

UNDOCUBLACK: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY STUDY INTO THE STORIED LIVES OF
UNDOCUMENTED BLACK COLLEGE STUDENTS

By

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine how being Black and undocumented shape the educational experiences of undocumented college students. By centering the educational experiences of undocumented Black college students, this dissertation adds to the limited scholarship on undocumented Black college students. Intersectionality theory was used as a theoretical framework to understand both the joys and challenges of four undocumented Black college students experience as they navigated higher education. The findings suggested that undocumented Black college students experienced challenges in two ways: (a) Institutional Challenges, which resulted in them being invisiblized as undocumented Black students (b) Identity-Related Challenges, which pointed to the idea of being stamped as not belonging because they are undocumented and Black. Finally, undocumented Black college students also shared how they used joy to sustain themselves as they navigated higher education which resulted in life-giving moments. This dissertation argued that the experiences of undocumented Black students must be considered in higher education because their identity is being erased and their needs are due to higher education institutions not being aware of their existence.

This dissertation is dedicated to Mom. Thank you for always believing in me and supporting me.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Patricia's Story

As I scrolled through Facebook on July 4, 2018, I saw a post from a friend that read, “Ya’ll know I don’t be on Facebook like that, but I just came on here to let ya’ll know that a Black woman climbed the Statue of Liberty and I’m here for it! I’m living for this from the Caribbean!” I immediately stopped what I was doing and searched “Black woman and Statue of Liberty” in Google! While frantically searching, I couldn’t help thinking if she was okay. And there it was: article after article after article confirming that a Black woman did, indeed, climb the Statue of Liberty.

Therese Patricia Okoumou (Patricia henceforward), a 44- year-old Black immigrant from the Democratic Republic of Congo, climbed the Statue of Liberty in protest of President’s Trump “zero tolerance” policy on immigration, and the separation of families at the border” (Annese, Burkner, & Fische, 2018). She is an activist and a member of *Rise and Resist*, an organization based in New York that was formed in response to 2016 U.S election. Specifically, Rise and Resist is a “direct action group committed to opposing, disrupting, and defeating any government act that threatens democracy, equality, and our civil liberties” (riseandresistst.org). Patricia and members of Rise and Resist set out on the fourth of July to protest the inhumane immigration policies that separate migrant children from their parents at the U.S border, and to advocate for the abolition of Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE). However, inspired by the words of Michelle Obama, “when they go low, we go high” (Walters, 2018), Patricia decided to climb the Statue of Liberty and “go as high as she could” (Walters, 2018).

In a three-hour standoff with police, Patricia commanded the attention of millions, as the media halted displays of the usual fourth of July celebrations. In her first one-on-one interview

with the Guardian days later, Patricia was asked what she was thinking—what ran through her mind as she climbed the Statue of Liberty. Patricia responded, “are they going to shoot me?” (Walters, 2018). As I read those words, I felt an instant dip in the pit of my stomach. The same feeling, I had as I searched “Black woman and Statue of Liberty”. You know that feeling you have when you are dreaming you are falling off a cliff? Yes, that one. Fear. I feared for Patricia. I went through the day feeling a bit unsettled as I thought about and talked about Patricia’s actions. I asked, “did you see that a Black immigrant woman climbed the Statue of Liberty?” to every person who texted and called me that day. I kept asking, because I knew her decision to resist in the way that she did was not easy.

As I continue to think about the brave actions of Patricia months later, I find myself asking the same four questions: What does it mean that a Black immigrant woman climbed the Statue of Liberty? How did Patricia’s presence disrupt the current image of who is an immigrant in the U.S? What was she thinking in the moments leading up to her climb? What did the world think when they saw a Black body “chillin” at the base of the Statue of Liberty? This is what I know: Patricia’s presence highlighted the intersecting identities of immigrants in the U.S. There are pockets of people who do not imagine Black people when they think about undocumented immigrants or family separations at the border. Organizations such as the Black Alliance for Just Immigration (*BAJI*, hereafter) and UndocBlack network work tirelessly to challenge the one-dimensional image of immigrants or what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie note as “the single story”, but they can only do so much. In fact, folks can choose not to read reports such as the *State of Black Immigrants* by BAJI or statistics that highlight the number of undocumented Black immigrants who fight for their lives on a daily basis. Patricia’s decision to resist in the way she

did, however, brought the world to screeching halt. And, in many ways, forced the world to reimagine who is, and who can be, an immigrant.

I open my dissertation with Patricia's act of resistance for two reasons: First, resisting and challenging structures of inequality requires an enormous amount of strength and perseverance. The oppressive structures that organize society weaken the soul and spirit of Black people and Patricia, through her act of resistance, showed the world that she will continue to fight. Second, when Patricia, a Black immigrant woman resisted, she opened an opportunity to talk about the experiences of Black immigrants in the United States, who account for 10% of the Black U.S. population Anderson, 2005 and similar to other immigrant groups, hold various immigration statuses (e.g., citizenship, permanent-residency, undocumented). Despite their presence, the experiences of Black immigrants do not occupy a central place in societal discourse concerning immigration, immigrants, and the undocumented. This includes undocumented Black students.

Undocumented people are individuals who do not hold immigrant visas (green card) or a citizenship and have not been granted legal access under rules for longer-term residence or work permits (Nienhusser, 2016; Passel & Cohn, 2010). According to the Passel & Cohen (2016), the undocumented population consists of various racial and ethnic groups. Lachica Buenavista (2018) noted that more than "one million or 12 percent of the total population are undocumented Asian immigrants" (p. 79) and Anderson (2015) estimated that about 575,000 Black immigrants hold undocumented status. The undocumented population in the U.S is a result of "social, political and economic conditions, along with restrictive migration policies" (Terriquez, 2015, p. 1303). It is estimated that 11.4 million or 3.6% of the entire US population are undocumented

immigrants (Baker and Rytina, 2013) and that 65,000 undocumented students graduate high school each year (Abrego, & Gonzales, 2010).

