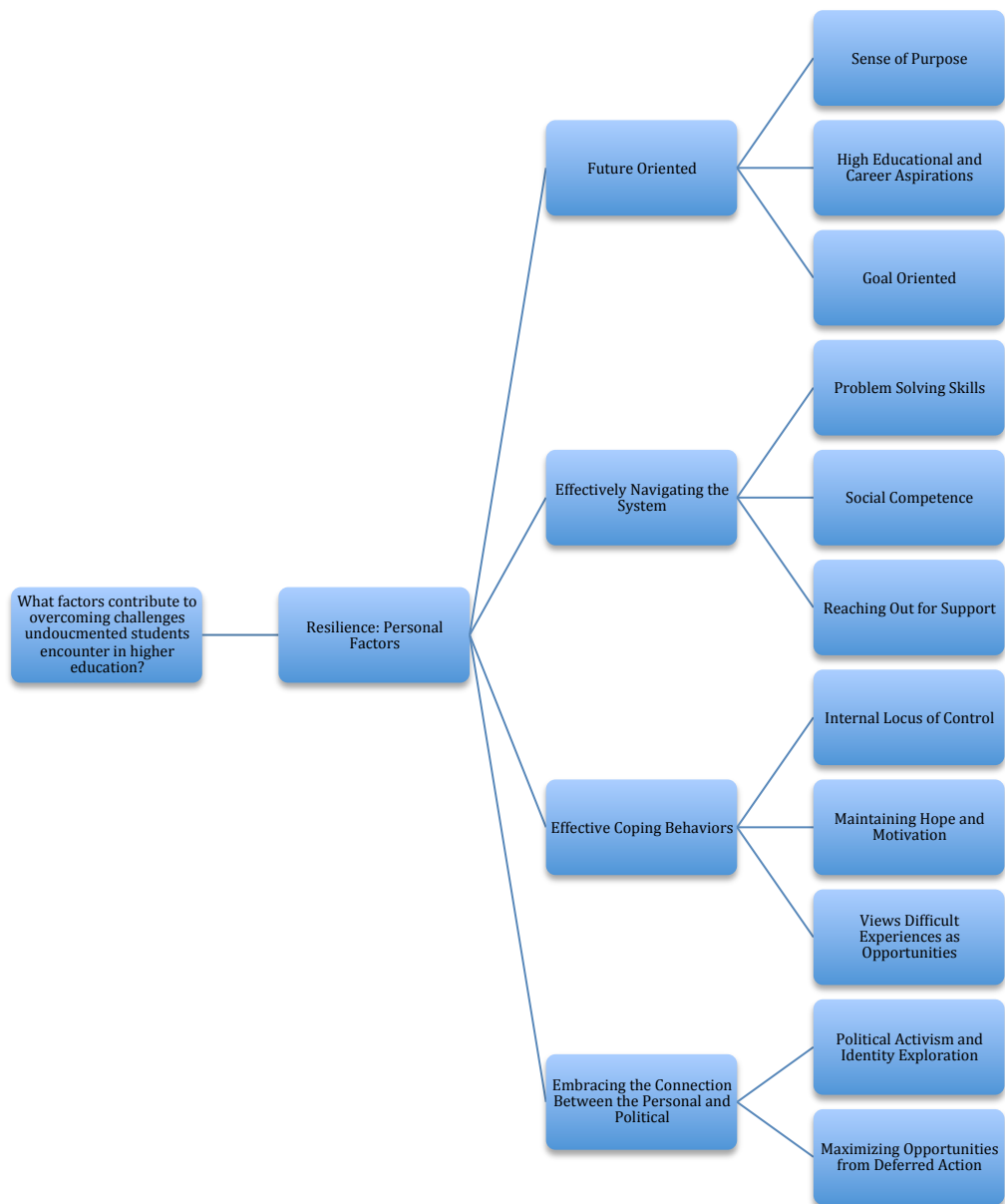


Figure 6.2. Themes that emerged from research question two, part two.

## **Future-Oriented**

Participants demonstrated resilience through being future-oriented, which includes having a strong sense of purpose, having high educational and career aspirations, and being goal-oriented.

**Sense of purpose.** Students consistently demonstrated having a strong sense of purpose in life despite the extreme uncertainty they face post-graduation. This concept was not clearly highlighted in existing literature. However, it relates closely to other themes that are highlighted as important in the literature, such as being goal-oriented and having high educational and career aspirations. Demonstrating a sense of purpose ties together students' past, present, and future in a way that acknowledges their status-related challenges but also highlights how participants maintain faith and are proactive in remaining focused on their goals.

Zoe described how she fought to attend college to better her circumstances. She did not fully realize she was undocumented until her first year of college, "but the fact that I had so many limitations...my eyes still weren't open to it...It was really difficult you know." However, she explained not getting discouraged about her circumstances and always working to create a better situation for herself no matter how hard she had to work to get there:

But I didn't feel like I let it get to me. Like if a door closed in my face, which many did, that I couldn't apply for certain things or I couldn't get into certain programs because they needed my social. It's just like ok, and just kept moving on. I never looked back and was like oh my God like I couldn't get in. I didn't get depressed about it I guess. And so then I figured that I didn't want to go to a two-year community college just because I felt like I was better than that. Not to say that community college is bad or anything but I felt like I could push myself more than that. So I didn't want to stay here. I didn't want to stay in the ghetto. I didn't want to stay. That wasn't for me. So I really looked really hard enough I found a good amount of scholarships and I told myself if I can afford to go to a four year, then I'm going to go to a four year. I don't know what I'm going to have to do, if I'm going to have to work, then I have to work.

Eber talked about having faith and the sacrifices he faced to fulfill his dream of becoming a physician. He described that working towards his goals meant having to work harder than others while being resourceful and handling reoccurring defeat. He described fighting for his future even though he knows he may be unsuccessful in fulfilling his dreams:

You have to try harder than you know your friends and your peers and your rivals. It's you have to learn how to be resourceful and how to, you have to be able to deal with defeat and disappointment almost on a daily basis. So there wasn't a single moment, it was mostly just the whole idea that you have to come to terms with the concept that you can work your hardest, you can put everything that you have and still you might end up with nothing. And if you don't do that, you just, you won't be able to even go to class anymore. And it sounds simple but it's a very hard concept. We work hard, we put in the effort because, deep down we want something of this. And if we don't get anything we just don't do it. But that's not really how it is here. You just have to go into it, you have to have faith basically.

For Eber, admitting to himself his biggest dream of becoming a physician was an important moment in his life. Owning this dream gave him a sense of purpose for his future, even if it was not certain that he would be able to achieve this dream because of his status. Acknowledging his primary goal of becoming a physician was a positive and uplifting feeling for Eber:

...one of the best moments of my life is when deep down I realized at least for me I told myself I want to be a physician. Even if it means putting in all this effort and sacrifice, all the things that I have, and just basically giving up part of my life for it, even if nothing comes out of it. I'm going to do it. Because that's what I want to do. That's my dream and one day when I get that, it is like a huge weight got lifted from my shoulders. It was a reality...it was like it just felt like at least the first time in my life I had something that my peers didn't have. Just something incredibly positive has come out of my situation because up to the point it had just been handicaps and obstacles and things to get in my way but it's like that day, I finally realized something positive came out of this and it's probably the most positive and most uplifting thing that I have ever felt in my life. In a way if I wasn't in this situation I would have never gone through this and I would never be at this point.

Two students mentioned the significance of activities outside of school that helped them maintain a sense of purpose in their otherwise limiting circumstances. One student explained that she likes to decompress by reading and by writing poetry. However, her poetry is tied to

reflecting on her identities, and a few of her poems that have won awards are on the topics of immigration reform and gender roles in the Latin@ community. Ana, who is currently living in Mexico waiting to return to the U.S. after deportation, explained that distractions are an important coping mechanism for her, so she focuses on memorizing vocabulary words in preparation for the additional schooling and courtroom career she hopes to pursue when returning home.

Helping others and becoming involved in activism are also ways students showed a sense of purpose to overcome challenges. Alexa described learning about the reality of her situation through her college experiences, and the importance of being humble, honest, and respectful. Her coping mechanism involves finding purpose through helping others by giving advice:

Just going to the university, having a different perspective and learning about all these ways that the undocumented population, minorities, low income are facing and just learning to cope with it. And learning to deal with it because sometimes there's nothing you can do. You can try to change your perspective and maybe be an activist and work your way to want to change that, but just learning to know that that's how it is and that's how it might be. And there's nothing you can do about it... So the way I cope with that is I...um, some of the things my parents taught me is to be humble, honest, respectful, help people when you think that they need help, so you know just by being myself and trying to do the best I can when I see somebody who needs help or you know have some issues, I think that's the way that I cope with it. It's not necessarily um, I don't know how to say this, but um so I guess the way that I cope with it is because I've lived through it. I know what it feels like. And just maybe sometimes talking to people, giving advice, is a way of coping with it too.

In a few cases, a strong sense of purpose came from proving naysayers wrong in accomplishing educational goals. Miri explained her determination to succeed despite barriers in the system or skepticism from others. She does not give up and strives to prove others wrong if they question her ability to succeed. Her aunt did not believe Miri would excel in college because of her status, but Miri worked hard to proved her wrong:

Well the same thing that I couldn't accept no for an answer, I'm like that. That's my personality. I couldn't accept no for an answer and I try to find any way that I can to



make things work out for, if it's in my best interest for it to work out for me, then I just try to everything to make it work out like that... So I think that I am very determined and I think that has really helped me get to where I am today. I also don't give up. And because I, like if somebody dares me to do something or tells me, you won't do this, I prove them wrong. I want to prove them wrong. And I think that's one of the reasons I also got to college. My aunt she would tell me when you're undocumented, we're undocumented, you're not going to get to college it's going to be really hard for you. And I told her I *will* get to college. And when I got to college I kind of told her look I got into [university] and she said wow. So I think that proving people wrong, that they don't believe in me, has really helped me out too. I don't take no for an answer and if somebody tells me no you can't do it, I do it.

Demonstrating a sense of purpose and future involved awareness of goals and facing challenges head-on to achieve these dreams. Students worked hard to achieve the best for themselves and emphasized the importance of having faith, being resourceful, and finding meaning in activities such as artistic expression and helping others through political activism. Being determined and proving to others that their dreams were achievable were also strategies participants used to focus on their sense of purpose and future.

**High educational and career aspirations.** Participants held high educational and career aspirations despite the challenges they faced in working towards these goals. In addition to most participants being academically high achieving in grade school, they also earned high grades during undergraduate studies. This reality combats the sentiment participants heard from others that they were incapable of success in college, or that they were taking away admissions spots from other qualified students. Also, most participants expressed the goal of attending graduate, medical, or law school. Several participants were also already enrolled in graduate or professional school. Sam described his extremely high level of involvement in college and how he carried this passion and hard work throughout his graduate degree where he served in multiple leadership roles while working many hours a week:

So I focused on making sure I need to work about 20 to 30 hours a week. At one point I had a full time job working close to 40. In-between that I got very involved with school.

Started a few organizations. Now I've been around for 5 or 6 years, lead teams to competition on government and model United Nations competitions in New York. Which lead to a creation to a new bachelor's program at my university. I was elected, in undergrad I was elected five years in a row, the position representing the entire university at the higher education committee in the state of Illinois. I eventually was elected to a trustee, which is the highest position any student can serve on the governance of the university. So I was at the table with the president of the university and all the vice presidents. And all the trustees that were appointment by the governor of the state. And the final year, I was elected student government president. I led at first to advocate for students, whether it's DREAM related or the implementation of a university pass of all busses in the city and lower tuition costs, and the advocacy role, fighting on behalf of all students at the school. And once I came to graduate school, the last position I had was also elected to a Vice President role on handling external affairs, which required representing the university and the graduate student community at the state capital, traveling to Washington DC, lobbying on behalf of federal research dollars and so forth for the university.

Sam held high educational aspirations and maximized his experiences while in school through involvement and various leadership roles. His passion for these positions also translates to his career goals of working in politics.

Mia explained the importance of educational success as a means to obtain her career goals despite the barriers undocumented students face. She explained that it is understandable some undocumented students “get depressed...And they just don't feel like they should actually do something” but she emphasized that “they should look forward to life even though they don't have papers” because “maybe one day they will if they keep fighting for it.” Mia explained that, “if that day comes, hopefully by then they’ll be ready to get a good job, contribute to society, and help their local community. She stressed the need for undocumented students to prepare to give back to their communities, especially because “that's really helpful for the Hispanic community” to inspire kids to be passionate about education from a young age. Mia feels strongly that education is really important and she wants this message to spread to her community because education is a path to finding a good career:

I wish that other Hispanic undocumented people would just know that how important it is to get an education. Cuz that's the pathway to getting a good career, a career they actually want to be in. Little jobs here and there, like liquor store jobs or waitressing jobs, they're just temporary jobs. They should be able to see past that and know that one day they can be paid doing what they love.

Students expressed having high educational and career aspirations, and they were able to maintain these goals despite so many barriers related to their status. Students earned high GPAs and some took on leadership roles and were involved on campus. Most participants expressed the goal of attending graduate, medical, or law school, and some participants were already enrolled in advanced degree programs. Participants realized that education translates to opportunity for upward mobility and hopefully one day having the opportunity to work in their chosen careers.

**Goal oriented.** Each student demonstrated great determination in remaining goal-oriented in the face of challenges. This focus on achieving goals is particularly remarkable given the reality of students' limited futures rooted in uncertain immigration reform. Aracely explained that her passion and determination pushes her to overcome negativity from those around her who question her ability to achieve her goals. She works hard even if she might fail because she would rather be a risk taker than prematurely give up in the face of challenges:

I think I'm just very passionate, you know, um when I hear that I can't. Or I won't be able to. It kind of pushes me a little more. It makes me more passionate about what I'm doing. So um I would constantly hear from my cousins or aunts and uncles that they were questioning why I was going to school. You know they were questioning how I was paying for it or questioning me why I was even doing it if I wasn't going to be able to get a decent job or anything. So I think the fact that they taught me that I was pretty much wasting my time. It made me even more passionate about it. And just kind of their negativity kinda infused more like motivation, you know. So I think I'm able to take all the negatives and want to prove everyone wrong, and so I work harder towards things...I've always said that I'm...very determined. I know when I want something I'll try and I don't, regardless of whether I can or can't, even if I'm going to succeed or fail, I'm not afraid to try. So I'd rather go down the line and fail with trying than not try at all. Wondering what could have been you know. But I definitely I like that about me. I'm somewhat of a risk taker.

Sam also emphasized being determined despite his frustrating situation. He said he works to “navigate through the entire system” and “overcome” because he is “an individual who's not supposed to...have or achieve as much as I've achieved. Because of my situation.” He explained feeling frustrated but remaining motivated and determined to succeed despite challenges:

Despite all the challenges and barriers that are set up on by others, just continue to knock down those walls and continue to quote unquote hustle, and make sure that you know I'm progressing and that I'm just doing the best that I can for myself and my family, my future. First you feel the frustration.... So how do I handle it? Is just simply to not put myself in any situation. Is just to ignore it. You feel the frustration, but there's nothing that you can do. At least in the meantime. I think everybody's different and it's your personal motivation. I'm determined to succeed, I'm determined to get ahead in life, to progress.

Despite the reality of an uncertain future, Ben negotiates planning ahead with making the most of each day as it comes. He acknowledged that he has “developed a mentality of sort of to typical cliché *carpe diem*,” while also realizing “you have to plan for the future and it’s one of those, the resilience theory you said... yea you just have to kind of keep telling yourself yea it’s gonna get better.” He explained that at one point last year he “lost all hope” but his family and mentors were there to support him and to “put me back on track if I do fall off track. And then once I’m on track, look at the bigger picture.” He focuses on everything his parents have scarified for him and he wants to “make sure their dream comes true.”

Students remained goal oriented despite facing negativity from others and the reality they might fail. Participants also focused on their goals while acknowledging their futures were uncertain because of unclear progress with immigration reform. Motivation and determination were key attributes for participants in working towards their goals, and they acknowledged the

significance of family and mentors in supporting them in this quest to achieve their goals despite difficult odds.

### **Effective coping behaviors**

Participants demonstrated resilience through using effective coping behaviors in the face of struggles during their higher education journeys. Effective coping behaviors are those that facilitate students moving forward when encountering challenges instead of engaging in harmful behaviors when experiencing setbacks impeding their academic progress. Participants demonstrated having an internal locus of control, maintaining hope and motivation, and viewing difficult experiences as opportunities. Instead of becoming discouraged and giving up, students used a variety of effective coping behaviors to face challenges and move forward. Participants demonstrated effective coping behaviors in the face of challenges instead of giving up or engaging in behaviors detracting from ultimately achieving their educational goals.

**Internal locus of control.** Despite the many tangible external barriers undocumented students face in their educational paths, participants still demonstrated having an internal locus of control. Students were aware of the numerous challenges they faced due to externally imposed legal restrictions, but participants often chose to reframe their thinking and take ownership of making decisions to positively direct their journeys.

Zoe explained how she decided to create opportunities for herself and worked to be as active as possible in shaping her future, regardless of progress with immigration reform. She acknowledged the reality of the limitations imposed upon her such as not being able to hold a corporate job or travel internationally, but she is determined to create her own opportunities instead of waiting for opportunities to come to her. She explained shifting her focus internally for creating a path to success:

...searching for opportunities that I can create for myself and not necessarily expect people or expect for something to happen. Or wait for something to happen. You know, I need to create those opportunities for myself now. You know, try to figure out who I need to talk to, how do I need to maneuver, how do I need to move, where do I need to relocate? You know, where the opportunities are I think is what's key for me in the movement right now is to, you know, kinda just like look out for what I have to do next and not really put all my eggs in one basket for the Dream Act to come through or for immigration reform to come through and be like, oh, I'm just gonna wait a year to, you know, hope that the immigration reform passes. You know, like I, I can't afford that. So I have to create those opportunities for myself...

Focusing on creating her own opportunities directly relates to coming to terms with her identity.

Due to the second-class citizen treatment she has received in the U.S., she is also questioning if she wants to become an American citizen one day, because:

... that's my new motivation...I have come to terms with who I am and I have to live with that. You know, I have to live with the fact that I am undocumented and I might well be undocumented for much longer, a long, long time. And being okay with it and stuff, mourning it is not gonna change it. Not just gonna magically get my papers one day. You know, like I have to work on what steps I need to take now that are gonna make me successful one day...and I think at one point in time, I was like, you know what? I don't even wanta become an American citizen because American citizens have not been very nice to me and I don't think I wanta be a part of that. But I don't, I don't see it as like my ticket. You know, I don't see it as my golden ticket. I see it as something that could help me but if I don't have it, I have to find something else that can help me. And I think that that's one of the big things that has helped me like get through is that, you know, I can't put that as my only opportunity. I have to find opportunities that are gonna...help me.

Zoe reframed her situation to focus on what was within her power to emphasize a path to success despite what changes might be brought about through immigration reform.

Ana explained making a conscious decision to demonstrate persistence and reframe her thinking in the face of challenges. She described, "Once you know I started to see, oh ok, well I'm going to be able to make it, it's going to be ok. Like my head, my thinking changes. And it's like ok, you have to do this now." She related this intentional shift in thinking to being persistent and explained that going with the flow is not an effective solution to overcoming challenges

because this strategy does not guarantee something good will happen. Instead, Ana emphasized how she decides to take control of her situation by making things happen:

You can't go with the flow...because going with the flow is like you're not doing anything. You're waiting for something to happen to you. It shouldn't be that way. You soul make things happen to you. Good things. And wait for them to happen because, let's say you don't feel lucky well, your lucky day isn't going to come knocking on your door saying go out and do anything you want because you're going to be lucky today... Yea because you just keep waiting and waiting and that doesn't guarantee something good is going to come your way. You have to make it happen and not just go with the flow.

Karla also talks about feeling strong by taking control of her life by reframing challenges to positive situations. She attributes this internal locus of control to “having a very strong female role model around me growing up” in her mother and grandmother. Because of their influence, Karla feels strong and is also aware she is the role model for her younger siblings. She takes more risks than her siblings such as moving out of her home and attending college, and she focuses on “not showing so much weakness ‘cuz it's better not to. And kind of controlling my mind and how I think and see things. See it more in a positive way than a negative.”

Ana described herself as realistic, but said she also reframes her thinking to be more positive so she can take ownership of her situation. She described how it is tiring to hold negative thoughts, so she takes ownership of her emotions so she can be optimistic that she can make her dreams come true:

After a while it's tiring thinking things that are not so good for myself. And I try to look at the bright side like there's something good has to come out of all of this. Right? If you really want to do something you can make it happen.

Ben also described feeling like he takes ownership over his life and, as a result, has experienced great successes in not identifying as a victim of his circumstances. He described a situation in which this positive attitude about being in control of his successful journey surprised people

interviewing him for a newspaper article, because they were looking for a story about extreme struggle and hopelessness:

...I did an interview with a newspaper, used a pseudonym...it was for my local newspaper and they expected me to kinda come up with like a sob story, being like, yeah, no, it's been difficult. I could barely eat. That whole thing. Cuz they were completely shocked when I told them my story. I was just like, their reactions were just so funny cuz eventually I called them on it. Were you expecting a sob story? Yeah, it was like, do you guys realize my story so far has been a success story? And they kind of didn't know where to go with that which is really, really funny but really, really disappointing.

Ben experienced disappointment with the journalists who expected a sob story from him, but much like the other participants, he emphasized taking ownership of his success and future and not wanting to be a victim of his circumstances. Participants demonstrated having an internal locus of control by reframing their thinking to be more hopeful, by seeing the positive in their situations, and by believing they could take action in carving their own path to success regardless of immigration reform progress in the future.