In recent years, researchers have developed literature that addresses the educational experiences of undocumented students (Bjorkland, 2018; Flores, 2010; Munoz, 2016; Perez, 2006). Some of these researchers have studied the role policies plays in creating or restricting access to higher education (Nienhusser, 2015; Flores, 2010). Others focus on the psychological and social burdens that immigrant students often endure (Benuto, Casas, Cummings, and Newlands, 2018; Negrón-Gonzales, 2013). And still, others examine the economic barriers that impact undocumented students' access to and within higher education (Abrego, & Gonzales, 2010; Abrego, 2008). Interestingly, despite evidence that undocumented students span various racial and ethnic groups, very little research has focused on the educational experiences of non-Latinx undocumented students. While there has been some empirical work on the experiences of undocumented Asian students (Lachica Buenavista 2018; Buenavista, and Chen, 2013; Buenavista, 2013. Buenavista, 2012), the educational experiences of Undocumented Black students in the literature remains nearly invisible (Little, & Mitchell, 2018; Benuto, Casas, Cummings, & Newlands, 2018)

In this narrative project, guided by an intersectionality perspective, I met with four undocumented Black college students and asked them to share their stories with me. My goal was to examine how being Black and undocumented shaped their educational experiences. The following research questions oriented my work: What are the educational experiences of undocumented Black students? How do undocumented Black students experience challenges as they navigate higher education? And finally, how do undocumented Black college students find

joy during challenging times in school? The lack of research on undocumented Black students motivated my first two research questions.

As a higher education scholar-practitioner, I am deeply committed to centering voices of historically marginalized groups and making sure that those voices inform our practices. Therefore, my decision to ask undocumented Black students about joy stemmed from the fact that most of the scholarship that discusses undocumented students fails to capture the complexity of their lives, including their agency and potentially their joy. I sought to explore and amplify how undocumented Black students find joy in their lives, which I understand as anything that is “a source or cause of delight” or a “feeling of happiness” (Merriam -Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 1999). Juxtaposing joy and challenges was important because I wanted to highlight that there are life giving moments that happen in the midst of challenges. Therefore, this project highlighted the beauty that exist by also centering joy and the different ways joy manifest in the lives of undocumented Black students.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative study was to examine how being Black and undocumented shape the educational experiences of undocumented college students. As stated above, the educational experience of Black undocumented students is nearly absent in the literature. Moreover, scholars have demonstrated that marginalized communities often have an undocumented wealth of knowledge that can help institutions (e.g., schools, universities) improve their policies, practices, and cultures (citations here) and I believe the same is true for undocumented Black students. Additionally, the literature also suggests that undocumented Black students probably face significant challenges, the literature does not currently cover those challenges. Moreover, I suspected that they also find moments of happiness and Black joy.

Activists and organizers who are committed to improving higher education for undocumented communities might find some guidance in these stories of joy and build opportunities or programs around lessons shared by the storytellers in this study. In sum, the purpose of my study is twofold:

1. To share the stories of undocumented Black students and better inform higher educational professionals (e.g., deans, presidents, faculty, and administrative staff) on the specific needs of undocumented Black students.
2. To document joy and provide a counter-story that centers the educational experiences of undocumented Black students

Overview of Study Methodology and Framing

As noted earlier, my study was guided by broad research questions that allowed me to explore the early education through post-secondary education journeys of undocumented Black students. In terms of methodology, I used a narrative inquiry design for this project. Narrative inquiry “pursues a narrative way of knowing by exploring the narratives or stories of participants” (Kim, 2015, p. 20). Because the basis of narrative inquiry is stories (Bhattacharya, 2017), I learned from and alongside undocumented Black students. Given my interest in understanding how being both undocumented and Black among other identities have shaped undocumented Black students’ experiences, I adopted intersectionality to guide my thinking in this project. Intersectionality is a method and an analytical tool rooted in Critical Race Theory and Black Feminism (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson, 2013). Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) introduced the term intersectionality to the legal-academic scholarship to demonstrate the “multidimensionality of Black women’s experience” (p. 139). Specifically, Crenshaw (1989) argued that Black women were marginalized in anti-discrimination law and wanted to show the

specific position of Black women. Crenshaw offered an analogy to capture how Black women were missed by anti-discrimination law following:

Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination. (p. 149)

Although I shared more about intersectionality and its role in my work later in the dissertation, it is important to note that intersectionality allowed me to investigate the intersection of Blackness, gender, class, immigration status and other overlapping identities as it related to undocumented Black college students experience in educational settings. As an analytical lens, intersectionality helped me account for the meaning and consequences of belonging to multiple marginalized social groups.

Organization of Dissertation

The remainder of this dissertation is outlined in two chapters. In Chapter 2, I discuss literature on: (a) History of U.S immigration laws, (b) Undocumented students in higher education, (c) Black immigrant students in higher education. In Chapter 3, I discussed my epistemological stance, a more detailed description of my conceptual framing, positionality, methodology, and research design. In Chapter 4, I provided overview of my storytellers which was followed by my findings in chapters five through eight. I concluded my study with discussion, implications, recommendations, future research, and conclusion in chapter nine.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

It is crucial that I start this chapter by acknowledging the genocide of Indigenous peoples that led to the creation of the U.S. as a settler colonial nation-state (Tuck & Yang, 2012). A settler colonial state, as defined by Tuck and Yang (2012), refers to “an empire utilizing external forms and internal forms of colonization” (p. 7) that “leads to the racialization of Indigenous and Black people to ensure the ascendancy of white settlers as the true and rightful owners and occupiers of the land” (p. 12). The United States was born out of colonial exploits, and the racist ideologies that led to the massacre of an estimated 50 million Indigenous peoples (Totten & Hitchcock, 2011) and the enslavement of Black peoples (Rawley & Behrendt, 2005), still informs immigration policies today. I acknowledge the genocide of Indigenous because as a Black scholar, I am doing my dissertation on Indigenous land where everyone, including People of Color are settlers. In fact, Tuck (2012) asserts that because “settler colonialism is built upon an entangled triad structure of settler-native-slave, the decolonial desires of white, non-white, immigrant, postcolonial, and oppressed people, can similarly be entangled in resettlement, reoccupation, and rehabilitation that actually further settler colonialism” (p. 1). By not acknowledging that I am doing work on stolen land, I would be contributing to an ongoing colonial project. This is not to say that my acknowledgement negates the fact that I am still doing work on stolen land, rather, my acknowledgement indicates my role as a settler.

Chapter Preview

In this chapter, I review several bodies of literature drawn from books and journal articles. To identify relevant literature, I used key words such as American immigration, mass immigration, U.S immigration history, Black immigrants, undocumented Black students, and search engines such as google scholar, Jstor, ProQuest, ERIC among others. I compiled a

generative literature base. To begin, in Section I, I provide a brief history of key dates and landmarks in U.S immigration history. Throughout the history of the U.S, there have been several notable laws that have shaped the U.S as the nation-state it is today. This review will be brief and lack some of the details that are certain to be important. However, my goal is to merely paint a broad historical picture, so readers will have a foundational understanding of the United States' general approach to immigration and be able to connect how the history of U.S immigration laws informs and shapes immigration for today's college students and colleges and universities. In section II, I review the literature on undocumented students in higher education and Black immigrants in higher education. Section III will follow this, where I discuss the educational experiences of Black immigrant students in higher education. I conclude my literature review with section IV, which address anti-blackness in higher education.

Section One: History of U.S. Immigration laws

All of the Western nations have been caught in a lie: a lie of their pretended humanism. History has no moral justification, and the west has no moral authority. For a very long time America prospered; this prosperity cost millions of people their lives. – James Baldwin (2016)

1790 Naturalization Act: “An Act to Establish a Uniform Rule of Naturalization”

The United States, much like other settler colonial nation-states (Tuck & Yang, 2012), is often referred to as a nation of immigrants that is all-embracing. However, immigration laws, which are often purported as race-neutral, have been made to exclude groups of people. One of the earliest examples of how immigration law is historically intertwined with racial prejudice is the implementation of the 1790 Naturalization Act. This March 1790 naturalization law was the first to specify who could become a naturalized citizen. Specifically, the act stated only free whites of “good moral” character who resided in the U.S for at least two years, could be granted citizenship (Migration Policy Institute, 2013; Daniels, 2005; Haney López, 1997; Omi & Winant

1994). Children of these free whites who were under the age of twenty-one at the time at their parents' naturalization, would also be considered U.S citizens. Additionally, the children of U.S citizens who were born abroad at sea or outside the limits of the U.S would be considered natural born citizens (Daniels, 2005).

Shortly after the Naturalization law, in 1798, congress enacted a series of four "emergency" laws known as the Alien and Sedition laws (Smelser, 1954). These laws were enacted to "regulate aliens, criminalize seditious writing, talk, and behavior, to prepare for conflict with France" (Bradburn, 2008, p. 565). While these laws still maintained that only free whites of good moral character could become naturalized citizens, they increased the residency requirement from two years to fourteen years (Bradburn, 2008). The overall goal of the Alien and Sedition laws were to restrict the activities of immigrants due to American fear of French infiltration (Smelser, 1954). These four laws also allowed the U.S government to "deport any "alien" considered to be "dangerous to the peace and safety of the United States" (Smelser, 1954).

Although President and leader of the Federalist Party John Adams framed the Alien and Sedition Act as an attempt to protect the U.S. from spies, Daniels (2005) believes the impetus behind President Adams's Alien and Sedition had less to do with a desire to restrict immigration, but rather a "desperate and vain attempt to keep Federalism in power and the Jeffersonians out" (p. 7). The Federalist party was only against immigrants who they thought would vote for Thomas Jefferson, which at the time, were mostly immigrants from Europe (Daniels, 2005).

While the 1790 Naturalization Act was enacted to establish a uniform rule of naturalization (Daniels, 2005; Haney López, 1997), it explicitly prevented free blacks, slaves, Indigenous peoples, and any non-white persons from becoming a naturalized citizen of the

United States (Daniel, 2005). For this reason, I see the Alien and Sedition Act as one the first documented laws that socially and culturally constructed race in America. In other words, it was instrumental in setting the tone for institutionalized racism and for whiteness in the United States thenceforth.

The 19th Century: The Age of Mass Immigration

The 1790 Naturalization act led to a rise in immigration, because the requirements benefited whites, particularly whites from Northern and Western Europe who were seeking a new home in the United States. By the early 19th century, the United States saw significant growth in the population as immigrants flocked to the country in search of economic freedom (Daniels, 2005). Scholars generally refer to this period of significant growth as “the age of mass immigration” (Tabellini, 2018; Ager, P., & Hansen, 2017; Daniel, 2005), and although there is variation in the time-period, most agree that there was a massive inflow of immigrants into the United States. Some believe the age of mass immigration lasted from 1815-1860 (Jones, 1992), some 1850-1920 (Ager, & Brückner, 2013), others 1880-1924 (Jaret, 1999) or 1901-1930 (Massey, 1995). Nonetheless, about “600,000 immigrants arrived in 1830, 1.7 million by 1840, and 2.6 million by 1850s, a 433 percent increase over two decades” (Daniels, 2005, p. 9). One-third of the immigrants during this period of mass immigration came from Ireland alone, many of whom were Catholic (Ruhs & Quinn, 2009). A key aspect of the age of mass migration, as noted by Ager and Brückner (2013) was that it was a period of “free immigration” (p. 4). However, this period of “free” immigration was limited to whites because at this time, Black people were enslaved and forcibly brought to the United States as chattel slaves (Schweninger, 2020). During this period, the geographic origins of immigrants started to shift from Northern and Western Europe--the “old immigrants of the ante-belleum era” (Ludmerer,1972)—to Southern and

Eastern Europe. Known as the “new immigrants” (Ludmerer, 1972), immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe came from poor backgrounds and were escaping famine. Some see this shift in geographic regions as a time of cultural diversity (Ager, & Brückner, 2013; Janet, 1999), as these “new” immigrants had different religious leanings. Northern or old immigrants were Protestant where as the “new” immigrants were Catholic.