**Maintaining hope and motivation.** Participants gave many examples of choosing to maintain hope and motivation despite challenges and an uncertain future. Although it was difficult at times to be hopeful for a positive future, participants emphasized that it was important to maintain motivation in their present educational and career progress to build a foundation for success in the future. Alicia described how positivity helps her overcome challenges and disappointment. Since she was young, Alicia tried “to be very emotionally stable...I feel that that stability is what sort of kind of keeps me going.” She is realistic that “there’s always going to be ills,” but she tries “to look at things in a positive way.” Alicia emphasized the importance of having a positive outlook as a means to create change in the face of disappointment and setbacks:

There's always going to be hardship, but if we keep looking at the negative it's going to consume you. You have to look at some sort of positive form of you have to try to find a



way you can create change, and sometimes it's gonna be discouraging when you lose. I know a lot of students were *verrrry* disappointed when the federal DREAM Act didn't pass in 2010. And it hurts. It hurts very much. But you have to keep going.

Alicia said that, despite this hurt, she had to remain focused on the future because, “there's a lot at stake and that's worth fighting for.” Ultimately, “You have to remember why you're doing it. For yourself, for your family, for your friends, for your loved ones, for community.” Not giving up was for Alicia’s own benefit as well as a way to honor others who have been a part of her journey.

Karla explained her strategy of dealing with disappointment by looking forward to the next opportunity and using her support network:

I just know that when an opportunity comes and I know I can't take it cuz either I don't have a social security or something to prove, or to like to be able to either get that job or get that internship or get that scholarship, um I usually I just, I mean it does sound depressing but I always think like this wasn't meant to be. I think I mentally have to push myself forward or think positive with the support of my family, I think talking to especially my sister who is in the same situation as me. And a couple of my friends, we talk about it and we make ourselves feel better. And just always think like this wasn't for us, this wasn't our time or just stuff like that.

Eber emphasized the role of hope and never giving up despite the uncertainty undocumented students face. His primary coping strategy is that, “I guess it always boils down to just hope. To never letting that hope leave you.” He said the main piece of advice he would give a younger undocumented student is “first off, have hope.” Eber expanded on this advice by stating, “But also try to surround yourself with people and with activities that will be able to instill that hope even when you think there’s no point to it any more.” He explained the importance of undocumented students being tenacious and never giving up, as “It might sound simple...for undocumented students...going to college, and succeeding is not so much about how smart you are, or just how talented. It’s more about how tenacious or how much you can hold in there without giving up.”

Students described their internal sense of hope and motivation regarding their futures, and they also often mentioned the role others played in maintaining this positive outlook. Maria explained how she stays motivated personally, but how this is supplemented by connecting with others such as peers and professors:

So it's interesting to like, it's hard to keep motivated when it's when sometimes you're like what's the point without documentation? So I think it's really hard because sometimes you do have a lot of emotional, not depression, I would say, but sometimes you just think about it and you're like, I'll keep going, and it's hard sometimes to like just get that out of your head. Just got to keep going, keep going. Um I think my personal um I guess being able to self-motivation does help you out a lot. Because um but I think I got the self motivation from being able to be supported by everyone else like um just sort of community to push you to keep going. Like having talks with other peers that are in the same situation kind of like yea we're in this situation but it's you know, just kind of having the same conversation about like it's going to be, it's better to have some kind of education than nothing. Especially in our situation. So I think self-motivation, but self-motivation you get it from peers and other people that you talk to that are in the same situation that you're in.

In addition to the importance of peers, Maria also described the key roles professors can create in helping students with educational motivation:

Oh even just you know professors too. Professors that I have talked to um kind of you know, they always say like I remember one time one of my professors, she's like just get your degree and we can work something out later. Like they're just get your degree and we'll see what happens in the next two years, you know. I mean, you're always going to have us, and we can figure something out. We can get you a job or something. They always kind of just bring kind of like a hope for you after you finish your degree. I think that's kind of something, you have to be self-motivated to do well in school and graduate, but it's because they have created that little hope at the end of the tunnel. So I think it's a combination of both, you know, like personal characteristics so ok you know I have this focus so I can do it, um but at the same time, it's also people that kind of like supplement that.

Kate demonstrated tolerance for ambiguity in her future while maintaining hope, especially post-DACA. She focuses on her hard work as a means to a better future, especially now that she has the opportunity to work through DACA. During difficult times, she stays positive and thinks about carrying her education with her into the future:

...just hoping that knowing that I'm working towards something. Before I used to be more negative about it just because I didn't feel like I was going to go anywhere. I was going to school and everything but I didn't know if after I graduated I was going to be able to do anything, just because I hadn't done anything about my status and stuff. But just recently with the whole Deferred Action that came out and that they're allowing undocumented students to work, since I've applied for that and stuff, I feel like I have more hope. Once I get done with school I'll be able to find a job in my career field, so I always feel that I have to, even though sometimes it gets hard, I have to think ahead of what it's going to be worth. You know. You just can't sit there and be upset because you can't do anything that day but you're working towards something that's going to be with you basically the rest of your life.

Students described maintaining hope and motivation despite current challenges and an uncertain future. Participants focused on positivity to overcome disappointments, and also never stopped trying to succeed because the struggle is worthwhile. Demonstrating tenacity and having support from peers and professors were ways students remained focused on a hopeful future.

**Views difficult experiences as opportunities.** Students saw challenges as an opportunity to grow personally and to feel empowered in overcoming hardships, which then gave them additional strength to draw from in the future. Students were very community-oriented when describing how their challenges could translate positioning them better to help others. Aracely explained using her situation as a way to “role model for Latina women to pursue a graduate degree. I don't think that it ends with an AA or a BA. I think there's definitely more being kind of like that.” She emphasized that the underrepresentation of Latina women in education is a problem, but she plans to use her circumstances to better this situation by becoming “an advisor, be someone...that other Latinas can look up to. And want to model for.”

Students also used career and professional preparation limitations as a motivator to achieve their professional goals and to help others facing similar challenges. Mia shared her motivation to achieve her goal of helping other undocumented women, especially related to

domestic violence concerns. She strives to be a role model to women who are undocumented so she can show them they can have positive futures as contributing members of society:

I am really motivated to get out there and show other undocumented women that they can succeed without having a male partner or that it's ok not to be documented. It's ok to excel. When I see other women in positions like that are in my position, I'm a victim of domestic violence, and when I see other women that are dealing with that, I push myself forward and I want to be a role model for them so that they know that even though they're in difficult situations, being undocumented, having kids, being victims of violence, that they can still look forward to something. Like being part of society and contribute.

Eddie explained how his positionality ultimately helps him bring a unique and relevant perspective to his work in law school. Compared to his white classmates, he can use his situation to better understand the law in a unique way and can identify with undocumented immigrants:

I know I don't remember the exact quote but I do know that Justice Sotomayor, she would expect an undocumented immigrant to use the richness of their experience to reach a better conclusion than a person that has not gone through those experiences. That's something I think about often when I'm in class and I'm studying amongst my white counterparts, I'm thinking of how I can apply the law to the things that undocumented immigrants experience on a daily basis. So I think, I dunno I just think it's very important for me to continue to identify with undocumented immigrants and DREAMers and all that.

Alexa shared that the limitations related to her status have served as a source of inspiration for helping others in the undocumented community. Specifically, she enjoys working with undocumented high school students to encourage them to attend college. Alexa uses her experiences as a foundation for encouraging others in similar situations to achieve their educational dreams:

Just knowing that what I've gone through and what others go through makes me want to help them. And better their future or if someone is an undocumented high school student like we do for [organization], and tell them hey you can go to college. There's a lot of resources that can help you and we can do this and that. Just knowing that I'm able to do it and that it is possible makes you want to help others. And let everybody know that they can do it. Whether it's a job, a university, certain policies that think they can benefit

from. That definitely has changed my motivation to actually work and to help human development field and want to help others. For sure the undocumented community.

Eber described how he would be a more effective physician one day because he is at peace with facing pain and suffering due to his status. The isolation he experienced due to his status could have led him to get stuck in his pain and loneliness, but Eber described instead becoming humbled and self-reliant from his experiences. The struggles he felt were chronic, so eventually Eber stopped being afraid of these emotions and embraced them as a way to help him in his future career as a doctor working with patients who are experiencing pain and suffering:

So I was pretty much on my own. There wasn't anyone really to talk to... So I guess, but I mean in a way, maybe it's good because it does teach you to be self-reliant and to just basically be able to do things on your own. And well yea but I mean even more important than that, I think that it teaches you to, it humbles you. It teaches you to understand about pain and loneliness and just all those awful feelings that everyone runs away from. You have to learn about them first hand and even though they're not acute, it's not completely traumatic... But the thing with people in my case, what I've watched is that even though it's not acute, it's chronic. It's something that you go through every day. That little bit of loneliness and pain that you feel every morning, it's there. Always. And eventually you just learn to, it becomes part of you. And I don't know, at least for me it's ingrained into my system. So I stopped being afraid of it.

Similarly, Zoe said her undocumented status has an influence on her career goals of improving the lives of others. She is interested in working outside of the U.S. or working with undocumented immigrant workers where she can use her bilingual skills and educational background to make a difference in others' lives that are disenfranchised:

I feel like I really either want to work outside of the United States or work at somewhere where it's the majority undocumented immigrant workers, like car dealers or meat packing plants and stuff like that. Just because I feel like I've been so blessed, even though yea I've been undocumented but I've had the opportunity to be educated. And opportunity to speak fluent English and Spanish. I have that opportunity, so why not use it. And help other people that can't be helped. And so I really want to work with those people and be able to give them their benefits and give them all the resources that they need in order for them to be a successful employee and crew. For them to be treated fairly. So that's really my goal. I don't really know where I'm going to be placed or anything, but I know that I really want to work closely with my people and my culture.

And to be able to help the people who can't be helped. Because I know what it's like to be helpless.

Aracely described using her situation to assist others who are specifically struggling to obtain higher education. She was enthusiastic about going into social work and community development as a way to facilitate her vision of everyone having “equal opportunity to succeed.” Aracely explained her desire to redevelop underserved communities and provide resources “so everyone will have that equal opportunity regardless of immigration status. Or socio economic status or any of that.” Her passion for work in this area stems from her own circumstances, and “because of my struggles I'm looking to help people that have similar struggles, who do want higher education. That want to achieve higher education.”

Students spoke about the importance of using their difficult experiences as opportunities to help others because they understood what it was like to be undocumented and to face the related hardships. Participants emphasized role modeling specifically for youth and women as a way to encourage these segments of the undocumented community to strive for educational success. Participants used experiences related to their status to capitalize on this unique perspective in school and work, especially as it pertains to career goals such as working with immigration law, community development, and with undocumented immigrant workers.

### **Effectively Navigating the System**

Students were resilient in effectively navigating the collegiate system by demonstrating problem solving skills, showing social competence, and reaching out for support. These skills were particularly important for undocumented students working to persist in an educational system built upon maintaining a status quo that marginalizes them.

**Problem solving skills.** Students showed problem solving skills in navigating the collegiate system with creativity and resourcefulness. At times, demonstrating effective problem

solving skills meant strategically disclosing one's status, while other situations called for taking risks by using loopholes in the system to seek opportunities without disclosing one's status.

One student was particularly proactive in approaching his on-campus department to keep his resident assistant position even though he could not receive a paycheck because of his status. Ben explained that he tried to find a way to get a social security number so he could keep his RA job, even though he was not in the position primarily for the stipend. He realized it was not possible for him to legally work on campus, so he spoke with administrators in student life about his situation. Ben was upfront about his status, and said he would still uphold his end of the work contract if he could keep his room, even without the paycheck. Despite being terminated for a week, Ben was ultimately able to stay in his position because the student life staff worked with Human Resources to keep him in the RA role. However, this process caused the reality to set in of how important a social security is in his educational journey, while also realizing he benefitted from his decision to be honest with his institution about his immigration status:

That's when it hit me. This social security is really, really important for some reason. Well, not for some reason. I understood why. But it had never really resonated in my head until that point and that's where I was like well, why am I in school? I'm surprised I got to keep my RA job after that semester. I mean, at that time I wasn't being responsible...I've always had a straight face...I was completely honest with them. And I guess it was enough to um, It was like ok I understood I'm not being paid the stipend for this job and that was basically it. I came to them with what my situation was they were willing to help me. It was one of the main reasons when I came here I hadn't gone to [other institutions]. They've always known my situation and I guess that it wasn't an issue when they hired me. When it came around to it, they actually terminated me for about a week. But I made sure that I spoke with the people in charge at student life and I guess they were able to work it out with their HR department. So yea that's how come I'm still an RA.

Several students mentioned being risk takers, but also emphasized they used this approach because they were forced to do so, and not because they wanted to navigate the system in a risky manner.

Sam explained how he overcame challenges by proactively taking risks such as deciding to attend college without traditional means of financial support such as family or government financial aid. Even when scholarships required applicants be U.S. citizens or residents, Sam still applied and was honest on his paperwork. He stressed his leadership experience and willingness to disclose his status as a means to find financial support, even when opportunities originally appeared blocked to him. He advised that other undocumented students take the same approach and to decline the opportunity if follow-up information is requested. Sam explained that this approach was not harming anyone and that it was worth the risk in case an opportunity came to fruition:

And I'm an example of being able to get it done. It wasn't a cheap school, I think we spent let's see, tuition probably about 30 thousand dollars. Without financial aid, without the ability to get a loan, no collateral. Without money from parents. Without anything like that. How do you do it? Seems like a far-fetched goal. Never the less, I continued and pushed and pushed. So I think I ended up paying about half in cash from working. The other half I was say from a general scholarship. Through my involvement in leadership the university gave me a scholarship, external organization gave scholarship and so forth. A lot of their criteria for legal purposes requires you to be a U.S. citizen or a resident. I submitted the paperwork not giving, excuse my language, not giving a damn. And you know until they asked for it. So I would submit it and say this is who I am, this is what I've done, this is my leadership, this is what I want to do. Can you help me out with a scholarship? I would get congratulations, here's a thousand, here's two thousand, here's 25 hundred.

Sam's approach to pushing through struggles to finance his education relates to the advice he currently gives other undocumented students considering taking risks in finding scholarships:

I'm like if I sit around and just wait I'm never gonna be able to get those, so I try to tell a lot of students even though they don't know my situation and they're in the same situation, there are ways... And just try to challenge them to take a little bit of risk and even though they're requiring certain documentation for a scholarship, go ahead and submit your application. And you get the award, and they don't ask for anything, you're set. And if they do ask for something, you know you can just decline it and move it. Nobody's going to get hurt. Nobody's going to find out or anything like that.



Maria also spoke about problem solving through finding loopholes in the system she learned about from others in her activist organizations that “did a lot of work with immigration.” She explained this involvement as the time when, “I started like learning the loopholes and kind of started, how to navigate through being undocumented kind of how to navigate your way through a four-year institution.” She also supplemented her problem solving skills by being able to “find out professors and faculty and staff that were really supportive of undocumented students.” Demonstrating problem solving skills happened in various ways for students. Participants described taking risks, being resourceful, and navigating the system as ways that contributed to students’ proactive approach to overcoming challenges in college.

**Social competence.** Students described situations in which they demonstrated social competence to form connections helpful for navigating the system in college. Several students mentioned the importance of networking, and Ben described how his natural charisma draws others in to want to help him. Ben has always been shy and reserved, but at the same time, he has a charisma that displays confidence to others. This charisma has translated to social competence for Ben, and led him to one of his mentors who helped him apply for college and has helped greatly with finances. Ben described his balance of shyness and charisma that has attracted others to help him in his educational journey:

When I was little, I was a really shy kid. I’m surprised how many people I’ve met despite how shy I was. I was reserved, I mean I still am. If I don’t know you right now, I’m not going to open up at all. But at the same time I have this charisma, you could say without being too you sound too cocky, but I do have this charisma where I kind of own the moment. I just show confidence and people have received that very well and that’s where I’m getting mentors such as Mrs. D. Where she wants to help me. She thinks I’m going to basically, now that I look back on it, she’s like I’m going to invest in you. She told me once, if I had a son, if she could have a son because she can’t, he’d be your age and you’re like a son to me. Yea it’s those things where I feel like my charisma, my confidence that I’ve always had at a younger age and carried through despite how shy I was and I’ve been. People kind of see that and she was very willing to help me. Um

apply to college, get the money that I needed, make some monetary contribution to my tuition directly.

Ben used his awareness of his personal characteristics that attract others to him as a means of forming meaningful social connections. This social competence is an example of how students network to find others who can help them navigate higher education.

**Reaching out for support.** Several students emphasized the importance of actively seeking support from others. However, a few students spoke about cultural norms discouraging reaching out for help outside of one's community. Several students acknowledged the real dangers in disclosing one's status, yet they realized being transparent about their situation was necessary to get help to the fullest extent possible. Existing literature addresses the importance of undocumented college students networking and finding help through educators, but the specific process of reaching out for support is not highlighted in current research. Participants described their decisions to reach out for support and how this helped them effectively navigate college.

Ignacio took an open approach to disclosing his status as a way to seek support, despite feeling afraid. He addressed the legal risks many undocumented students take in lying about their status such as using a fake social security number. Ignacio was taught by his family to always be honest, so ever since high school he has been very open with his status as a way to gather supporters. He said everyone at his university knows about his situation and he has experienced a large number of people willing to help him because of decision to seek support:

So I was afraid to tell my peers but I did tell my teachers and I told anyone that I thought could help me. And I was extremely honest with them. Having after I came out of high school that's whenever I just I decided that if someone was going to help me, they have to know everything about me. Because that's one of the mistakes students in my situation make. Undocumented students who have made fake social security numbers to enroll for school because they want to go with it and that's a huge risk that's a felony. They've done extreme things because they want to keep going with education. I was always just taught

to come out and be honest. And make the best of things. So out of high school I told everyone that I could that I knew that could help me. Everyone in the university knows me. They know I'm undocumented... Because once you have that determination, once you have that wanting to excel from your parents or from whomever is raising you, you want to get more, you want to become better for those people. You don't settle with less, you seek out for help. When you seek out for help, you'll find it. There's a lot of people willing to help.

Zoe has had positive experiences seeking help and also takes an open approach to disclosing her situation to potential sources of support. She explained that she finds someone on campus and asks if "...is there anything that we can do to like help me? Because I'm really struggling." Reaching out in this way is not easy though, because her culture stresses independence:

I think that I'm not afraid to ask for help which I think is a huge thing that we have as a culture as well. You know, that we just kinda wanta do everything on our own and I have to, I had to realize I couldn't do it on my own and I had to have help.

In addition to reaching out for help, Zoe described showing others how "hard my work ethic was and how hungry I was for a college education" by spending extra time helping others with tasks on campus. Once educators saw Zoe's drive, they connected her to other campus educators and helped her network to find additional resources. She attributes this network of support to "being open to people and saying, hey, you know what? Like I'm undocumented and this is going on and this is my story." She usually receives a positive reaction, as "most of the time, people are really open to it and so, you know, if it's not that they can help, they know somebody else that can help." This assistance is sometimes financial or leads to additional networking connections, which has been particularly helpful in finding support after her dad passed away. Zoe takes all of the opportunities she can get, and proactively seeks support by disclosing her status and sharing her story.

Students who frequently reached out for support stressed the importance of being completely open and honest about their undocumented status and related circumstances. Students relied on this approach despite experiencing fear over the potential repercussions of coming out with their status, in addition to facing cultural expectations to not reach out for assistance beyond one's immediate community. Disclosing one's status and proactively reaching out for support often created a positive snowball effect as educators connected students with other resources, ultimately creating an increased network of support and opportunities that likely would not have been available to students who did not actively seek help in navigating the system.

### **Embracing the Connection between the Personal and Political**

Students demonstrated resilience by embracing the connection between the personal and political. Making these connections meant exploring their racial and ethnic identities and connecting to others with shared identities and experiences. Participants also demonstrated this theme through political activism, as well as by maximizing opportunities and critically exploring Deferred Action.

**Political activism and identity exploration.** Several students spoke about the importance of political activism and exploring their Latin@ identity through avenues such as activism, formal courses in school, and connecting to others with shared identities. Political activism is a topic explored in current literature about undocumented students, especially as it relates to high school student involvement and the civic engagement of undocumented students in higher education (Abrego, 2008; Gonzales, 2008; Pérez, 2009; Pérez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2009; Rincon, 2008). However, there is still a need to learn more about this

area, especially as political activism relates to the identity exploration undocumented students experience in college.

Aracely spoke about the confidence identity exploration provided her because, prior to college, she was afraid and ashamed to disclose her status since her family did not talk about being undocumented. Being able to engage in dialogue about her identities and related experiences helped Aracely connect to her community and become more involved:

Another thing is probably being more confident. Even with the identity that I hold. You know, not being afraid to disclose my identity or not being ashamed when to disclose my identity when I need to. You know I felt like before something, at least in my family, we don't even really discuss it within my family. You know like the hardships, it's kind of like we all just live our lives and it's going good or it's going bad. But you know having that open discourse, learning more about this community, learning more about Latinos, it really helped me ultimately gain that information within myself, to get more confident, just you know. Be more involved.