During this era of mass immigration, the first significant wave of immigrants from Asia to come to United States, with most of the immigrants coming from China. Chinese immigrants flocked the country due to the political unrest as result of the Taiping Rebellion (Chen, 1997). Additionally, many Chinese immigrants heard stories of gold in California and came in search of work as miners (Yung, Chang, & Lai, 2006). Although Chinese immigrants migrated to the United States during this time, most immigrants were coming from countries in Europe.

As more immigrants migrated to the United States, a wave of organized xenophobia and nativism took over in the country. (Cohn, 2000; Curran, 1975; Higham, 2002). Xenophobia is “a form of attitudinal, affective, and behavioral prejudice toward immigrants and those perceived as foreign” (Yakushko, 2009, p. 44). Nativism is a “preference for those deemed natives, simultaneous and intense opposition to those deemed strangers, foreigners” (Perea, 2007, p. 1) and should not be understood as a mere general dislike for immigrants based on cultural difference. Instead, “it is a deep-seated antipathy based upon emotions of fear and hatred” (Jones, 1992). This hatred or view of immigrants being “un-American” (Higham, 2002, p. 4), led to the rise of a series of anti-foreign parties across the United States (Higham, 2002, p. 4). Nativist movements targeted immigrants long before this period (Higham, 2002), however, the Know-Nothing movement, prominent around the late 1840s and early 1850s (Ager, & Brückner, 2013; Keely, 1979), was the most noteworthy nativist political party. Comprised of American

born Protestant men who were anti-Catholic, anti-Irish, and anti-immigrants, the Know-Nothing or American political party promulgated several anti-immigrant laws to “Americanize” the U.S which set the tone for views on immigration going forward (Ager, & Brückner, 2013).

In summary, the age of mass immigration was due to the increase of immigrants fleeing famine, persecution, and poor economic hardships. However, during this time, nativist movements like the Know-Nothings actively sought to block immigrants from participating in American life, such as restricting the ability to vote or hold political office and calling for an increase of residency requirements for naturalization for American citizenship from five years to 21 years (cite). These racist ideologies and deep hatred for immigrants did not end with the fall of the Know-Nothing party. In fact, these nativist beliefs continued to inform the creation of immigration laws that extended well throughout the 19th century and today (Tourse, R. W., Hamilton-Mason, & Wewiorski, 2018)

The Era of Restriction, *aka* Let’s Keep America white

The era of mass immigration is often referred to as the “golden door” (Daniels, 2005). Immigrants’ ability to migrate was due to the lack of immigration laws and policies during the early 1800s (Daniels, 2005). However, as noted earlier, nativist beliefs led to the creation of immigration laws which resulted in an era of restriction. A “nodal point in the history of American immigration,” as suggested by (Daniels, 2005, p. 3), the United States embarked on a period of exclusionary practices and laws that targeted specific groups of immigrants (Daniels, 2005). Beginning with the 1875 Page Act, also known as the first restrictive federal immigration law (Abrams, 2005), a series of bans were placed on individuals who had mental health issues, contagious diseases, sex workers, beggars, polygamists, and importers of sex workers, to name a few (Cohn, 2015, Pfeffer, 1986). Characterized as the anti-prostitution law (Zhu, 2010), the Page

Act specifically prohibited the immigration of sex workers from all Asian countries (Peffer, 1986, Zhu, 2010). However, according to Abrams (2005), “most Chinese women migrating to the United States in the early 1870s were prostitutes or second wives in polygamous marriages” (p. 641). So, although the language used in the Page Act did not specifically name Chinese sex workers, Abrams (2005) and Zhu (2010) suggest that it helped paved the way for the Chinese Exclusionary Act because it intentionally targeted Chinese sex workers.

The Chinese Exclusionary Act, passed on May 6, 1882 (Curriden, 2013), closed the border to all Chinese laborers or anyone of Chinese heritage (Curriden, 2013). Many scholars suggest the Chinese Exclusionary Act was the first law that prohibited immigration based on race and class (Haney-López, 2006; Pegler-Gordon, 2006) and thus set the tone for race base immigration in the U.S. However, in the 1790 Naturalization Act, which only considered free whites of “good moral” character eligible for U.S. citizenship (Lopez, 1997), it is not difficult to see that the foundation for the Chinese Exclusionary Act was laid nearly a century before 1882.

As more immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe arrived in the United States the need to preserve the ethnic makeup of immigrants from Northern and Western Europe rose. In response to influx of “new” immigrants, the immigration quota laws of 1921 and 1924 were passed. The Emergency Act of 1921 temporarily restricted immigration from European country to three per cent of the foreign- born of that nationality listed in the United States” (Ludmerer, 1972). Countries of Northern and Western Europe received larger quotas because they were considered “old” immigrants as they contributed most heavily to immigration in the settlement of the Americas (Irwin, 1972). Eugenics or scientific racism played a central role in immigration discourse and the creation of the National Origins Quota system (Ludmerer, 1972). Northern Europeans believed they were superior and felt they were in “danger of being replaced

racially by an influx of “undesirable, biologically inferior “new” immigrants” (Ludmerer,1972, p. 62). Thus, the Immigration Restrictive Act of 1924 or the Johnson-Reed Act was passed (Higham, 2002; Ludmerer,1972), which strengthened the Emergency Act of 1921. Whereas the Emergency Act provided immigration visas to three percent of the number of people who lived in the U.S. at the time of the 1920 census, the Immigration Restrictive Act of 1924 limited visas to two percent based on ancestry at the time of the 1890 census (Higham, 2002).

The quota laws of 1921 and 1924, also known as the National Origins laws, further highlight the role of nativism in immigration laws. As a result of these laws, there was a decrease in immigration which essentially ended the period of mass immigration. Although it appears that the quota laws specifically prohibited only white immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, if one considers the Supreme Court case *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* (McClain, 1995), it is clear that immigrants of color were also prohibited. Singh Thind was an Indian immigrant who migrated to the United States in 1913, who, coming from Northwest India, was categorized as aryan or white, and therefore sought naturalization based on his racial categorization as white. However, the Supreme court ruled against Thind as they suggested “Indians were not eligible for naturalization because they could not be considered “white” within the meaning of Section 2169.1” (McClain, 1995). These laws demonstrate not only how fluid racial categories are, but that immigrants of color were to be otherized.

Black Immigration

It is important to note that leading up to the visa quota laws which ended the period of mass immigration, Black immigration was growing. Specifically, during the 1910 and 1920s there was an increase of Black immigrants migrating to the United States. Most of these Black immigrants came from the Caribbean from countries like Jamaica and Barbados (Reid, 1939) in

search of better economic stability (Palmer, 1995). Many of these immigrants had assisted after assisting in building the Panama Canal. The increase in Black immigration, particularly to the East Coast, resulted in Black immigrants being the largest non-white group of immigrants, outnumbering Asian immigrants from China, Japan, and the Philippines (Reid 1939). These Black immigrants had a different experiences than Black folx who were enslaved.

Although the visa quota laws placed restrictions on immigrants from certain countries, Black immigrants from the Caribbean were not affected. Black immigrants from the Caribbean were not affected by visa restrictions because they were under colonial rule by Great Britain and therefore, their visa quota numbers fell under Great Britain's. Although Black immigration was not impacted during periods of restriction, when the quota laws of 1921 and 1924 were introduced, Black immigration did eventually decline. The decline in immigration was as result of the combination of the anti—immigrant sentiment and xenophobia in the US and local consulate policies in the Caribbean, which made it difficult for Black immigrants to get visas which resulted in a decrease in Black immigration (Daniels 2005, Model 2008).

Immigration Reform

As mentioned earlier, the creation of the National Origins Quota System was in response to the influx of immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe. Quota laws limited the number of immigrants who could enter the United States based on country of origin and ensured that immigrants from Northern and Western Europe remained the dominant ethnic group. The push for a racial homogeneity was met by criticism, as quota laws were racist and discriminatory. As a result, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, brought an end to the National Origins Quota laws (Lee, 2015).

In addition to ending quotas based on national origin, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, also known as the Hart-Cellar Act, established an immigration policy that focused on reuniting families and attracting skilled labor to the United States (Kammer, 2015). According to Orchowski (2015), “numerical restrictions on all visas were set to 170,000 per year, with a per-country-of- origin cap of not more than 7 percent” (p. 40). What this means is, no country received more than 7 percent of green cards, which was a massive shift from the quota laws that allotted visas based on immigrants who could trace their ancestry to the 1890 census (Orchowski, 2015). Parents, spouses, and children of U.S. citizens were not factored into the visa cap, as there was an unlimited number of visas available for this group (Chin, & Villazor, 2015). A limited number of visas, however, were allocated to siblings, spouses, and children of lawful permanent residents (green card holders) (Chin, & Villazor, 2015; Orchowski, 2015). The combination of the unlimited visas to parents, spouses, and children of U.S citizens and limited visa available based on relatives of green card holders, opened the door what is known as chain migration (Chin, & Villazor, 2015). Therefore, naturally, the Hart-cellar Act significantly changed the face of the United States., as migration patterns shifted from Europe to other parts of the world (Reimers,1983; Chin, 2015). For example, while immigrants from the Caribbean and Africa migrated to United States under the Hart-Cellar Act, most immigrants came from Asia and Latin America (Orchowski, 2015). This radical shift from Europe led to the “browning” or what I call, the “legal browning” of the United States. (cite).

It is important to note that the passing of the Hart-Cellar Act came at a time when racial unrest was at its peak in America. At the height of the Civil Rights movement, the Hart-Cellar Act was one of the three landmark civil rights bills that was passed between July 1964 and October 1965 (Chin, 2015). These laws, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which outlawed

discrimination in “hiring, retail sales, services, and public accommodation,” (Chin, 2015) and the 1965 Act which guaranteed voting rights to African Americans and ensured no one could be denied the right to vote based on race, played a crucial role the passing of the 1965 Immigration Act/Hart-Cellar Act (Massey, 2015). In fact, Massey (2015) suggest amendments to the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act “were viewed not so much as a piece of immigration legislation as a civil rights reform intended to rectify past wrongs” (p. 119).