Zoe also benefited from learning about her culture, which occurred for her in the college classroom. One of her majors was American ethnic studies, which gave Zoe the opportunity to learn about Hispanic and Mexican cultures and the history of exploitation faced by her ancestors. It was empowering for Zoe to find herself and feel pride in her ancestors once she learned the history of Mexican Americans and Mexicans in the U.S.:

And adding American ethnic studies to my major, to my career also has helped me a lot just. I dunno learning about my Hispanic culture, learning about the Mexican culture, learning about how we got here and the race and the ethnicity that actually, how we made it here. How we've been exploited. How the history behind Mexican Americans and Mexicans in America. It's just really kind of empowered me to know where I've come from and why Hispanics are here in this huge amount. It's just really helped me kind of find my own self and be proud of my people.

Alicia became politically empowered in high school and, as a result, knew she wanted to be a positive change agent in her community. She recalled that staff and teachers had a lack of understanding about issues undocumented students face, including that, "I don't think they understand the cultural differences. And how it can possibly affect the way a student performs."

Alicia gave the examples of not being able to afford a textbook or not being able to remain at school to complete projects after hours. She hopes to use her experience with these challenges to better understand students and to “support them and let them know that they can come to a teacher. They shouldn't have to be afraid of them. And we can help them ultimately.” In addition to shaping her desire to help others in a similar situation, Alicia described how her political activism related to her identity and helped her get involved in her community and:

...gave me that agency to not feel like a victim or to not feel that this is gonna be my life forever...And so at that point it just wasn't about for myself, about empowering myself, but making sure that other students felt the same way I did...So politically, being politically active really gave me that agency to feel like I can make some change, and change needs to be made.

Alicia used her circumstances as a starting point for helping others achieve their future goals, while Eddie looked to the past for inspiration related to his identity and activism. He placed the political activism of the DREAMers in historical context when reflecting on the Chicano movement with the increasing presence of Chicanos in higher education:

...when I was referring to a new wave of students who are educated and things like that. I remember back then in the 1960s and the Chicano movement was going on, and because of that, there's many people that felt the need to go to college and things like that. So when I was an undergrad, I would come across other older Latinos that had PhDs and things like that and I would think to myself, gee what did you go through when you were younger to push to, or to make you go to college and get a PhD and law degree and things like that. And the more I researched, the more I realized, more likely than not, it was the Chicano movement, at least in Southern California that pushed them to go to college. And for many of those folks, they still considered themselves Chicanos and things like that.

Alicia applied her knowledge of this historical context to her vision of the future of the immigration reform movement:

So I can imagine that in the next, I dunno I'll say decade or so, we're gonna look back and we're, to that day, or years from now, we're still gonna say we were DREAMers back in the day, you know. And I hope by that time we'll hold a lot of law degrees and PhDs and things like that, so I mean, I see that as the next wave of a certain group of

people that are going to be educated and think back and say that we were just like Chicanos in the 1960s or African Americans in the 1960s.

Miri also situates her circumstances in a broader political context and she offered this advice to other undocumented students: “The one thing that I would wanta tell anyone who’s undocumented is...not to conform to things” and to “find a mentor.” She takes this advice one step further and encourages others to give back to the community and to be a mentor for other marginalized students:

...be that mentor for other students, whether they’re undocumented or not because especially Latino students, you know, we want to, more Latinos to go to college so even if they’re undocumented, be that role model for another undocumented student or just a student who’s not undocumented so that more Latinos can go to college. We should strive to do that...I think a lot of undocumented students find someone that they look up to. Be that other, And try to figure out why those who don’t make it to college, either undocumented or not, why they don’t make it to college and try to fix that. And always give back to a community, especially now, being able to work and that we continue, if immigration reform passes, to really give back.

Students spoke about the importance of political activism and identity exploration throughout their journeys. For most students, these developmental processes occurred in college, while a few students described becoming politically aware in high school. Several participants reported learning about their Latin@ identities through college coursework and by connecting with other undocumented students in student organizations. Learning about the political history of one’s ancestors, combined with the desire to help future generations of undocumented Latin@ students, led participants to feel empowered personally and politically.

**Maximizing and critically exploring Deferred Action.** Most participants worked hard to make the most of opportunities arising out of Deferred Action, while also using a critical lens to discuss the shortcomings of this temporary and non-comprehensive approach to immigration reform. During the time that passed between the two rounds of interviews, the political situation in the U.S. shifted significantly with Deferred Action passing on a national level. Several

participants highlighted how this change in circumstances had a direct impact on their experiences. This is also one of the gaps in current scholarly literature, which is likely a result of the timing of the very recent implementation and granting of DACA. Students who received DACA maximized their new opportunities, while all students demonstrated an awareness of the implications of Deferred Action for themselves as well as in the broader context of immigration reform.

Students demonstrated the aspects of resilience described above prior to DACA passing, and in our second round of interviews participants still had similar challenges to work through, despite having more legal rights such as being able to qualify for a job. Participants used DACA to their benefit, while also maintaining a realistic critical view of the legislation and its limitation. Students discussed frustrations with the legislation, while also speaking about the great impact this legislation had symbolically in furthering hope for the future, as well as tangibly on opening up opportunities for them. Eber explained his increased sense of security and hope post-DACA because he no longer has to be afraid of being detained and he can attend school while working:

... first off it's very helpful you know that I can walk down the street without being afraid of you know being detained. That's a big plus. But it also I mean for years, just growing up here, there was always that feeling that I really don't have a future and to just suddenly one day have the President sign the executive order and give people like me hope, that was a huge thing. Since it made me realize that sometimes even if it seems hopeless, something big might happen the next day. So you can't really stop working hard. So I guess both in the tangible sense that I can actually go to school without being afraid and I can apply to, I can work at school and get money so I can pay my tuition and also just realizing that life is much more, there's more to life than just what you can see ahead.

In addition to bolstering his sense of hope, Eber also described other benefits of DACA such as helping him feel like a part of his peer group because he can participate in school activities such as field trips:



...I used to feel so restricted. For example...I remember during class they had a field trip outside of the area and I just couldn't go, so just knowing that I can do anything like that really makes me feel like I'm part of the group, but for the first time I guess in my life.

Zoe explained the glimmer of hope that came from DACA, and how she now feels unstoppable in achieving her dreams. Nothing can take away from her the success she has experienced thus far, and she feels immune to others' negative thoughts about her being undocumented. Zoe feels stronger than ever and with her DACA visa she is ready to take a new job on campus. She emphasized the hope that DACA has given her, and how it has finally made all of her hard work pay off in opening opportunities to achieve her dreams:

Then when I look at myself, and I'm like look at all that I've achieved *and* I don't have papers. *Damn* that feels good! You know. To know how far I've gotten knowing all the things that I've had to go through. And then I'm still here you know. Even through my depression even through my dad's passing and everything. How far I've gotten and how proud of that I can be. Because nobody can take that from me... People can try to bring me down but then I think about all the things I've had to go through and all the feelings that I've felt about myself and things like that, and just how that's not me any more. How I've been able to push through all of that and just been so successful. And how strong I am and become because of it. How some people just don't do it.

Zoe described that, in moving through her difficult past and not giving up, she now feels extremely hopeful for her future, especially in light of DACA:

I know that I have such a bright future ahead of me after I get my visa from Deferred Action. I'm gonna be on fire. It's kinda like the little glimmer of hope that I've been needing. Just kind of pushed me back up. If I was asleep and dormant, now I'm awakened. I'm on fire and the adrenaline is going. I already have a job as soon as I get it, once I get back to school at the end of January...One of my big successes through all of this stuff when I've wanted to give up, but I've had this Deferred Action coming on. And now I can reap those benefits. All of that, and I kept pushing even when I didn't want to go anymore. I kept going and I kept going. And now I have all this wonderful stuff happening. In the midst of all of this bad stuff that happened, I didn't give up. Now things are really turning out better.

Zoe also described that she feels a sense of freedom after being granted DACA, and that she now has her driver's license and was hired for a job at her university:

Yeah, I applied for it and I got it in like six weeks and that was really, really exciting. I, like honestly, I don't think I ever felt like that feeling ever before. It's really hard to explain, I guess. Like I explain it, like I felt free but I felt different but I'm still the same person but I felt very, very different. I felt so much more free. And I got that and then it just kind of helped me, it's helped me a lot. I got, I got my driver's license and now that, I think, was like the huge, huge, like it felt like a huge weight lifted off my shoulders. Like I applied, I went in, I took the test and like I remember the day that I got my license. Driving down the road was a totally new experience. It felt, it felt like I had just gotten free from jail and I just like got to see the world. It was a really amazing feeling and then I came back to university and I was able to apply for different positions and stuff and I actually got hired by the university.

All but three students applied for DACA, and everyone who applied for Deferred Action received it. Participants had mixed feelings about the details of the legislation, as they realized it provided important opportunities yet was a temporary Band-Aid, especially in leaving their families unsupported and leaving them all vulnerable after the two-year grace period. As Ben was in the process of applying for DACA, he explained the importance of the legislation. He was frustrated, however, that he had to rely on someone else to make a decision about granting him DACA, which would provide a small bit of freedom to open up opportunities for his future:

So hopefully I mean that's like our saving grace right now and kind of why I'm so eager to help right now. Because if I can get that piece of freedom to some extent that's a way we look at it. I look at it with my family. That little bit of freedom. Almost the limits are... there are no limits anymore. We're just waiting for it. It sucks just kind of sitting and waiting um for someone else basically to say whether, decide on my future essentially.

Alicia also described frustration with DACA and the impact it has on families because undocumented students' parents are left with no legitimate pathway to citizenship. She was also upset that the general public does not realize that undocumented youth are activists in areas that reach beyond fighting for higher education access. Alicia emphasized the fight for broader immigration reform such as ceasing deportation, keeping families united, and creating legitimate pathways to citizenship for everyone. She explained the need for others to realize that undocumented students' families also deserve better opportunities through immigration reform:

And that's frustrating because I come from a working class family and just because I went to school doesn't mean that my parents deserve some sort of pathway to citizenship any less than I do. And so I think that's what makes me nervous about our movement. First of all that people just look at us and they think oh they're this ideal youth and we're not activist. We are activist. It's not just about trying to go to higher education. It's about stopping deportation; it's about keeping our families united. It's about creating a pathway to citizenship for everyone, not just for us. So I feel, at least the undocumented student movement, I hope that we're gonna be able to change people look at us a little differently. Not just as a symbol of the American ideal youth, but as undergraduates, people who come from these type of families and that those families need to be taken care of as well.

Karla experienced some newfound freedom with DACA, but is also upset with limitations that still exist for her. She feels more in control of her life and less stressed now that she can feel safe driving, but she still wants more for her life. Karla wishes for immigration reform that will allow for her to travel abroad and to return to the U.S. freely, which is still not a reality under DACA:

...I feel more like I have a little bit more control in my life. I feel like just being able to like have a responsibility to go to work and like drive myself, and feel safe in my car now. I think that just kind of took off a little bit of stress...I just think that it just has brought me the hope that things are getting better in my life and they're working out. But I do think this isn't all I want. I really, what I really want is the travel outside of this country, being able to come back. That's still in a way, the Deferred Action doesn't give me that. And that still kind of bums me out.

Miri discussed some limitations of DACA, but also said she will maximize her time with Deferred Action so that it may benefit her in the future even if her status is in limbo again at that time. She spoke about taking advantage of being able to secure a job now so that her employer can witness her hard work ethic and possibly sponsor her in the future if DACA is not renewed. Miri plans to use this temporary legal work experience to network her way into future work, depending on how immigration reform shifts:

But the positive side is that we already have a foot in the door in terms of a job, in terms... well, people who find a job, in terms of knowing the other side and we've gained other experiences, having our IDs and our social security cards. So even though we might, let's say DACA doesn't work and they, it gets taken after two years, which I really

hope it doesn't, we at least already have experience in the real, in the actual working or labor market in terms of working legally. And for those of the people who worked, who are working, let's say in their field, maybe they can always talk to, once their manager or supervisor know how their work ethic is, maybe there's possibility that some people might get sponsored by their employers to eventually get a green card or become naturalized.

Sam spoke about the immigration reform movement in general and, although he did not apply for DACA, he reflected on the importance of positive political momentum in the fight for rights. He described how individuals who are undocumented have been here for many years, and are law-abiding, taxes paying Americans just like others, and should be afforded the same opportunity in life. Sam emphasized the economic and security benefits to the U.S. if the government would allow undocumented people to incorporate fully into society, including obtaining higher education.

I think as far as the movement, it is something that will continue to build on whatever momentum it has. Comprehensive immigration reform is a hot topic in U.S. Congress right now and I think as many times in the past, now hopefully that goes through. They'll continue to fight. Individuals been here for 10, 15, 20 plus years, who are as much American as anyone else, live by the law, pay their taxes, and things of those nature. Just want the same opportunity. It's in the economic interest and security of the United States to allow this certain group of population into mainstream society and let them come out of the shadows and go for masters and doctoral and bachelors degrees and things of those nature, so they can contribute to society. So hopefully that's something that will very soon transition for the better. If not, that movement will continue to push forward and hopefully soon there will be some sort of legislation or something that allows for those individuals to fully become integrated with society.

Sam's vision for the future of immigration reform also relates to his own career path. He is hopeful that he will have a successful future, based on his achievement thus far in life despite so many obstacles. His thoughts on DACA and immigration reform overall have led Sam to work towards improving opportunities for upward mobility for other disenfranchised populations in the U.S.:

In terms of myself, I anticipate a bright future based on being able to achieve so much with so little resources, opportunities, and you know technically I'm not supposed to be

where I'm at. But I managed to get this far, I wonder how much further I can get. I hope to be in a position to make certain decisions, not only based on DREAM Act or individuals from my circumstances, but other individuals who are facing Civil Rights issues or equality, gender, wage pay, things of those nature. Being able to be an advocate for that and hopefully make a better U.S. society to live in at some point.

Participants who were able to apply to Deferred Action maximized the opportunities associated with being granted DACA, while all participants remained mindful of fighting to overcome the limitations of this legislation within the broader spectrum of immigration reform.

### **Chapter Summary: Findings From the Second Research Question**

Participant examples were used to highlight each of the main themes related to the second research question: What factors help undocumented students overcome challenges they face in higher education? Participants demonstrated resilience through drawing on environmental and personal factors when encountering challenges. Students were able to demonstrate resilience through using environmental factors such as relationships with family, peers, mentors, and other educational gatekeepers, as well as through maintaining ties to their home community, and through involvement in campus or community organizations.

Personal factors to enhance resilience included being future oriented, effectively navigating the system, demonstrating effective coping behaviors, and embracing the connection between the personal and political. Students who were future oriented had a strong sense of purpose, high educational and career aspirations, and were goal oriented. Effectively navigating the system included using effective problem solving skills, social competence, and reaching out for support. Students demonstrated effective coping behaviors by having an internal locus of control, maintaining hope and motivation, and viewing difficult experiences as opportunities. Participants who embraced the connection between the personal and the political were involved in political activism and linked these experiences to identity exploration. Participants also

maximized opportunities they received from being granted DACA, while also maintaining a critical political view of Deferred Action and the implications for the broader undocumented community. Overall, students used environmental and personal factors to help them overcome challenges in higher education related to their immigration status. The factors participants use to show resilience are similar to factors mentioned in the resilience literature.

## CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this final chapter, I discuss the findings from the current study and situate them in existing literature. After presenting a study overview, I provide a brief summary of the findings from Chapter Four. Next, I discuss the findings in relation to relevant research and I then move to a discussion on the implications of this study for practice. I conclude with a discussion on limitations of the study, followed by suggestions for future research.

### Study Overview

This research study examined the experiences of undocumented Latin@ college students who demonstrate resilience in navigating higher education. I completed two rounds of semi-structured interviews with 16 undocumented Latin@ college students.

### Research Questions

The research question guiding this study is: *How do undocumented Latin@ college students demonstrate resilience as they navigate higher education?* I explore this main question through two sub questions:

1. How does being undocumented shape a student's college experience?
2. What factors help undocumented students overcome challenges encountered in higher education?

This study contributes to the limited literature on the experiences of undocumented students in higher education, especially as the study combats a deficit model and moves beyond issues of admissions and financial aid to examine the journeys of undocumented students who are persisting in higher education. Ultimately, students' *counter narratives* can raise awareness among educators to facilitate improved practice for serving this student population. CRT and LatCrit, along with a resilience theory framework, informed the interview questions.

## **Significance**

Current literature on undocumented college students focuses mainly on accessing and financing higher education, but the experiences of undocumented students who are currently enrolled in higher education and demonstrating persistence to graduation, or who are recent college graduates, are understudied. My dissertation findings provide insight into how students learn about their undocumented status and how students express a desire for a typical college experience. However, students face challenges associated with financial constraints, psychological burdens, and traditional cultural familial expectations. This study explores students' strategies for overcoming these challenges and their suggestions for how campus educators can better serve this student population. The findings from this study provide knowledge on how to help these students persist, which is significant for producing talented college graduates who will benefit from upward mobility while contributing to the U.S. as a whole.

This research is significant from an economic standpoint. As a country, the U.S. cannot afford to fail in cultivating the abilities of the people who live here due to their citizenship status; doing so does not enable them to contribute to the greater good and support themselves. Rethinking higher education's approach to serving undocumented youth will lead to many benefits including keeping talented students in the U.S., enhancing the U.S. economy and global economic competitiveness, and improving the quality of life for undocumented students and their families as members of our community who are currently forced to live in the shadows with limited chances at social and economic mobility.

In addition to economic significance, this research is rooted in professional ethics for university educators, as well as a humanistic standpoint. University educators at various levels



are responsible for creating an environment that will enhance the success of all students. Also, institutions of higher education have an obligation to serve the country and to produce talented graduates with the opportunity for upward mobility. Despite the economic, ethical, and humanistic significance of this research, there are still significant gaps in the literature concerning the experiences of undocumented Latin@ college students who demonstrate resilience in navigating higher education, and in turn, how this knowledge may inform practice for university educators.

### **Summary of Major Findings**

Chapter Four used participant stories to illustrate the themes that emerged from each of the two main research questions. In response to the first research question regarding how being undocumented shapes students' college experiences, participants reported concerns related to perceptions of campus climate, emotional challenges, academic and career limitations, and navigating challenges to involvement in organizations. Students' perceptions of campus climate concerned their sense of belonging versus marginalization based on social interactions such as coming out or connecting with peers, and in interactions with campus educators who were sometimes unaware or unsupportive of undocumented students.

Emotional challenges included issues of stigma and fear that students frequently experienced as a result of their status. Participants also faced academic and career limitations such as not being able to study abroad, not qualifying for paid internships, or not being able to major in certain fields such as education that require background checks for mandatory student teaching and site visits. Students expressed a desire for other aspects of a traditional college experience, including involvement in student organizations. However, it was difficult for

participants to juggle involvement with campus groups because of issues with commuting, working long hours each week, and family expectations to be at home.

Participant examples were also used to highlight each of the main themes related to the second research question: What factors help undocumented students overcome challenges they face in higher education? Participants' resilience when encountering challenges was enhanced when they drew on environmental and personal factors. Environmental factors included relationships with family, peers, mentors, and other educational gatekeepers, as well as maintaining ties to their home community, and involvement in campus or community organizations.

Students' resilience also related to being future oriented, effectively navigating the system, demonstrating effective coping behaviors, and embracing the connection between the personal and political. Students who were future-oriented had a strong sense of purpose, high educational and career aspirations, and were goal oriented. Effectively navigating the system included using effective problem solving skills, social competence, and reaching out for support. Students demonstrated effective coping behaviors by having an internal locus of control, maintaining hope and motivation, and viewing difficult experiences as opportunities.

Participants who embraced the connection between the personal and the political were involved in political activism and linked experiences to identity exploration. Participants also maximized opportunities they received from being granted Deferred Action (DACA), while also maintaining a critical political view of Deferred Action and the implications for the broader undocumented community. Overall, students' experiences highlighted that drawing on both environmental and personal factors contributed to the resilience needed to overcome challenges in higher education related to immigration status.

## **Discussion of Findings**

The findings from this study illuminate the reality that undocumented Latin@ college students are a group of people not completely unlike other college students in U.S. institutions of higher education. Participants expressed the desire for a traditional college experience, hoped for meaningful friendships in college, yearned to fit in on campus, and demonstrated enthusiasm for achieving their academic goals as a pathway to giving back to society through their dream careers. Participants faced challenges that other college students also encounter, such as navigating higher education as first-generation college students and coming from low socioeconomic status backgrounds. Like other students with immigrant parents, undocumented college students also balanced cultural expectations and traditional family norms with the culture of the U.S. This role negotiation includes balancing common challenges of being a Latin@ student at a predominantly white institution. These overarching themes were discussed in the Chapter Two literature review, and provided relevant background information as a starting point for examining aspects of undocumented Latin@ college students' experiences.

Although there is some overlap between undocumented Latin@ college students and some common issues students face in higher education overall, participants also faced unique challenges due to their immigration status. Attending college as an undocumented student involves additional barriers to accessing, financing, and persisting in higher education, which ultimately leads to challenges in achieving upward mobility in the U.S. I turn now to a discussion of literature that illuminates the findings, including literature on the historical mission of higher education in the U.S., resilience theory, CRT and LatCrit, campus climate, and the ethic of care.

## **Discussion Theme 1: Undocumented Identity as Problematic**

*Throughout this work, there is an assumption that the undocumented identity is problematic. The problematic nature of this identity is a result of the legal status associated with this group of people's experiences and life circumstances. However, as evident through participant stories, this identity and its resulting challenges have also led individuals to demonstrate resilience and to cultivate many environmental and personal protective factors that have fostered intelligent, hard-working, and compassionate individuals. Unfortunately, even with current temporary attempts at alleviating some tangible legal burdens related to being undocumented, the social stigma associated with one's undocumented status remains.*

The data from this study highlight that identity as undocumented shapes these students' college experiences, which is just one area of life where having an undocumented identity is problematic. A study on undocumented college students by Díaz-Strong and Meiners (2007) found that every aspect of these students' lives are impacted by policies related to their immigration status. Similarly, "The construction of an undocumented status by the state negatively impacted the lives of the unauthorized immigrant population by questioning their legitimacy, affecting their safety and producing feelings of shame" (Abrego, 2006). The problematic nature of this identity also extends to subtleties in how undocumented students are treated in school. For example, participants shared stories of teachers assuming they are unintelligent and incapable of advanced coursework, so they were treated differently in class and were not often considered as "college-track" in high school.

The undocumented identity is also problematic because students straddle multiple cultures as they feel like outsiders to their countries of birth and to the U.S. In one study by Gildersleeve (2009), having an undocumented status was not a demographic descriptor, but a

tool “in which students can learn about their potential educational outcomes” (Annamma, 2013, p. 32). Also, undocumented students “disconnected from school and its agents were constructed as not only undocumented but also problematic in achievement, limiting access even further to college-going literacies and their opportunity to re-define their citizenship, while increasing their social exhaustion” (p. 32).

Undocumented as an identity is also problematic in that it places individuals as a “foreign” or “alien” other based on many markers that have significant tangible implications in the U.S. Otherization based on race, ethnicity, and immigration status, as well as based on culture and language, places individuals in a subordinate position to privileged groups such as White U.S. citizens who set the standard for the “norm” of comparison. In her work on “Immigrant Rage,” Marciniak (2006) explains “the privileged constructs of ‘whiteness’ in relation to U.S. immigration has vigorously emphasized the need to see whiteness not as ‘naturally’ owned, but as assigned, a process intertwined with ever-changing perceptions of race and ethnicity” (p. 40). In contrast, “when it comes to the perception of nonwhite immigrants as unwanted ‘pollutants,’ the cases of various policies aiming to ‘purify’ American society from them are many” (p. 41). She emphasizes the common image of the U.S. as under attack from alien outsiders. This imagery is seen in the language that further perpetuates stereotypes of undocumented individuals and groups, especially when commonly referred to as “illegal aliens.” Also, this phrase is commonly used without delineating undocumented populations’ countries of origin, although in the U.S., undocumented Mexican immigrants are often the face of immigration reform.

In an essay on Latino politics and the identity considerations behind the categories “Hispanic” and “Latino,” Gimenez (1998) explores how use of these “umbrella labels conspires

against their acceptance among the people they are supposed to name, especially among the foreign-born” and how use of the labels is a form “of ideological interpellation which, under certain material conditions, are likely to produce ‘Hispanic’ or Latino subjects” (p. 483). Although many participants did not fully realize their undocumented status until young adulthood, the material reality of this identity still impacted their lives even with attempts at buffering this reality by parents throughout students’ childhoods. Students had a sense they were different, had certain limitations in life, and could sometimes recall early memories of scary situations crossing the border, which were silenced by family members and peers at school. This early sense of fear and shame was attached to their existence even before they realized the full implications of being undocumented. Overall, holding an undocumented status in the U.S. is problematic in that it creates imposed borders, theoretical and geographic, that restrict individuals’ opportunities for upward mobility, including challenges to postsecondary access and equity.

## **Discussion Theme 2: Color-Blindness**

*Color blindness is problematic when examining the experiences of undocumented Latin@ college students because they face multiple barriers to equity in educational opportunity due to systemic inequalities. Ignoring institutionalized racism creates the misconception that undocumented individuals do not need equitable policies to achieve upward mobility because of the fallacy that everyone in the U.S. has fair access to equitable opportunities.*

CRT has a foundational assumption that racism is present in U.S. society and that the voices of people of color are essential in disrupting the common narrative. This dominant narrative is rooted in problematic views such as colorblindness, which is a belief that all people should be treated equally, regardless of race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). On the surface, color

blindness may seem like an appealing solution to creating a level playing field in areas such as education. However color blindness is damaging in that it purports that racism no longer exists, there is no proactive strategy needed to address a historical legacy of institutionalized racism, and that marginalized individuals and disenfranchised groups are to blame for their own challenges with upward mobility in U.S. society.

Color blindness was not an explicit theme in students' stories because exclusion of their experiences in higher education discourse did not seem to be a result of an attempt to discount the need for equity in considering how immigration status impacts their experiences. Instead, educators were either altogether unaware of these issues, or they were perceived by participants to have biases that led them to struggle with working with this student group. However, as this topic gains momentum in scholarship and immigration reform debates likely come into even increased visibility with the upcoming U.S. Presidential election, it is important to remain mindful of color blindness. Based on the use of color blindness in relation to other racially and ethnically marginalized student groups, it is likely some surface-level proponents of higher education access for undocumented Latin@ students might espouse color blind beliefs.

However, color blindness is problematic when examining the experiences of undocumented Latin@ college students, because they face multiple barriers to equity in educational opportunity due to systemic inequalities. Instead of learning about the experiences of undocumented Latin@ college students and shaping policy and practice based on this knowledge, color blindness puts educators in a mindset of ignoring these unique situations and treating everyone the same, regardless of background. This is particularly concerning for undocumented immigrants in the U.S. when considered in combination with the myth of meritocracy.

Color-blindness provides the illusion that undocumented individuals do not need equitable policies to achieve upward mobility because of the fallacy that everyone in the U.S. has fair access to equal opportunities. Instead of acknowledging the racism inherent in U.S. social institutions, these views result in perpetuating stereotypes of marginalized individuals as undeserving, and incapable of achieving opportunity and success in the United States. Color-blindness is an important notion to bear in mind when examining the participants' experiences and in reading the suggestions for practice, which directly consider the complexities of issues such as race and racism in shaping practice for serving undocumented college students.

### **Discussion Theme 3: Racist Nativism**

*Nativism, or the belief that the U.S. should limit immigration, involves opposition to “outsiders” who are often seen as a threat to nationalistic identity. Racist nativism includes fear and ignorance shaping negative views on undocumented immigrants in the U.S. Participants described the negative experiences regarding how U.S. citizens saw them as less than human criminals who were not worthy of opportunities in life. Educators can listen closely to the counter narratives of undocumented Latin@ college students as a way to connect with the humanity underlying this pressing situation students are facing in U.S. institutions of higher education.*

Nativism is the view “that the United States should give priority to its current citizenry and limit immigration” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 151). Pérez Huber (2010) summarizes three critical components of nativism: “1. There is often intense opposition to the ‘foreigner’ which, 2. Creates the defense and protection of a nationalistic identity, where 3. The foreigner becomes a perceived threat to that nationalistic identity” (p. 80). These components of nativism are particularly poignant when considering the experiences of undocumented immigrants in a



post-9/11 world where heightened border patrol and restrictive immigration policy have become visible in heated debates about the “other.”

As addressed above in the discussion of the undocumented identity as problematic, undocumented Latin@ students are seen as perpetual foreigners. Regardless of how long undocumented individuals have lived in the U.S. or how well they “play by the rules” as defined by those in positions of power such as white U.S. citizens, they are still seen as outsiders who are otherized. Participants in this study detailed their hard work to succeed in school, work hard in various jobs, remain loyal to family, integrate into U.S. culture, and to give back to their communities. Despite following these broader social expectations, undocumented students reported being treated as outsiders who were not deserving of opportunities in the U.S. Others treated them with skepticism or hostility as outsiders even though participants identify with being raised in the U.S. and the U.S. is the only home they truly know.

Perceptions of identity markers such as speaking Spanish or having a Spanish accent, having dark or non-white skin, and valuing traditional Latin@ cultural norms are all areas used to exclude undocumented individuals and communities as foreigners. Although each participant spoke about working hard to achieve the “American Dream” and the desire to give back to the U.S., the general public still sees undocumented people as foreigners who do not belong in the U.S. This is shortsighted, of course, as most of those perpetuating this perpetual foreigner viewpoint also come from a history of immigrants to the U.S. However, over time, notions of whiteness, U.S. citizenship, entitlement, and belonging slowly shift. Although there is still a spectrum of “belonging” for U.S. citizens based on areas like accent and phenotype, undocumented Latin@ immigrants are among the most widely viewed as perpetual foreigners as they have marginalized identities in many categories that are otherized in the U.S.

Given discussions on assimilation and passing, LatCrit scholars highlight the “sociological notion of nativism to name and explain the recent spate of measures aimed at foreigners and immigrants. They point out that nativism against Latinos and Asian populations thrives during times of economic hardship, when the labor supply is gutted, or, as now, when workers are insecure” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 81). Many of the jobs participants discussed were held in recent times during the great recession, but they spoke about doing difficult manual labor in dangerous conditions that other populations were unlikely to work in even in a recession. These jobs are racialized even in any U.S. economic climate, but the nativism against Latinos was particularly strong during the economic crisis when many U.S. citizens were struggling. Due to these circumstances, a combination of fear and ignorance have shaped views on undocumented immigrants in the U.S. This is problematic, as nativism functions to exclude non-white immigrants from participating fully in U.S. society while also justifying superiority of the dominant group, which is perceived to be white (2010). Further, racist nativism is a conceptual framework that highlights the intersections of racism and nativism (Pérez Huber, et. al, 2008).

In her study on exploring the intersectionality of undocumented Chicana women in higher education, Pérez Huber (2010) explained the consequences of racist nativism. Her participants described negative emotions such as:

...feeling uncomfortable, discouraged, fearful, and isolated throughout their educational trajectories. Racist nativist perceptions held by teachers, professors, and peers were emotionally painful. Limited or no access to campus resources and programs was frustrating. Restrictions on daily tasks to get through each day, such as driving to school, were disheartening. (p. 89)

The author concludes that “Acknowledging and understanding the complex intersections of race, immigration status, class and gender present in dominant constructions of Latina/o identity and

in particular, a Latina/o undocumented immigrant identity, is an initial step towards deconstructing negative perceptions of this group” (2010, p. 92). Racist nativism has a negative impact on the experiences of undocumented Latin@ college students, and participants in my study shared their experiences with the resulting negative emotions throughout their educational journeys.

Despite the challenges arising from racist nativism, students of color have demonstrated ways to overcome this negative discourse. Huber (2009) uses *testimonios* of Chicano undergraduate women to explore the community cultural wealth framework highlighting “the rich forms of capital existing within the families and communities of these young women that have allowed them to survive, resist, and navigate higher education while simultaneously challenging racist nativist discourses” (p. 704). Her work focuses on nativist racism as:

...a historical legacy of racism that has been intricately tied to notions of the native and non-native – one in which whites have been perceived as native to the United States and all other groups non-native. In this historical moment, racist nativism targets Latina/o undocumented immigrants, regardless of their many contributions to U.S. society as productive community members. (p. 705)

She explained that assigning undocumented immigrants a non-native identity “assigns them to a subordinated position in U.S. society and justifies the anti-immigrant and inhumane policies and tactics used to curb undocumented immigration” (p. 709). Participants in my study clearly described the harsh reality of being undocumented in the U.S., and how they perceived many U.S. citizens saw them as less than human criminals who were not worthy of opportunities in life.

Huber’s description of inhumane treatment extends to immigration discourse that has become “common sense” in understanding immigration issues such as denying undocumented college students rights such as access to federal financial aid programs, the ability to get a

driver's license, and the opportunity to "gain employment that reflects the training they earned at the university" (2009, p. 724). Huber ties her argument to how Malcolm X fought for human rights because "racial equality could never be achieved without recognizing that African Americans were entitled to the same basic human rights as whites" (p. 724). She explained that, "Positioning the immigration debate within a human rights frame reclaims the humanity of undocumented Latina/o immigrants" and can be used "in education discourse beyond the immigration debate to focus the efforts of researchers, practitioners, and policy makers toward equal educational opportunity as a human right *all* students deserve" (p. 725).

As I will explore later in a section on the ethic of care, it is essential to deconstruct the racist nativism inherent in debates surrounding immigration reform and to take an active stance in serving all students. Ultimately, educators must listen closely to the counter narratives of undocumented Latin@ college students as a way to connect with the humanity underlying this pressing situation in U.S. institutions of higher education.

#### **Discussion Theme 4: Campus Climate**

*Participants shared their perceptions of campus climate, which is important in shaping students' higher education experiences. Students spoke about the desire to feel a sense of belonging and mattering versus feeling marginalized, especially given the common occurrence of being the target of microaggressions. Hurtado (2010) explains how campus climate can impact all areas of adjustment to college, and she offers ideas on assessing campus climate for racial/ethnic diversity.*

Participants in my study shared note-worthy perceptions of the campus climate, which had a major influence on their higher education experiences, as these climates were overwhelmingly isolating and inhospitable. In a study on the obstacles faced by undocumented

Latina/o college students in California, researchers found several areas for improvement in how higher education meets the needs of this student population (Pérez Huber & Malagon, 2007).

Students often encountered hostile campus climates characterized by racism, which affected their higher education experiences:

Latina/o college students and other Students of Color frequently encounter a negative campus climate, characterized by racial discrimination. This negative campus climate can affect a student's persistence and desire to graduate, and may also discourage a student from continuing to pursue a graduate or professional degree. Improving the campus climate for Students of Color on a college campus benefits all students at an institution. (p. 845)

The authors explained that inhospitable campus climates are products of broader society, and institutions of higher education must acknowledge this and engage in proactive work to combat this issue:

Undocumented Latina/o students are affected by the racist nativist climate reflected by larger society. These feelings carry forward when this population of students finds that it must navigate through college without the acknowledgement and understanding of the barriers it faces...Institutions of higher learning cannot continue to take neutral stances in the effort to provide equitable access for students. (p. 859)

#### **Discussion Theme 4a: Sense of Belonging and Marginality versus Mattering.**

*Student persistence relates to perceptions of connectedness to the university community through peers and educators. Feeling accepted and culturally valued are important aspects of students' college experiences. Participants consistently expressed a desire for what they perceived as a traditional college experience, yet they were often left feeling disconnected from their campuses.*

Sense of belonging and mattering versus marginality are important areas of study in higher education. Strayhorn (2012) explained sense of belonging as student's perceptions of affiliation and identification with the university community. Foundational higher education scholars describe the importance of peer relationships, as they "exert an extraordinarily powerful influence on college student persistence, achievement, and outcomes" (Astin, 1993; Pascarella &

Terenzini, 2005). As seen in my study, participants identified the importance of finding a sense of community and connectedness with peers in student organizations focused on those who also identify as Latin@ and/or undocumented. Students also expressed the importance of positive educator interactions, especially when a faculty or staff member reached out to students individually and took an interest in their success. In my study, these connections made students feel like they belonged on campus and that they mattered to others.

A student's sense of belonging is largely built upon feelings of acceptance as an individual and as a connected part of a community, which impacts students' learning and social life (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Conversely, feeling isolated and marginalized from campus community negatively impacts students' college experiences (Tinto, 2005). These authors emphasize tangible links between belonging and success for diverse students, such as persistence to degree. In my study, a clearly reoccurring theme was students' desire to have what they perceived as a traditional college experience, yet they were often left feeling disconnected from their campuses.

In a seminal piece of literature on marginality versus mattering, Nancy Schlossberg (1989) addressed the concern of more fully engaging postsecondary students in learning. She defined mattering as "our belief, whether right or wrong, that we matter to someone else. This belief acts as a motivator" (p. 9). On the other end of the spectrum is marginality, which is when someone feels as though they do not matter. Schlossberg found that people in transitions often feel marginal and that they do not matter. Also, "The larger the difference between the former role and the new role the more marginal the person may feel, especially if there are no norms for the new roles" (p. 7). It is not difficult to imagine that first-generation college students, and especially first-generation students of color at PWIs, might experience marginality in their new

roles as college students in a new environment. Also, “marginality can also refer to a permanent condition. For many bicultural individuals, marginality is a way of life...a bicultural person feels permanently locked between two worlds” (p. 7). The participants in this study expressed navigating two worlds between home and college, which was an ongoing negotiation lasting well beyond an initial adjustment period to the higher education environment.

Schlossberg explained that, “we are aware of classifications and issues that divide us” such as race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, and awareness of these differences raises questions such as: “With all these differences separating us, what connects us? Do we have a shared humanity? Can a campus community be created that allows all students to find a place of involvement and importance?” (p. 6). Schlossberg offered the solution of rituals, or ceremonies and rites of passage, as a way for individuals to move into a new life change while also avoiding feelings of isolation and vulnerability. She explained, “As people tell us their stories, we can listen in ways that connect us...the most important lesson is that even with our differences, we are connected by the need to matter and the need to belong” (p. 14).

A study by Castellanos, Gloria, Mayorga, and Salas (2007) reported, “inhospitable feelings of being unwelcomed and culturally devalued are common educational experiences of many racial and ethnic minority college students and thus warrant student affairs personnel to have competent skills in order to work with students of different races, ethnicities, and cultures” (p. 656). Student affairs professionals must be prepared to serve as direct agents of positive change in creating a more positive climate for diverse students. It is important to understand the needs of minority students who are a diverse group often facing negative campus climates which ultimately impede degree attainment.

It is also crucial to have effective policies in place for responding to hate-motivated incidents as well as educating the broader campus community on issues related to race and ethnicity. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) explained, “A growing number of studies examine the effects on persistence and degree completion of campus racial and ethnic diversity and students’ perceptions of their campus’s racial climate” and “the overall institutional orientation to diversity also positively influences student persistence” (p. 419). The authors also described how research has “found evidence that perceptions of racial discriminations and prejudice in the classroom and on campus were negatively related to continued enrollment” (2005, p. 419). This is an example of how a hostile or chilly campus climate negatively impacts persistence for minority students.

Overall, the persistence of undocumented college students relates to feeling connected to the university community through positive interactions with peers and educators. Feelings of acceptance and being culturally valued are important for fostering a sense of belonging, which are key aspects of having a “traditional college experience” that participants wanted to enjoy. However, participants reported multiple situations in which they felt like they did not matter on campus, and this isolation had a negative influence on how they perceived the campus climate.

**Discussion Theme 4b: Microaggressions.** *Participants experienced subtle insults based on their identities, which had a negative impact on their perceptions of campus climate. Feelings of frustration, hurt, anger, and fear emerged for participants who experienced microaggressions in various campus spaces. There is a need for campus counter-spaces to combat the negative impacts of microaggressions.*

Microaggressions are “subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously” (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). In their study on African American college students, the authors found that “racial



microaggressions exist in both academic and social spaces in the collegiate environment” and that “racial microaggressions have a negative impact on the campus racial climate” (p. 60). Also, racial microaggressions led to “students’ struggles with feelings of self-doubt and frustration as well as isolation” (p. 69). Participants in my study expressed all three of these feelings, usually in response to social interactions with peers or educators. Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) also found that “being a member of a racial minority on their predominantly white campuses placed them in a position where they were perceived by others to represent the voice of their entire race” which Steele and Aronson (1995) call “spokesperson pressure” (p. 69). Participants in my study gave multiple examples of feeling this spokesperson pressure, both for Latin@ issues and undocumented student issues as they arose in courses.

Participants in my study detailed various microaggressions they encountered on campus, along with describing the accompanying emotions of frustration, hurt, anger, and fear. Solórzano and colleagues (2000) offered the solution of students creating “counter-spaces” in response to microaggressions. They explained, “These counter-spaces serve as sites where deficit notions of people of color can be challenged and where a positive collegiate racial climate can be established and maintained” (p. 70). Examples of counter-spaces from their study include spaces such as African American student organizations and offices serving this student group, as well as peer groups such as Black greek life, and Black student organized study halls (2010).

Considering counter-spaces for undocumented college students is important, yet particularly challenging, given the sensitive nature of visibility with one’s status. Regardless, offering counter-spaces is important for allowing students to “foster their own learning and to nurture a supportive environment wherein their experiences are validated and viewed as important knowledge” (p. 70). Ultimately, the authors concluded that without explicit

examination of racial microaggressions, they can “easily be ignored and downplayed...the cumulative effects of racial microaggressions can be devastating” (2000, p. 72).

Racial microaggressions and feeling the burden of being a spokesperson for one’s group have damaging effects on students, and can lead to negative emotions navigating a hostile campus climate. There is a need for campus counter-spaces and increased awareness of how to address microaggressions in working towards building a more positive campus climate for undocumented students.

**Discussion Theme 4c: Hurtado’s Campus Climate Framework.** *In her work on campus climate, Sylvia Hurtado emphasized the need to include campus climate assessments with evaluation of student outcomes and campus practice. Campus climate includes policies, practices, behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions around issues of diversity. Students from diverse backgrounds who perceive a hostile campus climate have a lower sense of belonging, which has an impact on adjustment to college. The use of Hurtado’s campus climate framework can help shape relevant practice for serving undocumented Latin@ college students.*

One of the leading scholars regarding campus climate for diverse students, Sylvia Hurtado, synthesized campus climate surveys and reviewed frameworks used to assess campus racial/ethnic diversity. Ultimately, the authors recommend that, “campuses integrate their assessment of the climate with the evaluation of student outcomes and campus practice” (1998, p. 204). Hurtado and colleagues defined campus racial climate as “a part of the institutional context that includes community members’ attitudes, perceptions, behaviors, and expectations around issues of race, ethnicity, and diversity” (p. 205). Hurtado and colleagues offered a way to approach evaluating the campus climate for students from diverse racial backgrounds, and these

suggestions can be adapted to learning about the experiences of undocumented college students as a way to then shape practice.