Although the Hart-Cellar act is often referred to as the “family unification act” (Inman, & Tummala-Narra, 2014), scholars note that the browning of the U.S. was an unintended consequence rather than an intentional move by Congress (Massey, 1995). For example, at an immigration hearing on February 10, 1965, Senator Ted Kennedy stated, “The bill [Hart-Cellar Act] will not flood our cities with immigrants. It will not upset the ethnic mix of our society” (as cited in Orchowski, 2015, p. 40). President Johnson also made similar remarks as he said, “This bill... is not a revolutionary bill. It does not affect the lives of millions. It will not reshape the structure of our daily lives” (as cited in Chin, & Villazor, 2015, p. 1). Commentary such as the ones made by President Johnson and Senator Kennedy, demonstrates that the Hart-Cellar Act was in fact still informed by racist ideologies, as there was no intent to disrupt the “ethnic mix”, which was predominately white immigrants from Northern and Western Europe. Chin (2015), however, challenges the notion that the Hart-Cellar Act was racist, as he suggests that “Congress understood when it passed the 1965 Act that it was putting U.S. immigration policy on a race-neutral basis” (p. 16). Chin (2015) extends his claims in support of the Hart-Cellar Act being race-neutral, as he contends that several legislators called for a change in immigration laws because “racial and national distinction were bad in principle” (p. 20). Pointing to these congressional statements strengthens Chin’s (2015) claims. However, current categorizations

such as “legal” and “illegal” immigration challenges this notion of race-neutral (Garcia, 1995). And although the Hart-Cellar Act “established a framework for a contemporary immigration system (Chin & Villazor, 2015, p. 2), current discourse and treatment of undocumented immigrants, suggest that immigration laws are not race-neutral.

How Immigration Became Unauthorized

Indeed, the Hart-Cellar Act of 1965 opened the door for immigrants from non-European countries (Chin, 2015; Inman & Tummala-Narra, 2014), with the goal to move to more inclusive immigration laws. However, excluding and othering immigrants is the cornerstone of U.S immigration laws, and as the years progressed, it became apparent that immigrants, particularly immigrants of color, were targeted. Garcia (1995) notes, while the “overt racist overtones that colored immigration rhetoric was lost with the end of legally sanctioned race discrimination in the 1960s”, by the 1990s, “many politicians and lawmakers emphasized the difference between "legal" and "illegal" immigration” (p.x).

Paradoxically, and what Massey (2015) notes as “the cost of good intentions” (p. 2), unauthorized immigration was a result of the passing of the 1964 Civil Rights act (Massey 2015; Chomsky, 2014; Massey, & Pren, 2012). From 1942-1964, the U.S government entered into a guest-worker agreement with Mexico, which allowed roughly 450,000 male Mexican citizens each year (Massey, 2015) to work in the U.S temporarily in the agricultural industries (González, & Loza, 2016). Known as the Bracero Program, Mexican citizens filled the labor shortage in U.S, which as a result of World War II (Massey 2015; Chomsky, 2014; Bickerton, 2000). In keeping with the Civil Rights act of 1964 and its charge to end discriminatory practices, the United States ended its 22-year agreement with Mexico due to the exploitive nature of the program (González, & Loza, 2016; Massey, 2013). Pointing back to the Hart-Cellar act which

allotted a certain number of permanent visas per country each year, Mexico went from having access to “450,000 temporary work visas and a theoretically unlimited number of resident visas (in practice averaging around 50,000 per year) to an allocation of zero work visas and a mere 20,000 residence visas” (Massey, 2015, p. 3).

Although the Bracero Program ended, the economic structures that were in place that relied on Mexican workers to fill the labor shortage in the United States as a result of World War II, did not disappear and neither did the workers (Chomsky, 2014). Instead, the workers “returned to the old, informal system” (Chomsky, 2014, p. 11). Workers decided to stay in the United States at the ending of Bracero Program decided because “their usual seasonal pattern had become criminalized” (Chomsky, 2014, p. 12), and it would not be good economically (Chomsky, 2014, p. 12).

Deferred Action Childhood Arrivals (DACA)

Discussions about undocumented immigrants is at the center of many political discourses. Of the estimated 11.6 million undocumented peoples who reside in the United States, many of them are children. There were concerns about children who were brought to the country without documentation by their parents, because they did not have a role in the decision to move to the United States. To provide a pathway to citizenship to undocumented immigrants who migrated to the United States as children, The Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM) Act was first introduced in Congress in August 2001. Unfortunately, there were several failed attempts to pass the act. However, with the ushering of a new administration, legislations were introduced that provide “support” for undocumented children.

In 2008 under the Obama Administration, there was a change in the legislations for undocumented children. On June 15, 2012, President Obama initiated the Deferred Action for

Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program (Gonzales, Terriquez, & Ruszczyk, 2014). DACA is an executive order that was passed as an alternative policy in response to the failed attempts of the DREAM Act. To qualify for DACA, undocumented individuals must have arrived in the United States before the age of 16 and have lived in the country continuously since 2007; be currently in school, a graduate of a U.S. high school; be younger than 31 on June 15, 2012 and have not been convicted of a felony or specific misdemeanors (Gonzales, Terriquez, & Ruszczyk, 2014). DACA does not provide a legal pathway to citizenship and temporarily defers deportation for those eligible. However, those who are eligible to apply will receive a social security number and a two-year work permit that has to be renewed every two years.

Politically, both the DREAM ACT and DACA emerged as a Latinx issue which resulted in undocumented individuals being branded as being only Latinx and specifically Mexican. While undocumented Latinx individuals represent a large number of individuals who have an undocumented status, there are individuals from other racial and ethnic groups who are also undocumented are not discussed or centered in as their Latinx counterparts.

Indeed, the passing of DACA provided a pathway for undocumented youth to seek post-secondary education. Many undocumented students could not access higher education because the Plyler v. Doe decision, the 1982 case that provided access to K-12 did not do for higher education. In fact, Olivas (2009) noted that as the number of undocumented students started to increase, “some public higher education institutions and states began to impose residency restrictions. Such restrictions precluded undocumented students from achieving domiciliary-based residency tuition or charged them tuition rates as if they were international students without visas” (p. 1759). Therefore, although the passing of DACA provided a gateway to higher education for some undocumented students, undocumented students’ still experienced

challenges as they navigated higher education. Below, I discussed in detail some the challenges undocumented students face.

Undocumented Students in Higher Education

No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark - Warsan Shire, n.d.