Hurtado and colleagues explained that, “A framework for understanding the campus racial climate explained it as a multidimensional construct, subject to and shaped by the policies, practices, and behaviors of those within and external to colleges and universities” (2008, p. 205). In examining the elements influencing the climate for racial/ethnic diversity, the authors found four areas of institutional context that are related to the external government/policy context and external sociohistorical context (2008). The four climate-related factors postsecondary institutions can control are internal to the institution, and include the following: structural diversity, psychological climate, behavioral dimension, and historical legacy of inclusion/exclusion (2008).

Structural diversity “refers to the physical presence of previously underrepresented groups at a particular institution,” while the psychological dimension captures “the extent to which individuals perceive racial conflict and discrimination on campus” (2008, pp. 207-208). This is a particularly challenging area for undocumented Latin@ college students, as structural barriers are likely the cause of a lack of opportunity for individuals who are undocumented to currently be serving in visible campus leadership roles. Also, outside of identity-based student organizations, undocumented students likely have difficulties identifying other undocumented students on campus.

Hurtado and her colleagues also assert that the behavioral dimension of the climate attempts to “assess intergroup relations on a campus or level of engagement with diversity” (p. 209). As listed in my suggestions for future research, studying the perceptions of non-undocumented students regarding their interactions with undocumented students could give a

fuller picture of intergroup relations. Hurtado goes on to say that the institutional historical legacy of inclusion/exclusion “is largely unaddressed in campus racial climate survey research because it involves more in depth study of norms that may be embedded in campus culture, tradition, policies, and historical mission” (p. 206). This is an important area for studying campus climate for undocumented students, although this student group is likely largely missing from much discourse regarding campus history.

Multiple studies by Hurtado and colleagues found that “Latino students who perceive a hostile climate have a lower sense of belonging than those Latinos who feel they are at more hospitable institutions. In fact, subtle perceptions of a hostile climate had more of an impact on all areas of adjustment to college (social, academic, personal-emotional, and attachment to the institution) than actual behaviors” (2008, p. 209).

In sum, perceptions of campus climate have an impact on students’ adjustment to college, and participants reported the desire to have a traditional college experience where they felt included on campus. Students’ sense of belonging and mattering related to connectedness to the university community, which occurred through peer and educator relationships and interactions. Negative interactions such as microaggressions caused emotions such as frustration, hurt, anger, and fear. Hurtado’s campus climate framework offers a way to understand how to assess campus climate for diverse students, which is significant because perceptions of a hostile campus climate lead to having a lower sense of belonging and difficulties adjusting to college.

### **Implications**

Based on the study findings and resulting discussion, there are several implications to consider in working with undocumented Latin@ college students. Improving campus services is one area to examine, including creating identity-based spaces and increasing educators’

awareness and skills for serving this student population. Demonstrating an ethic of care means focusing on students' holistic needs with empathy and by developing genuine rapport with students. These implications are also couched within the broader concept of interest convergence, which is a CRT-related idea that advancing the rights of undocumented Latin@ students will likely occur only such advancing of rights aligns with the self-interest of the dominant group. Therefore, it is important to demonstrate how increased educational opportunity for undocumented students is beneficial to broader society.

### **Implication 1: Campus Services**

*There is a need for improving campus services focused on facilitating the success of undocumented college students. Creating identity-based spaces such as a resource center and meeting space for undocumented college students is a starting place, along with increasing educators' awareness and skills in serving this diverse student population.*

Campus educators have the opportunity to use their positions of power to create change for better serving undocumented college students. As highlighted in a later section on suggestions for practice, some areas for reexamining campus services for undocumented students include the following; educator training; bolstering university resources; and building connections external to the institution. Several pieces of literature can help inform these practices, as many would be taking shape from the ground up, versus building upon existing resources.

There are likely to be challenges in directing university resources to serving a group of students for which dialogue is surrounded by political controversy. However, there is a broader body of literature regarding various groups of diverse students and educators working to serve all students, regardless of background or identities. In an article highlighting the narrative of one

undocumented college student, authors argue the need for the democratic society of the U.S. to “determine whether liberty and justice for all really does include all people. Whether those who choose to commit to socially just action to support access to higher education for undocumented students are considered to be “angels” or “outlaws,” the ultimate authority lies in the hearts and minds of those with a different sort of access—those with access to power and privilege. It is within these power structures that access to a life of quality is denied or granted. These decisions cannot be carelessly determined by the waves of political clout and gain, but rather from a value-based framework that encapsulates social justice, equity, and equality for *all*” (Harmon, Carne, Lizardy-Hajbi, & Wilkerson, 2010, p. 80). This emphasis on serving all students, regardless of diverse background, can occur in various ways through reforming campus services.

In general, there is a need for improving campus services that facilitate supporting undocumented students. Several approaches can be integrated into campus services such as creating identity-based spaces such as a resource center and meeting space for undocumented college students, along with dedicating resources to increasing educators’ awareness and skills in serving this diverse student population.

**Implication 1a: Identity-Based Spaces.** *Despite some critiques that identity centers are divisive, rather than inclusive, creating these campus spaces is important for undocumented students. Creating identity-based spaces on campus for undocumented students to gather, as well as access centralized resources, is an important step in helping students feel like they matter on campus.*

Participants emphasized the importance of finding safe spaces on campus, which was often in the form of a student organization rather than a specific physical location. Students also expressed frustration and uncertainty over where to seek relevant resources on campus. A few

participants recognized the lack of physical space dedicated to undocumented students compared to other student groups such as LGBT students or Black student groups that had designated identity-based spaces on campus.

In an article on campus identity centers such as women's centers, ethnic centers, and LGBT resource centers, Kris Renn (2011) addressed the common critique of these spaces as dividing rather than uniting campus community members. Some of the common arguments regarding these spaces will transfer to opposition surrounding the creation of resource centers and other campus spaces designated for undocumented students. Renn argued why identity-based centers should exist, including the following:

(a) they respond to noninclusive campus climates, (b) they are part of the ecology of identity groups on campus, (c) some centers play a role in bridging academic and student affairs, and (d) they carry on traditions and have a symbolic function. (p. 244)

Ultimately, Renn concludes that these centers are uniting, and not dividing. She suggests, "In an age of increasing diversity yet inequitable student outcomes" there should be an "emphasis on supporting centers as providing separate, but not separatist, resources that support success for marginalized students" (p. 253). Creating a designated campus space for a marginalized group sends a symbolic message of mattering, while offering a safe space for students to build community.

Similarly, in her work on high-achieving Black students in a predominantly White public high school, Carter-Andrews (2007) discusses the importance of identity-affirming counter-spaces, which can be "informal, academic or social" (p. 543). Counter-spaces, or places where racial identity is affirmed and validated with peers of the same race, "counter the hegemony of racist and other oppressive ideologies and practices of the institution and its members" (p. 543). Although focused on high-achieving Black students in the high school environment, the author's

discussion on counter-spaces applies to resilient undocumented Latin@ students in postsecondary education, as counter-spaces on campus could also “serve as protective forces for these students and allow them to maintain a strong racial sense of self, while maintaining school success in a racially hostile environment” (p. 543). Carter-Andrews’ work highlights the significance of peer networks and identity-affirming counter-spaces that are both informally created by students and formally created by students and adults. These spaces can be a safe retreat and site of connection compared to other spaces filled with negative messages about racially marginalized students.

As highlighted earlier, creating a physical space for undocumented students to gather, as well as to access centralized resources, is an important step in helping students feel like they matter on campus. Special attention must be paid, however, to the location of this space, as some students may wish to remain more closeted with their identities and will wish to seek resources in private, while other students would feel marginalized by having a resource center in a remote campus location. These subtle actions of educators can send messages to undocumented students about how they are valued on campus, so it is helpful to turn to literature on the implementation of other identity-based spaces such as LGBT resource centers that also serve another populations who may not be out with their identities.

**Implication 1b: Educator Skills.** *There is a need to increase awareness among educators about issues related to undocumented college students, and this awareness must also be translated to skills that are useful in everyday practice. Educators in various campus roles play important roles in helping diverse students persist, and this support should involve demonstrating multicultural competence and considering students’ diverse backgrounds. There*



*is a need for educators to reflect on their own identities and roles before they can effectively create diverse learning environments.*

Due to the lack of dialogue and training on issues related to undocumented college students, there is a need to increase awareness on this topic among educators. This awareness must also be translated to skills that are useful in everyday practice. Several pieces of scholarship acknowledge the role university educators have in helping students persist. For example, foundational scholars such as King (1993) and Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) have emphasized the important role advisors play in helping college students persist. Also, quality student-faculty contact outside of the classroom bolsters student persistence and overall development (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Other studies focus on serving diverse student populations. Chavez, Guido-DiBrito, and Mallory (2003) emphasized the importance of considering students' diverse backgrounds in shaping practice, as "The manner in which we empower students is based on a cultural understanding of their local contexts and how such understandings might be incorporated into the basic fabric of the institution" (p. 457). Literature also highlights the importance of educators demonstrating multicultural competence. The term "multicultural competence" encompasses this specific area of interest, as it refers to "the awareness, knowledge, and skills needed to work with others who are culturally different from self in meaningful, relevant, and productive ways" (Pope, Reynolds, & Mueller, 2004, p. 13). There are also various definitions of what multiculturalism means, but this review focuses on the idea that, "it is important to acknowledge that all of our social identities (race, class, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, and abilities) influence who we are and how we view the world" (2004, p. xiv). This view of multicultural competence echoes my previous considerations of positionality and reflexivity as

an educator and scholar working with this topic.

In another study of student affairs professionals' self-reports of multicultural competence, Castellanos, Gloria, Mayorga, and Salas (2007) emphasized the importance of student affairs professionals having multicultural competence to recreate university culture into inclusive learning environments for students. They explain that student affairs professionals "directly influence the formation of a multicultural environment, build an inclusive campus environment, and transform institutional structures" (2007, p. 645). Pope and Mueller (2005) explain, "For student affairs practitioners to be more multiculturally competent in all aspects of their work, it is vital that diversity issues be effectively and systematically infused into preparation programs" (p. 697).

Chavez, Guido-DiBrito, and Mallory stated, "University professionals and students must learn to value and harness the multitude of talents originating within various cultures, identities, ideologies, and backgrounds to be successful as institutions of higher education" (2003, p. 453). Choi-Pearson, Castillo, and Maples (2004) explained that student affairs professionals must meet the needs of an increasingly diverse study body by decreasing their own levels of racial prejudice because this benefits students "in areas such as recruitment, persistence, and retention" (p. 142). They concluded that student affairs professionals who have skills with racial diversity issues are gaining personal knowledge which also "ultimately benefits the students, university, and the campus community they serve" (2004, p. 144). So, employing multiculturally competent professionals has positive implications that are far-reaching and will become increasingly crucial in the near future. Manning and Coleman-Boatwright (1991) also agreed that, "student affairs educators have the capacity to profoundly influence the initiation and fulfillment of

multiculturalism within their areas of responsibility as well as throughout the campus as a whole (p. 373).

Another study by Landerman, King, Rasmussen, and Jiang (2007) explained the importance of students being exposed to diverse perspectives, which requires creating learning environments “that encourage the sharing of different perspectives that may lead to cognitive dissonance (and sometimes conflict) required for learning to take place” (p. 294). The authors explained that educators must overcome being uncomfortable and underprepared to deal with such conflict, as it is a necessary element of learning about diversity. Their findings also “provide strong evidence that educational institutions- from elementary schools to colleges and universities- remain key socializing agents for students and provide the contexts for a wide range of intercultural experiences” (2007, p. 294). Faculty members and university administrators play an important part in creating diverse learning environments. The role of student affairs professionals includes facilitating this safe space, but creating such space requires student affairs graduates to be comfortable with their own multicultural competence before they can translate this to supporting students through their own learning.

There are many ways to increase educator skills for working effectively with undocumented college students. Educators in various roles on campus can play an active role in helping undocumented students persist, and this support role stems from a foundation of multicultural competence, self-reflection of one’s identities, and focusing on creating inclusive, diverse learning environments. In sum, creating campus services focused on facilitating the success of undocumented students can take many forms, including creating identity-based spaces where resources are centralized and students can gather.

## **Implication 2: Ethic of Care**

*I highlight ethic of care as a way to explore the potential for better serving undocumented college students by having empathy with students in meeting their holistic needs, and through developing points of connection and genuine interest in working with this student population. This concept is grounded in supportive, genuine relationships with individuals. These bonds are important for working with undocumented college students, as heated debates have dehumanized and silenced individuals who are undocumented. Also, several participants shared that their success often stemmed from positive human connection and being recognized by a caring educator.*

Ethic of care is an interdisciplinary area of study rooted in education, philosophy, psychology, theology, sociology, and health care. I use it here to highlight the potential for better serving undocumented college students by having empathy with students in meeting their holistic needs, and through developing points of connection and genuine interest in working with this student population. Carol Gilligan began writing about ethics of care after researching people in moral conflict while exploring her 1982 model of moral reasoning. Other feminist theorists also highlighted the ethic of care, which “starts from the premise that as humans we are inherently relational, responsive beings and the human condition is one of connectedness or interdependence” (Gilligan, 2011, n.p.).

Gilligan (2011) emphasizes the ethic of care as “grounded in voice and relationships, in the importance of everyone having a voice, being listened to carefully (in their own right and on their own terms) and heard with respect” (n.p.). This inclusion of ethic of care in my discussion may initially seem at odds with the previous sections covering some CRT ideas such as interest convergence. However, I seek to offer a balanced view of how I see educators being able to navigate serving undocumented college students on the ground level in the midst of broader

immigration reform debates and shifting legal climates. In considering how individual educators will work with students on a daily basis on campus, maintaining an ethic of care is one way to focus on connecting with individual students to help them develop to their full potential.

Also relevant to this argument is Gilligan's view that, "Rather than asking how do we gain the capacity to care, the questions become how do we come not to care; how do we lose the capacity for empathy and mutual understanding?" (2011). She explained, "Different voices then become integral to the vitality of a democratic society" and "An ethics of care is key to human survival and also to the realization of a global society" (2011). This framework and these questions are compelling viewpoints for examining issues related to undocumented college students and immigration reform overall, as heated debates have dehumanized and silenced individuals who are undocumented.

In *Care & Advocacy: Narratives from a School for Immigrant Youth*, Jo Bennett (2012) explained the importance of demonstrating an ethic of care when working with immigrant youth. Although the author is focused on grade school students, the concept of ethic of care applies to working with undocumented students in postsecondary education as well. Bennett explained, "A yearning for a person to care, recognize our worth, and direct our potential is a driving force in the human condition" (p. 30). Similarly, Noddings' (2003) *Philosophy of Care* "views the caring relationship and bond that exists between teachers and their students as a means of crossing over a border, especially a border caused by race, class, and ethnicity or the border from failure to success. These borders are inevitably crossed in the quest for social and moral justice and span far beyond any school wall or other barrier." (p. 30). This border analogy is particularly poignant when examining the complexity of educators working with undocumented college

students. As several participants shared, their success often stemmed from positive human connection and being recognized by a caring educator.

I also highlight the ethic of care because it might seem daunting for a postsecondary educator to learn all of the rapidly changing information related to the legalities of immigration reform impacting students. However, postsecondary educators need not become legal experts. A basic awareness of laws and policies impacting students, along with how to access expert resources in these areas, can be greatly supplemented by demonstrating an ethic of care for individual students. As one of the participants explained, undocumented students perceive when an educator genuinely cares about them and wants to do their best to help. Regardless of outcome in a given situation, the participant emphasized that demonstrating this care and concern has a hugely positive impact on the student.

The ethic of care viewpoint also relates to the earlier discussion on using a humanistic framework to learn about the experiences of undocumented college students. In a study exploring the perspectives of DREAM-eligible college students, Morales, Herrera, and Murray (2009) emphasized the need for humanistic research:

...which captures the voices and rich experiences of DREAM-eligible students, be explored further to inform policy and practice. As the immigration battle in legislation continues with little indication of sound resolution, educators on the front line must decide where they stand on the issue. As they witness the talent and potential of their DREAM-eligible students, they must serve as strong advocates and allies for those whose voices have been silenced...These DREAM-eligible students have significant aspirations for their lives in this country, and their voices have much to teach us beyond the political rhetoric - if we will listen. (p. 279)

It is clear that institutions of higher education will be important change agents in reshaping the debate over undocumented students in college. Throughout the complicated legalities and heated debates, maintaining an ethic of care and truly hearing students' voices will be key in maintaining the humanity of this issue. This is a great responsibility, but also an opportunity for

higher education to serve as a model social institution. Duderstadt (2000) highlighted this vision as he concludes his thoughts on diversity in higher education:

Progress toward diversity will likely require some significant changes in strategy in the years ahead. Unfortunately, the road we have to travel is neither frequently walked nor well marked. We can look to very few truly diverse institutions in American society for guidance. We will have to blaze new trails, and create new social models. (p. 200)

Institutions of higher education have the opportunity to take a stand on supporting undocumented college students, which can be rooted in an ethic of care. This approach to working with undocumented students emphasizes a humanistic approach to building relationships with students who are often dehumanized in various U.S. social institutions. Participants reinforced the notion that positive interactions with caring educators were extremely important throughout their educational journeys.

### **Implication 3: Interest Convergence**

*A review of interest convergence in previous social justice and human rights movements provides a foundation for understanding this topic. Advancing the rights of a marginalized group occurs when it aligns with the self-interest of the dominant group. In light of this complex reality, an intentional effort must be made to form arguments on why providing increased educational opportunity to undocumented students is beneficial to broader society.*

Although this study covers a complex topic filled with challenging journeys, my interactions with participants resonate within a resilience framework, and leave me hopeful for a better future. Having a sense of hope was also a main theme in the study findings, which participants expressed when asked to describe their vision of the future for the undocumented student movement. Despite this optimistic outlook, it is also necessary to bring a critical awareness to the reality of immigration reform and the resulting impact on undocumented

college students. When considering positive change for undocumented students, the CRT view of interest convergence is a realistic idea for examination.

Interest convergence is an idea that “the majority group tolerates advances for racial justice only when it suits its interest to do so” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 149). CRT scholar Derrick Bell brought forth historical details surrounding the idea of interest convergence, or that “civil rights advances for blacks always coincided with changing economic conditions and the self-interest of elite whites” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001, p. 18). For example, the NAACP fought for educational desegregation for years, yet the U.S. Supreme Court *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling came when Black and white interests converged and abandoning segregation was “in part a response to foreign policy concerns and an effort to suppress the potential of black radicalism at home” (Dudziak, 2009, p. 86).

Similarly, in “Desegregation as a Cold War Imperative,” Dudziak (2009) explained that news stories of “voting rights abuses, state-enforced segregation, and lynchings” appeared in the world media during a time when “the sanctity of American democracy had tremendous implications for U.S. foreign policy interests” (p. 93). This level of U.S. racism shown on a global stage was problematic because “Americans could not save the Third World for democracy if democracy meant white supremacy” (p. 93). As such, “The Soviet Union’s efforts to take advantage of this American dilemma reinforced its Cold War implications” (p. 93). Although it might seem disheartening, this is a realistic critique of the motivation for widespread reform leading to desegregation done out of the interest of the majority. Looking to the past is helpful in informing realistic future efforts regarding issues such as immigration reform and higher education opportunity for undocumented students. However, the Cold War imperative was not an isolated incident of interest convergence.



More recent examples of interest convergence include the state of Arizona reversing its decision to cancel the Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday because the NBA All-Star Game and NFL Super Bowl would alter their decision to hold their events in Arizona. Ladson-Billings (2009) explained how this unfolded as the Arizona governor changed state plans in light of controversy:

...[her] position on the holiday had the effect of hurting state tourist and sports entertainment revenues, the state's interests (to enhance revenue) converged with that of the African American community (to recognize Dr. King). Thus, converging interests, not support of civil rights, led to the reversal of the state's position. (p. 23)

These are a few examples of interest convergence in effect, which are complicated realities to consider when working for positive change in immigration reform and providing postsecondary educational access and opportunity for undocumented college students. Unfortunately, there is still a critical mass of stakeholders in positions of power who do not believe in the humanistic aspect of this topic, and who have selective memories when it comes to their own immigration histories in the U.S. and how they have come to achieve their upward mobility over the generations. Therefore, in this study, such as in the opening significance arguments, as well as in future efforts to better serve undocumented college students, an intentional effort must be made to form arguments on why providing increased opportunity to undocumented students is beneficial to broader society. This includes providing tangible arguments on the benefits to dominant groups such as increasing the amount of taxpayers and educated citizenry to increase the U.S.'s global competitiveness, while also decreasing crime and reliance on public assistance by offering marginalized segments of the population opportunities for upward mobility.

Although a somewhat problematic reality, in looking to the future, I agree with Delgado & Stefancic (2001) who offer a "critical race agenda for the next century." This agenda also includes the reality of critical race theorists needing to "marshal every conceivable argument, exploit every chink, crack, and glimmer of interest convergence to make these reforms palatable

to a majority that only a few times in its history has seen fit to tolerate them” (p. 133). Aside from the humanistic and ethical arguments I proposed at the beginning of this study, it is in light of interest convergence that I also argued for the economic and broader social benefit of undocumented college students having equitable access and opportunity in higher education. The complicated and, at times troubling, idea of interest convergence is currently a necessary tool for realistically bringing the issues related to serving undocumented college students into discourse on shaping policy and practice.

Overall, several Critical Race Theory and LatCrit-related themes emerged in the process of examining the experiences of the undocumented Latin@ student participants in this study. In acknowledging the importance of positionality, I engaged in ongoing critical reflection of my identities as a researcher of this study. I also emphasized an anti-deficit approach through the use of resilience theory. The problematic nature of color-blindness in shaping educational practices was examined, as undocumented college students have faced systemic oppression leading to barriers in accessing equitable educational opportunities. Racist nativism creates an “us” versus “them” mentality in portrayals of individuals who are undocumented. The use of student counter narratives to share personal stories is an important approach to humanizing the issue of undocumented college student experiences. Interest convergence is a problematic, yet realistic approach to advancing immigration reform and providing increased educational opportunity to undocumented students. Scholarship and advocacy must emphasize the benefits of these efforts to broader society to align with the self-interest of the dominant group in the U.S.

In light of this discussion on interest convergence, the suggestions for practice I offer are fairly general and based on findings from this study, as well as from broader literature. It is important for educators to adapt these suggestions to various institutional climates so efforts will

be locally relevant. Also, while it is not my intent to offer a policy analysis of the implementation of these suggestions, I am aware that enacting new services and programs on campus, especially for controversial student groups, can be difficult in times of resource constraints. Some of the suggestions I offer will cost more money and time than others, but ultimately, if institutions are to take a stand in advocating for serving undocumented college students, dedicating resources to these efforts will send a clear message of support.

### **Suggestions for Practice**

Based on current literature and the findings from this study, the topic of undocumented college students is one that is only recently becoming a part of higher education discourse. There is much to learn from hearing the voices of undocumented college students in examining their experiences and, in turn, considering how educators might better serve this student population. Many campuses will be starting from the ground up with these efforts, but institutions have the opportunity to begin creating a multi-pronged approach to supporting undocumented students in higher education. I recommend implications for practice in three main areas including the following: educator training; university resources; and building connections external to the institution such as in the community, with family, and in the local K-12 system.

My implications from the study are mainly for practice, rather than being theory or policy focused. Although the intent of this study was not to develop a specific theory related to undocumented college students, it is important to note the gap in scholarly knowledge regarding the experiences of undocumented students. As addressed in the suggestions for future research section, further research is needed to examine areas such as the identity development of undocumented college students. Also, while my suggestions are aimed at practice for better

serving undocumented college students, some of these recommendations also relate to campus policy changes.

Similarly, the intent of this study was not to focus on the K-12 pipeline or financial aspects of undocumented college students funding their higher education pursuits, but given the related themes that reoccurred in participants' journeys, some of my recommendations touch upon these topics, as they are important pieces of the overall puzzle to higher education persistence. Before providing specific suggestions based on the findings from the study, it is important to provide a few notes about the foundation underlying the following implications for practice. First, I urge the reader to remain mindful of the CRT themes discussed in previous chapters. Improving practice for serving undocumented students requires a focus on an assets-based approach, color-consciousness to form culturally relevant practices, an awareness of racist nativism and the role this plays in students' experiences, and the reality of interest convergence.

### **Educator Efforts**

Several ideas for practice regarding educator training emerged based on the study findings. Student stories highlighted the importance of educators who are aware of issues relevant to their educational experiences, while also proactively showing support for this student group. Support can be demonstrated through visible ally programs, positive interactions with students, serving as a resource, and helping to create networks of allies for these students.

Due to limited information and discourse on the experiences of undocumented college students, it is important to raise faculty and staff awareness about this issue. Participants cited raising educator awareness as a primary way to improve their college experiences. There are many ways to address this need for raising awareness. Educators may create and partake in ongoing training, including accessing updates via online resources to highlight federal and state

legal changes. Practical tips could include listings of campus resources, tools for using appropriate and inclusive language, and tips for how to address problematic speech in classes or campus bias-related incidents. Overall, these efforts should encourage educators to learn more about this topic and how to be resourceful in serving students while operating within legal boundaries.

Beyond raising overall educator awareness, some educators may wish to engage in even deeper, more proactive measures to show their support in serving undocumented students. Universities can create a voluntary ally training program, much like common programs used for LGBT Safe Zones on campuses. An ally training program for university educators could focus on serving undocumented college students, and could be modeled after pioneering institutions' efforts such as the California State Long Beach AB540 Handbook used in campus ally training. Training could also include educating oneself beyond legalities by engaging in critical personal reflection about ones' own identities and biases and what it means for someone as an individual to demonstrate an ethic of care for all students.

Some educators may also support the creation of related faculty/staff interest groups to further explore this topic with current literature in light of current campus issues. These interest groups could also serve as starting points for educators to build networks of support for undocumented college students across campus. Educators can serve as connectors to other allies and advocates so they know where to refer students for various concerns. This wide network of allies will also help ensure institutional memory if a particular mentor or gatekeeper leaves campus.

The suggestions above can apply to university educators in a variety of roles, and there is also a way to reach a targeted audience of student affairs administrators by updating graduate

preparation programs. There is a need to create more inclusive training and curricula by adding materials on working with undocumented college students. Similar to how other diverse groups of students are integrated into classroom preparation, including undocumented student information can occur through case studies, reading current scholarship, and holding discussions on theory to practice for serving this student population.

Overall, educators including faculty, student affairs administrators, and staff can take an active role in increasing their training on the topic of undocumented college students and how to better serve this population. Increasing educator awareness of these issues can occur in multiple ways, including engaging in ongoing trainings and accessing readily available resources regarding legal updates and practical tips for working with undocumented students. Practical tips include accessible listings of dedicated campus resources, tools for using appropriate and inclusive language, and tips for how to address problematic speech in classes or on campus when incidents are directed at undocumented students. Some educators may wish to engage in deeper learning and advocacy surrounding this issue, such as partaking in an undocumented student ally training program that involves critical self-reflection and earning a visible ally sticker for students to see as a safe space. Faculty/staff interest groups are another way to build a more comprehensive support network across campus for undocumented students.

### **University Resources**

Universities as a whole can demonstrate a commitment to serving undocumented college students through informed and culturally relevant practice. Benchmarking is one approach to examining how institutions are leading in serving undocumented college students. Many pioneering institutions are in specific contexts such as California, so ideas would need to be adapted to local contexts and policy climates. Improving university resources could begin by

examining programs used to serve other diverse student populations such as ally trainings, identity-based resource centers, dedicated staff members such as directors or coordinators of identity-based centers, and offering identity-based courses and academic units.

In creating a dedicated physical space for undocumented students and related student groups, it is important to consider the placement of the space. Identity-based resource centers in central areas may signal to some students that they are not being marginalized in a small, insignificant hidden space, but others may wish for a more private space due to the sensitive nature of ones' immigration status. The specific campus layout will need to be considered in designing such a space. Universities wishing to support undocumented students might make the case that creating these resources could be funded in part from the additional money undocumented students pay through out-of-state or international tuition, despite being in-state students.

When the opportunity arises given potential policy shifts, increasing the presence of employed undocumented individuals in formal campus roles will help increase the presence of potential role-models and mentors for undocumented students. Universities can also recruit faculty and staff who are willing to serve as mentors for undocumented students, and create a formal program for connecting students with these individuals. A formal peer-mentoring program for students could also help students persist through college. Efforts at connecting peer and educator mentors with undocumented students might also create a more formal alumni network to encourage further involvement in the university and to encourage future generations of undocumented students to attend college.

Campuses can also coordinate climate surveys, perhaps anonymously, for undocumented students to provide feedback on their experiences and suggestions for improving the campus

environment. Universities can also include undocumented students in non-discrimination policies, as well as create inclusive university documents that provide attention to language and clearly expressed support for welcoming this student population. Campuses can also emphasize positive representation in curricular content, and inclusive educational co-curricular programming. Students and families will also benefit from centralized resources that are easy to access in online, multilingual formats.

Universities can also frequently revisit campus programs and policies to assess and evaluate the effectiveness of these efforts, and to align them with any changing legal circumstances such as updates from Deferred Action. As federal policies are unfolding, students would benefit from the creation of on-campus opportunities for career exploration and professional development such as unpaid internships, lab work, job shadowing, and local service projects. Institutions might also consider providing alternative financial aid to students and could target recruitment at specific K-12 school districts that serve a large number of undocumented students.

In sum, creating university resources aimed at serving undocumented students can occur in multiple ways. One starting point is to benchmark with other institutions leading the way in this area, along with surveying undocumented students on campus about their experiences and suggestions. Efforts can be informed by the processes used to sustain resources for serving other diverse student populations such as ally trainings, identity-based resource centers, dedicated staff members such as directors or coordinators of identity-based centers, and offering identity-based curricular and co-curricular programming. University resources can also be channeled into creating formal educator and peer-mentoring programs for undocumented students, along with creating more inclusive non-discrimination policies and use of inclusive language in university



materials. Given the limitations undocumented students face in academic and career exploration, universities can also create on-campus professional development opportunities for this student population. Ongoing assessment and evaluation of these efforts is important given changing policy climates, but overall, universities have realistic opportunities to take a stand for serving undocumented students in multiple ways.

### **Building Connections External to the Institution**

Creating a comprehensive network of support is important for serving undocumented college students who maintain close ties to home throughout their educational journeys.

Universities can be intentional in forming relationships with community partners such as local community organizations or religious institutions, and with families and local K-12 school systems.

Universities can proactively reach out to undocumented students in high schools with large number of undocumented students, as well as through easy to find online resources on the university website. K-12 partnerships can also focus on the pipeline to college and can channel resources into important preparation and summer bridge programs to connect students with institutions early in students' educational trajectories. When resources allow, in-state tuition programs and scholarships can be created. Pending federal policy changes, TRIO programs could be expanded to support undocumented students, as these federal grants support first-generation, low-income students succeed in college. More permissive articulation agreements between community colleges and four-year institutions would also be helpful in facilitating students' transfer from a common higher education entry point to four-year institution.

Involving families in university life includes having accessible, multilingual materials as well as information on the entire college process to help parents and guardians feel more

comfortable with their students navigating a system unfamiliar to them. Having a university point-person for families to contact as a trusted resource could also aid in the transition to college. Programs to include younger siblings in higher education culture could also create smooth transitions and inspire younger generations of students to also pursue higher education. Creating these connections can increase resource sharing and help students bridge gaps in their home and academic lives.

Overall, undocumented Latin@ college students maintain important ties to their home communities outside of campus, and these areas can be integrated into students' collegiate experiences. Universities have the opportunity to build connections with external community partners, with families, and in local K-12 school systems. Improving the K-12 to postsecondary pipeline is important in increasing access to higher education, as is increasing the number of summer bridge programs to ease the transition undocumented students face in attending college. Involving families in all phases of the college-going process is important, which means having accessible, multilingual materials to help families become familiar with their students' academic opportunities. Creating these connections between higher education and undocumented students' community and home lives can help students bridge their experiences as they negotiate multiple worlds.

### **Limitations**

Limitations of this study range from the interview and sampling methods to ethical considerations. Due to the sensitive nature of this topic and the legal repercussions associated with participants' identities, all interviews were completed via Skype audio or via phone call. Although this interviewing method allowed for a certain level of confidentiality, participants may have felt more disconnected than if interviews had occurred face-to-face. However,

participants still disclosed deeply personal information in their responses, and a basic level of rapport was built with the interviewer over the course of two interviews, and all but one individual participated in the second round of interviews.

Initially I thought the sampling method used would likely lead to contact with students who were very out with their status. However, some gatekeepers put students in contact with me who were fairly closeted with their status. Interactions with these students would have likely not been possible if their trusted mentors had not been a contact point between us. Further, the sampling method still excluded students who are extremely closeted with their status. This closeted student population is likely very difficult to identify and connect with for a research study, but it is worth noting that these students' stories are also important to hear, if possible to do so in a manner that is safe for the students. Interviewing students who are less visible with their undocumented status would likely yield different perceptions of campus climate and how they navigate higher education overall.

Similarly, due to the nature of limitations accessing students from various states, participants generally represented states with more open policy climates versus also some of the most policy-restrictive states. If possible, examination of the full spectrum of policy climates would be beneficial in understanding the impact of state policy on institutional policy, and ultimately, on students' experiences. It is also important to note the limited scope of this study, as examining the experiences of 16 participants does not yield information generalizable to all undocumented Latin@ students, nor the broader undocumented student community.

Identity-based differences such as race, ethnicity, and immigration status between the interviewer and participants may result in cultural barriers to creating an open and trusting interview environment. However, the majority of participants inquired about the interviewer's

motivation for studying this topic, and participants were very open and receptive to who they described as allies from the dominant group working along with them to bring awareness to this topic. Also, all participants were fluent in Spanish and English, but the interviewer speaks English but understands very limited Spanish. Interviews were conducted in English and at no time was there a language barrier, as the interviewer was familiar with some basic Spanish terminology used by some participants to describe certain parts of their experiences (e.g., use of the word *coyotaje* referring to how some families crossed the Mexico/U.S. border). Although some of these limitations are specific to this study, the overall cautions are also relevant to consider in future research related to this topic.

### **Further Research**

Research on the experiences of undocumented college students is limited, especially regarding examinations of their experiences outside of higher education access and financing. As such, there are many opportunities for building future research on this topic. To start, increasing the sample size and completing a longitudinal study could provide more detailed insight into the experiences of undocumented Latin@ college students. Embarking upon a longitudinal study of initial participants is important given the shifting national immigration policy landscape and its influence on institutional practice. Expanding the study at various universities with a diversity of policy climates would be a starting point for helpful comparative studies.

Other topics to examine further include recent policy changes (e.g., Deferred Action) and their influence on students' educational trajectories and career prospects. Learning about the overall identity development of undocumented college students could also be an important model for guiding work with students. Another phase of work could also explore students' sense of

belonging in college related to the intersections of marginalized identities within the undocumented student community, including issues of gender and sexual orientation. Of particular interest is the increasingly visible “UndocuQueer” movement led by undocumented college students who also identify within the queer community. Future studies could explore the idea of a “dual coming out” process that students might experience with these intersecting marginalized identities.

On a broader scale, future research should also examine undocumented students outside of the Latin@ community that includes other geographic countries of origin. Various institutional contexts, including Hispanic Serving Institutions, could be a focus for study in comparing campus climates and student experiences. Also, in an effort to supplement the student voice, research may include interviewing the mentors and educators who work closely with undocumented college students.

Due to access issues, many undocumented college students first arrive in postsecondary education through community colleges, which is touched upon in a small base of existing literature. However, as highlighted by my participants, undocumented college students often have the goal of attending four-year institutions. Therefore, further examination of the college choice and transfer process may shed light on how to assist students in this process. Although some K-12 studies exist, there is room for collaboration with other educators to further examine the K-12/higher education pipeline for undocumented college students, especially regarding how high school educators are working with this topic.

Overall, revisiting this study over time and listening to individual student experiences will be key as immigration policies continue to evolve, thus impacting the experiences of undocumented college students. Regardless of future lines of inquiry, it is crucial to center

student stories in the midst of heated debate and inconsistent policy climates that often exclude or create misperceptions of this student population.

### **Final Thoughts**

In acknowledgements, I shared a quote by Nelson Mandela that I was deeply touched by after visiting Robben Island in South Africa with a group of MSU colleagues. Mandela's quote speaks to the heart of this study, the spirit of the participants, and the work I strive to do with students in higher education. Our connectedness to one another cannot be forgotten in the midst of complicated realities regarding identities situated within legacies of power, privilege, and oppression. A South African phrase, *ubuntu*, translates roughly to "I am, because we are." In essence, this ethos means that we are all share a bond, connected through compassion and humanity.

Ubuntu encompasses the spirit that I wish to carry throughout my work, and I encourage others to consider the same when exploring the experiences of undocumented Latin@ college students. Immigration reform is a heated topic, and in the midst of controversial political debate, individuals who are undocumented are often dehumanized or forgotten. This reality does not serve communities well in advancing issues related to immigration reform overall, nor does it advance the potential of higher education in the United States. Maintaining a focus on affirming and humanizing undocumented college students will help communities tap into the bright futures of this marginalized group. Fostering this potential through educational equity can lead to increased opportunities for individual upward mobility and great contributions to broader society. Dr. Dorinda Carter Andrews' (2014) reflection on civil rights in education summarizes this concept, as:

The enactment and widespread presence of educational inequity doesn't allow for any of us to experience our full humanity. Furthermore, what is inequitable for one negatively

affects all; the individual good is intimately tied to the collective good. Because schools are touted as being the great equalizer, they have to become institutions where equality and equity are normalized. Students who have been traditionally marginalized on the basis of race, ethnicity, language, social class, sexuality and gender must experience schools as places where their identities are affirmed and achievement is possible for anyone, regardless of racial background. Our very survival as a democracy rests on the ability of individuals and groups to realize their full potential through equal access to opportunities for happiness and social mobility. (n.p.)

## **APPENDICES**



## **APPENDIX A: Interview Protocol**

### **The Experiences of Undocumented Latin@ Students who Demonstrate Resilience in Navigating Higher Education**

Interviews took place in two rounds. These protocols indicate the kinds of questions that were asked. Since these interviews were conversational, questions were adapted somewhat as the conversation developed.

#### **Interview #1 Protocol:**

- Describe how you got to where you are now as a student at university (family background, arrival in U.S., application to college, etc.).
- Tell me about your role as a student on this campus (year, live on campus, major, work, organizations, other involvement).
- Please tell me about your journey as an undocumented Latin@ student in college. Describe some experiences that have stood out to you as an undocumented student (classroom, campus climate, etc.).
- Are you “out” on campus about your immigration status? Please tell me about this decision and the resulting impact.
- What have been your biggest challenges so far in college?
- What have been your biggest successes so far in college?
- How do you usually address challenges as they arise in your education-related experiences?
  - What personal characteristics do you possess that have helped you succeed?
  - What environmental influences have helped you succeed? (i.e., family, friends, mentors, etc.)
  - How do you maintain hope and motivation when challenges arise regarding your school and future goals?
- How do you think other undocumented students overcome challenges related to their immigration status? Or, for some students, why they are not able to overcome these challenges?
- What are your educational goals? Career goals? While in college, have these goals changed or been impacted as a result of your undocumented status?
- What suggestions do you have for campus educators to better serve undocumented students?
- Addressing any additional points of clarification/Probes

- Is there anything else you would like to add?

**Interview #2 Protocol:**

- Thinking back to our first interview, is there anything else you would like to add before we cover more specific questions about your experiences as an undocumented Latin@ college student?
- How do you fund your education? If you work, how did you obtain your job?
- Please describe your family's role in your educational experience.
- Is English your second language? If so, how has this impacted your college experience?
- How, if at all, has your gender played a role in your educational experiences?
- Is there anyone from your home community who influences your educational journey?
- Is there someone on campus or in your community you look up to and seek advice from?
- What, if any, campus and community organizations are you involved in? What impact has this involvement had on your educational experience?
- Do you feel like a part of your campus community? Why or why not?
- How, if at all, has being an undocumented student impacted your peer relationships in college?
- Have you ever felt stigmatized or afraid because of your undocumented status while in college? If so, please describe this and how you handled the situation(s).
- Have your grades in college ever been impacted by your undocumented status?
- Addressing any additional points of clarification/Probes
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

**APPENDIX B:**  
**Chart Highlighting How the Framework Informs the Chosen Research Questions**

**Primary Research question:**

How do undocumented Latin@ college students demonstrate resilience as they navigate higher education?

**Research Sub questions:**

1) How does being undocumented shape a student's college experience?

- Please tell me about your journey as an undocumented Latin@ student in college.
- What have been your biggest challenges so far in college?
- What have been your biggest successes so far in college?

2) What factors contribute to overcoming challenges these students encounter in higher education?

- How have you overcome challenges in college?
  - What personal characteristics do you possess that have helped you succeed?
  - What environmental influences have helped you succeed? (i.e., family, friends, mentors, etc.)
- What suggestions do you have for campus educators to better serve undocumented students?

**Wrap-Up questions:**

- Addressing any additional points of clarification/Probes
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

<b>GENERAL BACKGROUND INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS</b>
--

- Describe how you got to where you are now as a student at university (family background, arrival in U.S., application to college, etc.).
- Tell me about your role as a student on this campus (year, live on campus, major, work, organizations, other involvement).
- Describe some experiences that have stood out to you as an undocumented student (classroom, campus climate, etc.).

**CRT/LATCRIT**

**Language and accent**

- Is English your second language? If so, how has this impacted your college experience?

**National origin**

- Are you “out” on campus about your immigration status? Please tell me about this decision and the resulting impact.
- How do you think other undocumented students overcome challenges related to their immigration status? Or, for some students, why they are not able to overcome these challenges?

**Race**

- (Are you “out” on campus about your immigration status? Please tell me about this decision and the resulting impact.)
- (How do you think other undocumented students overcome challenges related to their immigration status? Or, for some students, why they are not able to overcome these challenges?)

**Class**

- How do you fund your education?
- If you work, how did you obtain your job?

**Gender**

- How, if at all, has your gender played a role in your educational experiences?

**Phenotype**

## **RESILIENCE THEORY**

### **Personal Factors**

**High educational aspirations**

**Goal oriented**

**Problem-solving skills**

**Social competence**

**Effective coping behaviors**

**Internal locus of control**

**Sense of purpose and future**

**Maintaining hope**

**Motivation**

**Views experiences as opportunities**

- How do you usually address challenges as they arise in your education-related experiences?
- Please tell me about your educational goals and your goals for the future beyond college.
- How do you maintain hope and motivation when challenges arise regarding your school and future goals?

### **Environmental Factors**

#### **Maintains ties to home community**

- Is there anyone from your home community who influences your educational journey?

#### **Parental support**

- Please describe your family's role in your educational experience.

#### **Mentor relationships**

- Is there someone on campus or in your community you look up to and seek advice from?

#### **Involvement in community organization**

- What, if any, campus and community organizations are you involved in? What impact has this involvement had on your educational experience?

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Family**

- (Describe your family's role in your educational experience.)