The experiences of undocumented students in higher education are varied. Over the past 15 years, there has been a growing body of literature that documents the educational experiences of undocumented students in higher education. In fact, Bjorklund (2018) did a critical review of the literature concerning undocumented students and published between 2001 and 2016. Bjorklund found that all undocumented students face “significant financial barriers, shoulder unique psychological and social burdens tied to their legal status and lack access to forms of social capital that facilitate postsecondary success” (p. 631). In completing this literature review, I found that my own themes aligned with Bjorklund’s (2018) work. Thus, below, I expand on Bjorklund’s (2018) themes with additional literature that speaks more directly to my research concerns. First, I describe the financial barriers undocumented students face in higher education, followed by a discussion of the psychological and social burdens. I then conclude with a discussion of undocumented students’ social capital.

Financial Barriers and Undocumented Students

Bjorkland (2018) begins by noting that “financial burdens are the greatest concerns facing undocumented students” (p. 639). Out of the 81 articles reviewed, Bjorkland (2018) found that 27 of the 81 authors reviewed discussed the financial burdens of undocumented students. In my own review of the literature, an overwhelming amount of scholarship indeed pointed to financial burdens as an obstacle for undocumented students (Abrego, & Gonzales, 2010; Abrego, 2006;). To highlight these financial burdens, however, scholars have taken different angles. For

example, some point to institutional and federal policies that prevent undocumented students from accessing higher education (Nienhusser, 2015; Flores, 2010; Chavez, Soriano, & Oliverez, 2007), others point to the low socio-economic status of undocumented students and their families (Bjorklund, 2018). Pointing to the laws that impact undocumented students, Diaz-Strong, Gómez, Luna-Duarte, & Meiners (2011), conducted a qualitative study, where they interviewed 34 Latinx undocumented students to ascertain how they paid for college. Specifically, they examined how the “denial of financial aid prevents undocumented students from pursuing higher education and discusses the interlocking relationship between federal immigration and higher education policies” (p. 107). The authors found that undocumented students reported “financial limitations [as the] central challenge” because they were not allowed to access federal monies (p. 112). While documented students receive federal monies to fund their education, the Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 prohibits undocumented students from accessing federal aid (grants, loans, work study) to fund their postsecondary education (Abrego, 2008, Drachman, 2006).

Further compounding the financial situation for undocumented students is the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. The IIRIRA stipulates that undocumented students cannot receive in-state resident tuition (ISRT) unless out of state citizens or nationals are eligible for the same benefits (Bozick & Miller, 2014; Feder, 2006). As it stands, nine states explicitly deny undocumented students ISRT (Nienhusser, 2015; Bozick & Miller, 2014). Some states, however, have tried to provide financial assistance to undocumented students by allowing them to pay ISRT (Flores, 2010). Access to ISRT provides some financial relief for undocumented students which results in an increased access to higher education (Flores, 2010). In fact, in quantitative

study, Flores (2010) examined whether undocumented students who lived in states that provided access to ISRT were more likely to enroll in college. To examine the impact of enrollment benefits, Flores (2010) used an econometric method, differences-in -differences. Flores (2010) found that in-state resident tuition ISRT policy “positively and significantly affects college decisions of students who are likely to be undocumented as measured by an increase in their college enrollment” (p. 271). Specifically, Flores (2010) found that “foreign-born noncitizen Latinos living in states with an in-state resident tuition (ISRT) policy were 1.54 times more likely to have enrolled in college after the policy's implementation than similar students in states without such legislation (p. 239).

In a similar study by Flores and Horn (2009), the researchers examined the persistence patterns of undocumented students who received ISRT 4 years after enrolling in the University of Texas at Austin. As one of the first “quantitative analyses of the persistence behavior of ISRT policy eligible students at a large selective public institution in Texas,” Flores and Horn (2009) used a longitudinal dataset that was provided by the University of Texas at Austin, which housed data over a 10-year period of admissions, enrollment and course information for all students who applied as a first-generation college freshman. As a requirement, students had to be “eligible for ISRT or be self-identified as Latino on the Texas Common Application” (p. 65). Flores and Horn (2009) found that undocumented students who receive ISRT benefits are “remaining in college at rates similar to those of their Latino peers who are U.S. citizens and legal residents” (p. 57). However, although states with ISRT benefits would see a higher enrollment of undocumented students, Perez (2010) noted that community colleges serve as a gateway into higher education for many undocumented students, because it is less expensive than 4-year institution. In fact, Chavez, Soriano, & Oliverez (2007) stated that in California, it is estimated that roughly “30,000 AB 540-

eligible undocumented students enrolled in California's state community college system, compared to the less than 5,000 estimated AB 540-eligible who enrolled in the two states public university system" (p. 259).

While community colleges serve as access points for many undocumented students, Terriquez (2015) noted that undocumented students at community colleges still face significant hurdles. Using a mixed -methods study that used a "comparative analysis of 80 semi-structured interviews" (p.1302), Terriquez (2015) examined why undocumented students "stop out" or did not stay continuously enrolled in community college. Findings suggested that "undocumented students disproportionately encounter financial strains as they proceed through college" whereas "while also facing financial difficulties, [other students] are more likely to withdraw because of personal interests and poor academic preparation" (Terriquez, 2015, p.1314). Scholarship by Conger and Chellman (2013), Abrego and Gonzales (2010), and Contreras (2009) also supports Terriquez (2015) findings. In fact, although many undocumented students enroll in community colleges to circumvent the high tuition cost at 4-year institutions, South Carolina and Alabama ban undocumented students from attending community colleges all together" (Diaz-Strong, Gómez, Luna-Duarte, & Meiners, 2011, p.109). Coupled with the financial barriers undocumented students face, they also have to grapple with psychological and social burdens.