#### **Activism**

- (What, if any, campus and community organizations are you involved in? What impact has this involvement had on your educational experience?)

### **Campus climate**

#### **Social isolation, Connection to peers, University educators, Community**

- What, if any, campus and community organizations are you involved in? What impact has this involvement had on your educational experience?
- Do you feel like a part of your campus community? Why or why not?
- How, if at all, has being an undocumented student impacted your peer relationships in college?

#### **Awareness and support from university educators**

- (Is there someone on campus or in your community you look up to and seek advice from?)

### **Stigma and fear**

- Have you ever felt stigmatized or afraid because of your undocumented status while in college? If so, please describe this and how you handled the situation(s).

#### **Sense of belonging on campus**

- (What, if any, campus and community organizations are you involved in? What impact has this involvement had on your educational experience?)
- (Do you feel like a part of your campus community? Why or why not?)
- (How, if at all, has being an undocumented student impacted your peer relationships in college?)

### **Academics**

#### **Grades**

- Have your grades in college ever been impacted by your undocumented status?

### **Professional development and Career Plans**

- What are your educational goals? Career goals? While in college, have these goals changed or been impacted as a result of your undocumented status?



**APPENDIX C:**  
**Pilot Study Interview Protocol (with Christina Yao; Spring, 2010)**

1. Tell us about your role as a student on this campus (year, live on campus, major, work, organizations, other involvement).
2. Describe how you got to where you are now as a student at university (arrival in US, application to college, etc.).
3. How do you fund your education?
4. Describe some experiences that have stood out to you as an undocumented student (classroom, campus climate, etc.).
5. Describe your family's role in your educational experience.
6. Describe your experience with English as your second language?
7. How has your undocumented status affected your educational experiences?
8. Anything else to add?

**APPENDIX D:**  
**Participant Consent Forms for Study**

Interview Round One Consent Form:

**The Experiences of Undocumented Latin@ Students who Demonstrate  
Resilience in Navigating Higher Education**

You are invited to participate in a research study that allows me to explore how undocumented Latina/o students demonstrate resilience in navigating higher education. This study is a part of my dissertation work as a doctoral student at Michigan State University. Your participation in this study will help me to better understand this topic so I may help improve educational practices for serving undocumented Latina/o college students. The benefits to participation may include the opportunity to share your story and reflect on your experiences, which will contribute to research that can improve how higher education institutions support undocumented students.

The study involves two separate 60-90 minute individual semi-structured phone interviews, resulting in a total time commitment of approximately 2 ½ hours. The interview will be informal and conversational in nature with open-ended questions, allowing you to share your experience freely. Data analysis will follow standard qualitative procedures and will be conducted by Leslie Jo Shelton.

Participants will choose pseudonyms prior to analysis, and all identifying information will be removed from transcripts prior to analysis. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time, with no penalty for doing so. You may also choose not to answer individual questions but to answer others. With your consent, the interview will be audio taped. If you agree that I may do so, you may request at any time that I turn off the recorder. Digital recordings will be kept in a secure location for two years after the completion of the study, at which time they will be erased. Any additional information such as email correspondence will be securely maintained by the researcher until the end of the study.

Your identity will remain confidential in all transcribing, analyzing, and reporting of data. Because the study involves identifying you ahead of time and setting up a phone call, I cannot provide complete anonymity to participants. However, your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent possible. I will use a pseudonym of your choice in transcribing, analyzing, and reporting data. An added layer of confidentiality is in place by utilizing email and phone communication versus paper copies of documents and face-to-face meetings. However, please note that email is not 100% secure due to outside persons potentially intercepting your Internet browser or accessing your email messages. Please consider closing all browser sessions, clearing computer memory cache, and logging out of your email after submitting any information to me regarding participation in this study.

While participating in the study, you may encounter risks, which I will minimize as much as possible during the research process. It is possible that you may become uncomfortable discussing any unpleasant experiences. I remind you that you may, at any time and without penalty, elect not to answer a question or terminate the interview. As listed above, the benefits to

participation may include the opportunity to share your story and reflect on your experiences, which will contribute to research that can improve how higher education institutions support undocumented students.

If you have any questions about this study or concerns regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact – anonymously, if you wish, Dr. Ann Austin, HALE Department, 620 Farm Lane, 417 Erickson Hall, Michigan State University, (517) 355-6757, [aaustin@msu.edu](mailto:aaustin@msu.edu), or Leslie Jo Shelton, HALE Department, 620 Farm Lane, 418 Erickson Hall, Michigan State University, (517) 353-5187, [shelto84@msu.edu](mailto:shelto84@msu.edu). Also, if you have additional questions or concerns regarding your rights and role as a research participation, you may contact anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail [irb@msu.edu](mailto:irb@msu.edu) or regular mail at 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

At the time of the first scheduled phone interview, I will review the consent form information with all participants and will then obtain verbal consent from participants. Verbal consent to participate in the study will include participants acknowledging they voluntarily agree to participate, agree to have responses digitally audio recorded, and that participants understand they may stop at any time without penalty. Prior to our first phone interview, please review this consent form and do not hesitate to contact me via email ([Shelto84@msu.edu](mailto:Shelto84@msu.edu)) with any questions.

Thank you,

Leslie Jo Shelton  
Doctoral Candidate - HALE  
Michigan State University  
620 Farm Lane  
418 Erickson Hall  
[shelto84@msu.edu](mailto:shelto84@msu.edu)

MSU IRB i042035

Interview Round Two Consent Form:

**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM FOR STUDY**

**The Experiences of Undocumented Latin@ Students who Demonstrate Resilience in Navigating Higher Education**

You are invited to participate in a research study that allows me to explore how undocumented Latina/o students demonstrate resilience in navigating higher education. This study is a part of my dissertation work as a doctoral student at Michigan State University. Your participation in this study will help me to better understand this topic so I may help improve educational practices for serving undocumented Latina/o college students. The benefits to participation may include the opportunity to share your story and reflect on your experiences, which will contribute to research that can improve how higher education institutions support undocumented students.

The study involves one individual semi-structured phone interview of approximately 75 minutes, with the possibility of an additional 60-minute follow-up phone interview. The interview will be informal and conversational in nature with open-ended questions, allowing you to share your experience freely. Data analysis will follow standard qualitative procedures and will be conducted by Leslie Jo Shelton. Following our second interview, participants will be emailed a link to a \$20 online Amazon.com gift card as a thank you for participating. The gift card is not attached to any identifying information of participants, as it will be forwarded directly from my email address that has been used to correspond with participants throughout the study. Participants may opt out of receiving the thank-you gift card by notifying me any time before the conclusion of the second interview.

Participants will choose pseudonyms prior to analysis, and all identifying information will be removed from transcripts prior to analysis. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time, with no penalty for doing so. You may also choose not to answer individual questions but to answer others. With your consent, the interview will be audio taped. If you agree that I may do so, you may request at any time that I turn off the recorder. Digital recordings will be kept in a secure location for two years after the completion of the study, at which time they will be erased. Any additional information such as email correspondence will be securely maintained by the researcher until the end of the study.

Your identity will remain confidential in all transcribing, analyzing, and reporting of data. Because the study involves identifying you ahead of time and setting up a phone call, I cannot provide complete anonymity to participants. However, your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent possible. I will use a pseudonym of your choice in transcribing, analyzing, and reporting data. An added layer of confidentiality is in place by utilizing email and phone communication versus paper copies of documents and face-to-face meetings. However, please note that email is not 100% secure due to outside persons potentially intercepting your Internet browser or accessing your email messages. Please consider closing all browser sessions, clearing computer memory cache, and logging out of your email after submitting any information to me regarding participation in this study.

While participating in the study, you may encounter risks, which I will minimize as much as possible during the research process. It is possible that you may become uncomfortable discussing any unpleasant experiences. I remind you that you may, at any time and without penalty, elect not to answer a question or terminate the interview. As listed above, the benefits to participation may include the opportunity to share your story and reflect on your experiences, which will contribute to research that can improve how higher education institutions support undocumented students.

If you have any questions about this study or concerns regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact – anonymously, if you wish, Dr. Ann Austin, HALE Department, 620 Farm Lane, 417 Erickson Hall, Michigan State University, (517) 355-6757, [aaustin@msu.edu](mailto:aaustin@msu.edu), or Leslie Jo Shelton, HALE Department, 620 Farm Lane, 418 Erickson Hall, Michigan State University, (517) 353-5187, [shelto84@msu.edu](mailto:shelto84@msu.edu). Also, if you have additional questions or concerns regarding your rights and role as a research participation, you may contact anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail [irb@msu.edu](mailto:irb@msu.edu) or regular mail at 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

At the time of the first scheduled phone interview, I will review the consent form information with all participants and will then obtain verbal consent from participants. Verbal consent to participate in the study will include participants acknowledging they voluntarily agree to participate, agree to have responses digitally audio recorded, and that participants understand they may stop at any time without penalty. Prior to our first phone interview, please review this consent form and do not hesitate to contact me via email ([Shelto84@msu.edu](mailto:Shelto84@msu.edu)) with any questions.

Thank you,

Leslie Jo Shelton  
Doctoral Candidate - HALE  
Michigan State University  
620 Farm Lane  
418 Erickson Hall  
[shelto84@msu.edu](mailto:shelto84@msu.edu)

MSU IRB i042035

## REFERENCES

## REFERENCES

- Abrego, L. J. (2006). "I can't go to college because I don't have papers": Incorporation patterns of Latino Undocumented Youth. *Latino Studies*, 4(3), 212-231.
- Abrego, L. J. (2008). Legitimacy, social identity, and the mobilization of law: The effects of Assembly Bill 540 on undocumented students in California. *Law & Social Inquiry*, 33, 709-734.
- Abrego, L. J. (2011). Legal consciousness of undocumented Latinos: Fear and stigma as barriers to claims-making for first- and 1.5-generation immigrants. *Law & Society Review*, 45(2), 337-370. doi:10.1111/j.1540-5893.2011.00435.x
- Abrego, L. J., & Gonzales, R. G. (2010). Blocked paths, uncertain futures: The postsecondary education and labor market prospects of undocumented Latino youth. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)*, 15(1-2), 144-157. doi:10.1080/10824661003635168
- Alemán, E. (2007). Situating Texas school finance policy in a CRT framework: How "substantially equal" yields racial inequity. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 43(5), 525-558.
- Almedom, A. M., & Glandon, D. (2007). Resilience is not the absence of PTSD any more than health is the absence of disease. *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 12, 127-143.
- Altbach, P. G. (n.d.). Access Means Inequality. Retrieved November 11, 2009 from MSU ANGEL, EAD 960 <https://angel.msu.edu/default.asp>
- Annamma, S. A., (2013). Undocumented and under surveillance. *Association of Mexican American Educators (AMAE) Special Theme Issue*, 7(3), 32-41.
- Arellano, A. R., & Padilla, A. M. (1996). Academic invulnerability among a select group of Latino university students. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 18(4), 485-507. doi:10.1177/07399863960184004
- Arnau, R. C. (2002). Hope: Its measurement and relationships with personality and mental health. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 63(07), 3463B. (UMI No. 3060761).
- Astin, A. W. (1993). *What matters in college: Four critical years revisited*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Auerbach, S. (2004). Engaging Latino parents in supporting college pathways: Lessons from a college access program. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 3(2), 125-145. doi:10.1177/1538192703262514

- Bean, J. & Eaton, S. B. (2001). The psychology underlying successful retention practices. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 3(1), 73-89.
- Beltran, C. L. (2011). *AB 540 undocumented Latino college students: Successes and challenges*. (Masters Thesis). California State University, Sacramento.
- Bensimon, E. M. (2007). The underestimated significance of practitioner knowledge in the scholarship on student success. *The Review of Higher Education*, 30(4), 441-469. doi:10.1353/rhe.2007.0032
- Bergerson, A. A. (2003). Critical race theory and white racism: Is there room for white scholars in fighting racism in education? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 16(1), 51-63. doi:10.1080/0951839032000033527
- Bernal, D. D. (2002). Critical race theory, Latino critical theory, and critical raced-gendered epistemologies: Recognizing students of color as holders and creators of knowledge. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(1), 105-126. doi:10.1177/107780040200800107
- Benard, B. (1993). Fostering resiliency in kids. *Educational Leadership*, 51(3), 44-48.
- Bennett, J. (2012). *Care & advocacy: Narratives from a school for immigrant youth*. Information Age Publishing Inc.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2006). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in the United States* (2nd ed.). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Bowen, W. G., & Bok, D. C. (1998). *The shape of the river: Long-term consequences of considering race in college and university admissions*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Brown, B. (2010). *The gifts of imperfection: Let go of who you think you're supposed to be and embrace who you are*. Center City, MN: Hazeldon.
- Burd, S. (2013). Undermining Pell: How colleges compete for wealthy students and leave the low-income behind. *New America Foundation*. Retrieved from [http://education.newamerica.net/sites/newamerica.net/files/policydocs/Merit\\_Aid%20Final.pdf](http://education.newamerica.net/sites/newamerica.net/files/policydocs/Merit_Aid%20Final.pdf)
- Burton, M. M. (2012). *DREAMs Deferred: Testimonies of the Undocumented Latin@ student experience*. (Doctoral dissertation). Colorado State University.
- Cabrera, N. L. & Padilla, A. M. (2004). Entering and succeeding in the "culture of college": The story of two Mexican heritage students. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 26(2): 152-170.



- Calaff, K. P. (2009). Latino students' journeys toward college. *Bilingual Research Journal: The Journal of the National Association for Bilingual Education*, 31(1-2), 201–225.
- California State University Long Beach: Office of Government, Legislative and Community Relations. (2014). *What is AB 540? AB 540 Handbook*. Retrieved from <http://www.csulb.edu/president/government-community/ab540/handbook/what.html>
- Carlson, D. J. (2001). *Development and validation of a college resilience questionnaire*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from University of Nebraska – Lincoln. (AAI3016308)
- Carter Andrews, D. J., (2007). Why the Black kids sit together at the stairs: The role of identity affirming counter-spaces in a predominantly White high school. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 76(4), 542-554.
- Carter Andrews, D. J. (2014). *Dreams of ancestors: Born, deferred, Realized. Reflections on Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech and civil rights in education*. Michigan State University, College of Education: New Educator. Retrieved from <http://edwp.educ.msu.edu/neweducator/2014/dreams-of-ancestors-born-deferred-realized/>
- Carter Andrews, D. J. & Tuitt, F. (2013). *Our nation's schools remain contaminated with inequity*. Education Week. Retrieved from [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/op\\_education/2013/10/our\\_nations\\_schools\\_remain\\_con.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/op_education/2013/10/our_nations_schools_remain_con.html)
- Castellanos, J., Gloria, A. M., Mayorga, M., & Salas, C. (2007). Student affairs professionals' self-report of multicultural competence : Understanding awareness, knowledge, and skills. *NASPA Journal*, 44(4), 643–663.
- Cavazos, Javier, J., Johnson, M. B., Cavazos, A. G., Castro, V., & Vela, L. (2010). A qualitative study of resilient Latina/o college students. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 9(3), 172–188.
- Ceja, M. (2004). Chicana college aspirations and the role of parents: Developing educational resiliency. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 3(4), 338–362.  
doi:10.1177/1538192704268428
- Chávez, A. F., Guido-DiBrito, F., & Mallory, S. L. (2003). Learning to value the “ Other ”: A framework of individual diversity development. *Journal of College Student Development*, 44(4), 453–469.
- Chavkin, N., & Gonzalez, J. (2000). *Mexican immigrant youth and resiliency: Research and promising programs*. Charleston, WV: ERIC/CRESS. (ED447990)
- Clauss-Ehlers, C. S., & Wibrowski, C. R. (2007). Building educational resilience and social support: The effects of the educational opportunity fund program among first- and

- second-generation college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 48(5), 574–584. doi:10.1353/csd.2007.0051
- Coaxum, J. (2002). Equity. In J.J.F. Forest & K. Kinser (Eds.), *Higher education in the United States: An encyclopedia*, pp. 196-200. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.
- College Board, (2009). *Trends in college pricing 2009*. Washington, D.C.
- College Board, (2010). *The college completion agenda- State policy guide*. Washington, D.C.
- College Board, (2014). *Access & diversity collaborative - Tool 3: Key terms and concepts: Knowing the basics*. Retrieved from [https://www.aacu.org/inclusive\\_excellence/documents/ProjectUSALitReviewrevisedMa10.pdf](https://www.aacu.org/inclusive_excellence/documents/ProjectUSALitReviewrevisedMa10.pdf)
- Collins, A. B. (2009). *Life experiences and resilience in college students: A relationship influenced by hope and mindfulness*. (Doctoral Dissertation). Texas A&M University.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 19(5), 2–14.
- Contreras, R. A. (2002). The impact of immigration policy on education reform. *Education and Urban Society*, 34(1), 134-155.
- Contreras, F. (2009). Sin papeles y rompiendo barreras : Latino students and the challenges of persisting in college. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79(4), 610–781.
- Contreras, F. (2011). *Achieving equity for Latino students: Expanding the pathway to higher education through public policy*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons and evaluative criteria. *Zeitschrift fur Soziologie*, 19(6), 418–427.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry, *Theory into Practice*, 39(3), 124–130.
- Curiel, H. (1991). Strengthening family and school bonds in promoting Hispanic children's performance. In M. Sotomayor (Ed.), *Empowering Hispanic families: A critical issue for the 90's* (pp. 75-95). Milwaukee, WI: Family Service America.
- Delgado, R. & Stefancic, J. (2001). *Critical race theory: An introduction*. University Press: New York, NY.

- Dennis, J. M., Phinney, J. S., & Chuateco, L. I. (2005). The role of motivation, parental support, and peer support in the academic success of ethnic minority first-generation college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 46, 223–236.
- Denzin, N. K., & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.). *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousands Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Díaz-Strong, D., & Meiners, E. (2007). Residents, alien policies, and resistances: Experiences of undocumented Latina/o students in Chicago's colleges and universities. *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies*, 3(2).
- Dozier, S. B. (1993). Emotional concerns of undocumented and out-of-status foreign students. *Community Review*, 13, 33-39.
- Dozier, S. B. (2001). Undocumented and documented international students: A comparative study of their academic profile. *Community College Review*, 29(2), 43-53.
- Duderstadt, J. J. (2000). *A university for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. USA: University of Michigan.
- Dudziak, M. L. (2009). Desegregation as a Cold War imperative. *Stanford Law Review*, 41, p. 61.
- Dunbar, C. (2008). Critical race theory and indigenous methodologies. In N. K. Denzin, Y. Lincoln, and L.T. Smith (Eds.), *The handbook of critical and indigenous methodologies* (pp. 85-100). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dunbar, C. Jr., Rodriguez, D., & Parker, L. (2002). Race, subjectivity and the interview process. In J. Gubrium and J. Holstein (Eds). *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method* (pp. 279-298). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Eamon, M. K. (2005). Social-demographic, school, neighborhood, and parenting influences on the academic achievement of Latino young adolescents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 34(2), 163-174. doi: 10.1007/s10964-005-3214-x
- Educators for Fair Consideration (E4FC). (n.d.). *Educator guides*. Retrieved from <http://www.e4fc.org/resources/educatorguides.html>
- Evans, N. J., Forney, D. S., Guido, F. M., Patton, L. D., & Renn, A. K. (2010). *Student development in college: Theory, research, and practice* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Fry, R. (2003). *Hispanic youth dropping out of U.S. schools: Measuring the challenge*. Pew Hispanic Center, Report 19. Retrieved from <http://www.pewhispanic.org/files/reports/19.pdf>
- Frum, J. L. (2007). Postsecondary educational access for undocumented students: Opportunities and constraints. *American Academic*, 4, 81-107.

- Fuentes, M., Kiyana, A., & Rosario, E. (2003). Proceedings from 111<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association: *Keeping Latina/os in high school: The role of context*. Toronto, Canada.
- Garcia, R. J. (1995). Critical race theory and proposition 187: The racial politics of immigration law. *Scholarly Works*, Paper 662. Retrieved from <http://scholars.law.unlv.edu/facpub/662>
- Garcia, L. D. (2011). *Undocumented college students: Pursuing academic goals against the odds*. (Doctoral Dissertation). University of Southern California.
- Geertz, C. (2008). *Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture*. 1-10.
- Gelber, S. (2007). Pathways in the past: Historical Perspectives on Access to Higher Education. *Teachers College Record*, 109(10), 2007, p. 2252-2286.
- Gildersleeve, R. E. (2009). Organizing learning for transformation in college outreach programs. *Pedagogies: An International Journal*, 4(1), 77–93.
- Gildersleeve, R. E., & Ranero, J. J. (2010). Precollege contexts of undocumented students: Implications for student affairs professionals. *New Directions for Student Services*, 131, 19–33. doi:10.1002/ss
- Gildersleeve, R. E., Rumann, C., & Mondragón, R. (2010). Serving undocumented students: Current law and policy. *New Directions for Student Services*, 131, 5–18. doi:10.1002/ss
- Gilligan, C. (2011). Ethics of care. Retrieved from [http://ethicsofcare.org/interviews/carol\\_gilligan/](http://ethicsofcare.org/interviews/carol_gilligan/)
- Gimenez, M. E. (1998). Latino politics – Class struggles: Reflections on the future of Latino politics. *New Political Science*, 20(4), p. 475-484.
- Gin, K. (2010). Why these students? *Journal of College Admission*, p. 44.
- Glaser, B. G. (1965). The constant comparative method of qualitative analysis. *Social Problems*, 12(4), 436–445.
- Glesne, C. (2006). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction* (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Goldberg, W. A., Kelly, E., Matthews, N. L., Kang, H., Li, W., & Sumaroka, M. (2012). The more things change, the more they stay the same: Gender, culture, and college students' views about work and family. *Journal of Social Issues*, 68(4), 814-837.

- Gonzales, R. G. (2008). Left out but not shut down: Political activism and the undocumented Latino student movement. *Northwestern Journal of Law and Social Policy*, 3(2), 219-239.
- Gonzales, R. G. (2009). *Young Lives on hold: The college dreams of undocumented students*. College Board, 1-28.
- Gonzalez, R., & Padilla, A. M. (1997). The academic resilience of Mexican American high school students. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 19(3), 301-317. doi:10.1177/07399863970193004
- Greene, R., & Kropf, N. (2009). *Human behavior theory: A diversity Framework*. (2nd ed.). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- Griffin, K., & Allen, W. (2006). Mo' money, mo' problems? High-achieving Black high school students' experiences with resources, racial climate, and resilience. *Journal of Negro Education*, 75(3), 478-494.
- Grotberg, E. H. (2003). Introduction: Resilience for today. In E. H. Grotberg (Ed.), *Resilience for today: Gaining strength from adversity* (pp. ix-xiii). Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.
- Harbour, C. P., & Gwyn, E. (2011). Deweyan democratic learning communities and student marginalization. In E. M. Cox & J. S. Watson (Eds.), *Marginalized Students: New Directions for Community Colleges*, 155, 5-14. doi: 10.1002/cc.453
- Harmon, C., Carne, G., Lizardy-Hajbi, K., & Wilkerson, E. (2010). Access to higher education for undocumented students: "Outlaws" of social justice, equity, and equality. *Journal of Praxis in Multicultural Education*, 5(1). doi: 10.9741/2161-2978.1033
- Harper, S. (2006). Reconceptualizing reactive policy responses to Black male college achievement: Implications from a national study. *Focus: Magazine of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies*, 34(6,) 14/15. Retrieved from [http://repository.upenn.edu/gse\\_pubs/169/](http://repository.upenn.edu/gse_pubs/169/)
- Harper, S. (2012). *Black male student success in higher education: A report from the national Black male college achievement study*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education. Retrieved from <http://works.bepress.com/sharper/43>
- Hassinger, M., & Plourde, L. (2005). Beating the odds: How bi-lingual Hispanic youth work through adversity to become high achieving students. *Education*, 12(2). 316-327.
- Hernandez, S., Jr, I. H., Gadson, R., Huftalin, D., Ortiz, A. M., White, M. C., & Yocum-Gaffney, D. (2010). Sharing their secrets: Undocumented students' personal stories of fear, drive, and survival. *New Directions for Student Services*, 131, 67-84. doi:10.1002/ss

- Huber, L. P. (2009). Challenging racist nativist framing: Acknowledging the community cultural wealth of undocumented Chicana college students to reframe the immigration debate. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79(4), 704-729. Retrieved from <http://tilt.colostate.edu/teaching/huber.pdf>
- Huber, L. P. (2010). *Suenos indocumentados : Using LatCrit to explore the testimonios of undocumented and U. S. born Chicana college students on discourses of racist nativism in education*. (Doctoral Dissertation) University of California - Los Angeles.
- Huber, L. P. (2010). Using Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) and racist nativism to explore intersectionality in the educational experiences of undocumented Chicana college students. *Educational Foundations*, 24(1-2), 77-96.
- Huber, L. P., Malagon, M. C., & Solórzano, D. G. (2009). *Struggling for opportunity: Undocumented AB 540 students in the Latina/o education pipeline*. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Report.
- Hurtado, S., Carter, D. F., & Spuler, A. (1996). Latino student transition to college: Assessing difficulties and factors in successful college adjustment. *Research in Higher Education*, 37(2), 135-157.
- Hurtado, S., Laird, T. F. N., & Perorazio, T. E. (n.d.). *The transition to college for low-income students: The impact of the Gates Millennium Scholars program*. University of Michigan: Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education.
- Hurtado, S., & Ponjuan, L. (2005). Latino educational outcomes and the campus climate. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 4(3), 235-251.
- Immigration Policy Center, (2007). *Dreams deferred: The costs of ignoring undocumented students*. Retrieved from <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/justfacts/dreams-deferred-costs-ignoring-undocumented-students>
- Immigration Policy Center: American Immigration Council. (2012). *Public education for immigrant students: States challenge supreme court's decision in Plyler v. Doe*. Retrieved from <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/public-education-immigrant-students-states-challenge-supreme-court's-decision-plyler-v-do>
- Irizarry, J. (2012). *Cultural deficit model: Characteristics of the cultural deficit model – Alternatives to deficit perspective*. Retrieved from <http://www.education.com/reference/article/cultural-deficit-model/>
- Kantrowitz, M. (2011). Student Aid Policy Analysis: The Distribution of Grants and Scholarships by Race. Retrieved from <http://www.finaid.org/scholarships/20110902racescholarships.pdf>

- Kahlenberg, R. D. (2008). *Barack Obama and affirmative action*. Inside Higher Ed. Retrieved from <http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2008/05/12/kahlenberg>
- Kohler, A. D., & Lazafin, M. (2007). National Council of La Raza Statistical Brief No .8. 1-16. Retrieved from [http://www.nclr.org/images/uploads/publications/file\\_SB8\\_HispEd\\_fnl.pdf](http://www.nclr.org/images/uploads/publications/file_SB8_HispEd_fnl.pdf)
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2000) Racialized discourses and ethnic epistemologies. In Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 257-277). Thousands Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lahman, M. K. E., Mendoza, B. M., Rodriguez, K. L., & Schwartz, J. L. (2011). Undocumented research participants: Ethics and protection in a time of fear. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 33(3), 304–322. doi:10.1177/0739986311414162
- Landerman, L. M., King, P. M., Rasmussen, C. J., & Jiang, C. X. (2007). A phenomenological study of the development of university educators' critical consciousness. *Journal of College Student Development*, 48(3), 275-296.
- Lattuca, L. R., & Stark, J. S. (2009). *Shaping the college curriculum: Academic plans in context* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- López, J. K. (2007). *"We asked for workers and they sent us people": A critical race theory and Latino critical theory ethnography exploring college-ready undocumented high school immigrants in North Carolina*. (Doctoral Dissertation). University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
- López, M. P., & López, G. R. (2010). *Persistent inequality: contemporary realities in the education of undocumented Latina/o students*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Marciniak, K. (2006). Immigrant rage: Alienhood, "hygienic" identities, and the second world. *A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 17(2), p. 33-63.
- Martinez-Calderon, C. (2009). *Out of the shadows: Undocumented Latino college students*. Institute for the Study of Social Change - Working Paper Series 2007-2008.34. Graduate School of Education: University of California - Berkeley.
- Merriam, S. B. (1995). What can I tell from an N of 1? Issues of validity and reliability in qualitative research. *PAACE Journal of Lifelong Learning*, 4, 51–60.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Merriam, S. (2002). Assessing and evaluating qualitative research. In S. Merriam (Ed.) *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis* (pp. 18-36). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Meza, L. D. (2011). *Exploring Co-Curricular Involvement Among Undocumented Latino Students*. (Masters Thesis) California State University - Northridge.
- Morales, E. E. (2000). A contextual understanding of the process of educational resilience: High achieving Dominican American students and the "resilience cycle." *Innovative Higher Education*, 25(1), 7-22.
- Morales, A., Herrera, S., & Murray, K. (2009). Navigating the waves of social and political capriciousness: Inspiring perspectives from DREAM-eligible immigrant students. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 10(266), 266-283. doi: 10.1177/1538192708330232
- Muñoz, S. M. (2008). *Understanding issues of college persistence for undocumented Mexican immigrant women from the new Latino Diaspora: A case study*. (Doctoral Dissertation) Educational Leadership: Iowa State University.
- Muñoz, S. M., & Maldonado, M. M. (2012). Counterstories of college persistence by undocumented Mexicana students : navigating race, class, gender, and legal status. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 25(3), 295-315.
- Munsch, P. (2011). *Life without papers: Undocumented students negotiating higher education*. (Doctoral Dissertation) Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development: New York University.
- Murillo, E. (2002). How does it feel to be a problem? In Wortham, S. S., Murillo, E. G. & Hamann, E. T. (Eds.), *Education in the new Latino Diaspora: Policy and the politics of identity*. Westport, CT: Ablex Publishing.
- Muñoz, S. M., & Marta M. M. (2012). Counterstories of college persistence by undocumented Mexicana students: Navigating race, class, gender, and legal status. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 25(3): 293-315.
- Nakano, E. (2011). Constructing citizenship: Exclusion, subordination, and resistance. *American Sociological Review*, 76(1), 1-24.
- National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC). (2012). *Undocumented students in the college admission process*. Retrieved from <http://www.nacacnet.org>
- National Conference of State Legislatures, (2014). Undocumented student tuition: Overview. Retrieved from <http://www.ncsl.org/research/education/undocumented-student-tuition-overview.aspx>



- National Immigration Law Center. (2010). *Basic facts about in-state tuition for undocumented immigrant students* (pp. 1-3). Los Angeles, CA.
- Nebeker, K. C. (1998). Critical race theory : A white graduate student's struggle with this growing area of scholarship. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11(1), 25–41.
- Noddings, N. (2003). *Caring: A feminine approach to ethics and moral education* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.
- Oliverrez, P. (2005). *High aspirations, tough choices: How ineligibility for financial aid shapes college choice for college-ready undocumented immigrant students*. Paper presented at the 30th Annual Association for the Study of Higher Education Annual Conference (November 17-19). Philadelphia, PA.
- Oliverrez, P. (2005). *Ready and (un)able: An ethnographic study of the challenges of college access and financial aid for undocumented students in the united states*. (Doctoral Dissertation) University of Southern California.
- Ong, A. D., Phinney, J. S., & Dennis, J. (2006). Competence under challenge: Exploring the protective influence of parental support and ethnic identity in Latino college students. *Journal of adolescence*, 29(6), 961–79. doi:10.1016/j.adolescence.2006.04.010
- Ortiz, A. M., & Hinojosa, A. (2010). Tenuous Options: The career development process for undocumented students. *New Directions for Student Services*, 131, 53–65. doi:10.1002/ss
- Oseguera, L., Locks, a. M., & Vega, I. I. (2008). Increasing Latina/o students' baccalaureate attainment: A focus on retention. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 8(1), 23–53. doi:10.1177/1538192708326997
- Parker, L. (1998). 'Race is race ain't': An exploration of the utility of critical race theory in qualitative research in education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11(1), 43–55.
- Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (2005). *How college affects students: A third decade of research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Passel, J. S., & Cohn, D. V. (2009). *A portrait of unauthorized immigrants in the United States*. Pew Hispanic Center. Washington, DC.
- Perez D. II. (2014). Bibliography: Underrepresented students. *Penn State College of Education: Engineering Education Resources*. Retrieved from <https://www.ed.psu.edu/educ/e2020/resources/Underrepresented%20students>
- Pérez, W. (2009). Academic resilience and civic engagement: Patterns of undocumented Latino students. *Immigrant Paradox Conference*. Providence, RI.

- Pérez, W. (2010). Higher education access for undocumented students: Recommendations for counseling professionals. *Journal of College Admission*, 31-35. Retrieved from <http://www.nacacnet.org/research/KnowledgeCenter/Documents/Marketplace/AccessUndocumented.pdf>
- Pérez, P. A. (2010). College choice process of Latino undocumented students: Implications for recruitment and retention. *Journal of College Admission*, 21-26.
- Pérez, L. (2010). *Suenos indocumentados: Using LatCrit to explore the testimonios of undocumented and U.S. born Chicana college students on discourses of racist nativism*. (Doctoral Dissertation) University of California - Los Angeles.
- Pérez, W. (2011). *Americans by heart: Undocumented Latino students and the promise of higher education*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Pérez, W., Espinoza, R., Ramos, K., Coronado, H., & Cortes, R. (2009). Academic resilience among undocumented Latino students. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 31(2), 149-181.
- Pérez, W., Cortés, R. D., Ramos, K., & Coronado, H. (2010). "Cursed and blessed": Examining the socioemotional and academic experiences of undocumented Latina and Latino college students. *New Directions for Student Services*, 131, 35-51. doi:10.1002/ss
- Pérez, P. A., & Rodríguez, J. L. (2011). Access and opportunity for Latina/o undocumented college students: Familial and institutional support factors. *Association of Mexican American Educators*, 5(1), 14-21.
- Pérez Huber, L., & Malagon, M. (2007). Silenced struggles: The experiences of Latina and Latino undocumented college students in California. *Nevada Law Journal*, 7, 841-861.
- Perry, A. (2006). Toward a theoretical framework for membership: The case of undocumented immigrants and financial aid for postsecondary education. *Review of Higher Education*, 30(1), 21-41.
- Cornell University Law School, (n.d.). Legal Information Institute: Plyler vs. Doe. Retrieved from <http://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/457/202>
- Polkinghorne, D.E. (2007). Validity issues in narrative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13(4), 471-486.
- Ponterotto, J. G. (2006). Brief note on the origins, evolution, and meaning of the qualitative research concept "thick description." *The Qualitative Report*, 11(3), 538-549.
- Price, J. (2010). Understanding and supporting undocumented students. *New Directions for Student Services*, 131, 1-3. doi:10.1002/ss

- Pope R. L., Reynolds A. L., & Mueller, J. A. (2004). *Multicultural competence in student affairs*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Quijada, P., & Alvarez, L. (2006). Understanding the experiences of K-8 Latina/o students. In J. Castellanos, A. M. Gloria, & M. Kamimura (Eds.), *The Latina/o pathway to the Ph.D.* (pp. 19-34). Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC.
- Ramberg, J. (2007). DREAM Act Portal. Message posted to <http://dreamact.info>
- Rendón, L. (2006). Reconceptualizing success for underserved students in higher education. *National Postsecondary Education Cooperative*. (n.p.). Retrieved from [http://nces.ed.gov/npec/pdf/resp\\_Rendon.pdf](http://nces.ed.gov/npec/pdf/resp_Rendon.pdf)
- Rendón, L. I., Jalomo, R. E., & Nora, A. (2000). Theoretical considerations in the study of minority student retention in higher education. In J. M. Braxton (Ed.), *Reworking the student departure puzzle*. (pp. 127-156). Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press.
- Renn, K. A. (2011). Identity centers: An idea whose time has come...and gone? In P. Magolda, and M. B. Baxter Magolda (Eds.), *Contested issues in student affairs: Diverse perspectives and respectful dialogue*. (pp. 244-254). Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
- Renn, K. A., & Patton, L. (2010). Campus ecology and environments. In J. D. Schuh, S. R. Jones, & S. L. Harper (Eds.), *Student services: A handbook for the profession* (5th ed., pp. 242–256). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Renn, K. A., & Reason, R. D. (2012). *College students in the United States: Characteristics, experiences, and outcomes*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Reynolds, A. L., & Weigand, M. J. (2010). The relationships among academic attitudes, psychological attitudes, and the first-semester academic achievement of first-year college students. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 47(2), 173–193. doi:10.2202/1949-6605.6004
- Rincón, A. (2010). *Undocumented immigrants and higher education: Si Se Puede!* New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC.
- Rincón, A. (2012). *Repository of Resources for Undocumented Students*. (pp. 1–52). The College Board.
- Rodriguez, D. (2010). Storytelling in the field: Race, method, and the empowerment of Latina college students. *Cultural Studies <=> Critical Methodologies*, 10(6), 491–507. doi:10.1177/1532708610365481
- Schlossberg, N. K. (1989). Marginality and mattering: Key issues in building community. *New Directions for Student Services*, (48), 5-15. doi: 10.1002/ss.37119894803

- Solórzano, D. G. (1998). Critical race theory, race and gender microaggressions, and the experience of Chicana and Chicano scholars. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11(1), 121–136.
- Solórzano, D. G. (2005). Educational inequities and Latina/o undergraduate students in the United States: A critical race analysis of their educational progress. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 4(3), 272–294. doi:10.1177/1538192705276550
- Solórzano, D. G., & Bernal, D. D. (2001). Examining transformational resistance through a critical race and Latcrit theory framework: Chicana and Chicano students in an urban context. *Urban Education*, 36(3), 308–342. doi:10.1177/0042085901363002
- State of Arizona. (2010). Senate forty-ninth legislature second regular session: Senate bill 1070. Retrieved from <http://www.azleg.gov/legtext/49leg/2r/bills/sb1070s.pdf>
- Stanton-Salazar, R. D., & Dornbusch, S. M. (1995). Social capital and the reproduction of inequality: Information networks among Mexican-origin high school students. *Sociology of Education*, 68, 116–135.
- Stark, J. S., & Lattuca, L. S. (2009). *Shaping the college curriculum: Academic plans in action* (2nd Ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2012). *College students' sense of belonging: A key to educational success for all students*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Stuber, J. M. (2011). Integrated, marginal, and resilient: Race, class, and the diverse experiences of white first-generation college students. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 24(1), 117–136. doi:10.1080/09518391003641916
- Suárez-Orozco, C., & Suárez-Orozco, M. (1995). *Transformations: Migration, family life, and achievement motivation among Latino adolescents*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Suárez-Orozco, C., & Suárez-Orozco, M. (2001). *Children of immigration*. Harvard University Press.
- Swail, W. S. (2002). Higher education and the new demographics: Questions for policy. *Change*, 34(4), p. 15-23.
- Taylor, A. (2012). Journey to thinking Multiculturally: A cultural exploration of the Latino community. *NASP Communiqué*, 33(1). (n.p.). Retrieved from <http://www.nasponline.org/publications/cq/cq331latino.aspx>

- Taylor, E. (2009). The foundations of critical race theory in education: An introduction. In E. Taylor, D. Gillborn, & G. Ladson-Billings (Eds.), *Foundations of Critical Race Theory in Education* (pp. 1-13). New York, NY: Routledge.
- The LatiNegr@s Project. (2012). *Use of the @ symbol*. Retrieved from <http://lati-negros.tumblr.com/post/22536861673/use-of-the-symbol>
- The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education. (2005). *Indicators of opportunity in higher education: 2005 Status Report*. Washington, DC: The Pell Institute.
- Thelin, J. R. (2004). *A history of American higher education*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Tierney, W. G. (2008). *The impact of culture on organizational decision making: Theory and practice in higher education*. Steerling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC.
- Tinto, V. (1987). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Torres, J. B., & Solberg, S. V. (2001). Role of self-efficacy, stress, social integration, and family support in Latino college student persistence and health. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 59(1), 53–63. doi:10.1006/jvbe.2000.1785
- UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education (2007). *Undocumented students unfulfilled dreams...* (pp. 1-16).
- Valenzuela, A. (1999). *Subtractive schooling: U.S.-Mexican youth and the politics of caring*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Villalpando, O. (2003). Self-segregation or self-preservation? A critical race theory and Latina/o critical theory analysis of a study of Chicana/o college students. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 16(5), 619–646. doi:10.1080/0951839032000142922
- Villalpando, O. (2004). Practical considerations of critical race theory and Latino critical theory for Latino college students. *New Directions for Student Services*, 105, 41–50. doi:10.1002/ss.115
- Villenas, S., & Deyhle, D. (1999). Critical race theory and ethnographies challenging the stereotypes: Latino families, schooling, resilience and resistance. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 29(4), 413–445.
- Waxman, H. C, Huang, S. L., & Padron, Y. N. (1998). *Motivation and Learning Environment Differences Between Resilient and Nonresilient Latino Middle School Students* (pp. 1–2). Laboratory for Student Success: Spotlight on Student Success. Temple University Center for Research in Human Development and Education.

- Waxman, H. C., Gray, J. P., & Padron, Y. N. (2003). *Review of research on educational resilience*. Center for Research on Education, Diversity, & Excellence. Santa Cruz, CA.
- White House (2010). *The Dream act: Good for our economy, good for our security, good for our nation*. Retrieved from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/DREAM-Act-WhiteHouse-FactSheet.pdf>
- World Economic Forum, (2008). *The global competitiveness report: 2008-2009*. Retrieved December 7, 2010 from <http://www.weforum.org/en/initiatives/gcp/Global%20Competitiveness%20Report/index.htm>
- Yao, C. W., & Shelton, L. J. (2010). *Undocumented, unafraid, and unashamed: Using critical race theory to examine the academic experience of undocumented Latin@ students*. Course Paper: Michigan State University - TE 931 Introduction to Qualitative Methods in Education Research.
- Yeh, T. L. (2010). Service-learning and persistence of low-income, first-generation college students: An exploratory study. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 50–65.
- Yosso, T.J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69–91.
- Yosso, T. J. (2006). Chicana/o undergraduate ‘stages of passage’: Campus racial climate at Midwestern University. In T. S. Yosso (Ed), *Critical race counterstories along the Chicana/Chicano educational pipeline*. (pp. 99–128). New York: Routledge.
- Yosso, T. J., Smith, W. A., Ceja, M., & Solórzano, D. G. (2009). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate for Latina/o undergraduates. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79(4), 659–691.
- Yosso, T., Villalpando, O., Delgado Bernal, D., & Solórzano, D. G. (2001). Critical race theory in Chicana/o education. *National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies Annual Conference*. Paper 9. Retrieved from <http://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1036&context=naccs>
- Zell, M. C. (2011). Achieving a college education: The psychological experiences of Latina/o community college students. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 9(2), 167–186. doi:10.1177/1538192709343102.Achieving
- Zusman, A. (2005). Challenges facing higher education in the twenty-first century. In P. G. Altbach, R. O. Berdahl, & P. J. Gumpert (Eds.), *American Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century* (pp. 115-159). Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.