Psychological and Social Burdens

Scholars have pointed to the psychological and social burdens faced by undocumented students at length (Jacobó & Ochoa, 2011; Patler, and Pirtle, 2018). Specifically, scholars pointed to fear of deportation, sense of belonging, and disclosure of status. Learning to be undocumented is psychological burden faced by undocumented students as a result of their legal status (Beuno, Casas, Cummings, and Newlands, 2018; Jacobó and Ochoa, 2011). Forced to

navigate an in-between space or what Suárez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi, and Suárez-Orozco (2011) noted as a “state of ambiguous belonging”, undocumented students battle anxiety and stress (Patler, and Pirtle, 2018) that is absent from the lives of their documented peers. The issues that are at the forefront of the literature that contribute to the psychological and social burdens faced by undocumented students are: (1) fear of deportation (Contreras, 2009; Enriquez, & Saguy, 2016) (2) sense of belonging (Beuno, Casas, Cummings, & Newlands; 2018; Valdez, & Golash-Boza, 2018), (3) disclosure of status (Muñoz, 2016; Valenzuela, Perez, Perez, Montiel, & Chaparro, 2015).

Fear of Deportation

Living with the fear of being deported is a daily reality for undocumented students (Negrón-Gonzales, 2013). Although some undocumented students have DACA status which grants deportation reprieve (Wong, García, Abrajano, FitzGerald, Ramakrishnan, and Le, 2013.), the current anti-immigrant climate has shown no one is safe. This is not to imply that the anti-immigrant sentiment is a recent occurrence, as there are several historical examples of nativism, racism, and exclusionary practices towards immigrants in the U.S. (Cohn, 2015, Curriden, 2013; Pfeffer, 1986; Smelser, 1954). Instead, the political discourse and actions (i.e. immigration raids) in the Trump-era has also threatened the safety of DACA recipients. For example, consider Juan Manuel Mortes, a 23-year-old DACA holder, who was deported in April 2018 despite having DACA status (Carcamo, 2017). Juan’s case is believed to be the first under the current administration, since DACA was implemented to protect DACA eligible immigrants in the Obama-era. There are discrepancies whether Juan’s DACA status was expired at the time of deportation, as Juan states that his DACA status was valid. Nevertheless, Juan’s experience only

serves to crystalize, and make very real, the fear of deportation for DACA recipients and all undocumented students, particularly in 2018, the Trump era.

Jacobo and Ochoa (2011) further highlighted the psychological trauma and severe emotional strain undocumented students face. The authors used a conceptual frame which included four quadrants: (a) unauthorized and unregulated legal social policy and explicit lived space; (b) unauthorized and unregulated legal social policy and implicit lived space; (c) unauthorized and regulated legal social policy and implicit lived space; (d) unauthorized and regulated legal social policy and explicit lived space, to examine the “pressures and social-psychological forces that shape the daily-lived experiences and negotiated spaces of undocumented college aged students pursuing higher education” (p. 22). Based on their interviews and focus group discussions, the authors developed four themes: (a) Identity and Membership, (b) Micro-Aggressions, (c) Trauma, and (d) Structural Violence. I point to the structural violence theme to further highlight the fear of deportation. One participant noted “apprehension, deportation, and family separation by immigration authorities generated conditions of trauma or posttraumatic disorder syndrome” as she watched her mother arrested and taken to prison by ICE (p. 27). When thinking about undocumented students/peoples and deportation, Lachica-Buenavista (2018) said it best: “undocumented status and deportability [become] inextricably linked through the ability of the federal government to remove humans deemed undesirable; as such, undocumented status equated to criminal activity” (p. 81)

Sense of Belonging

As outlined earlier, undocumented students’ lives are shaped by local, state, and federal legislation (Nienhusser, 2015; Contreras, 2009; Bozick and Miller, 2014; Feder, 2006) which presumably impact their sense of belonging. Sense of belonging can be defined as the degree to

which an individual is able to cultivate positive feelings or emotions to their environment. One of earliest example of this is the landmark Supreme Court case, *Plyler v. Doe* 1982. This Supreme Court ruling granted undocumented students' access to K-12 schools regardless of legal status (Immigration Policy Center, 2012), but did not extend the same educational rights postsecondary institutions (Drachman, 2006), leaving undocumented students riddled with financial burdens. Being “locked out of opportunities” in some states (Sahay, Khatcher, Núñez, and Lightfoot, 2016) and the financial demands of postsecondary education, undocumented students endure psychological strain. Additionally, not being able to access financial support at the federal and institutional level informs undocumented students' sense of belonging, because through these policies, institutions cannot meet their needs (Contreras, 2009; Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012; Pérez Huber & Malagon, 2007).

In a qualitative study conducted by Beuno, Casas, Cummings, and Newlands (2018), eight DACA students who were mostly women and from Mexico were interviewed to examine their experiences before applying to DACA and after receiving DACA. They found that participants who received DACA experienced a sense of temporary belonging, as they quickly realized they were DACA limited. In other words, having DACA did not provide the same benefits as students who had citizenship or provide a pathway to citizenship. Therefore, undocumented students felt a “sense of liminality or sense of non-belonging (p. 265). Participants noted they make excuses to explain their inability to do the “typical” things as their documented friends. This sense of liminality or sense of non-belonging. Suárez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi, and Suárez-Orozco (2011).

Another example that highlights the lack of sense of belonging felt by undocumented students is the 2018 announcement made by President of the U.S regarding DACA. On

September 5, 2018, the President of the U.S ordered an end to DACA, giving a Congress six-month window to find a solution for DACA holders. This announcement sent shock throughout the undocumented community. This example further underscores the fact that undocumented students struggle with sense of belonging. Their “sense of belonging” can be taken away at any time, which renders them in a constant state of unknown and in-between.

Disclosure of Status

In discussing the concerns undocumented students have, Negrón-Gonzales (2013), note “the most fundamental in this litany of concerns is the fear of being discovered as undocumented, a fear grounded in both the embarrassment that accompanies the stigma of being undocumented as well as the possible consequences of exposure — deportation” (p. 1287). Undocumented students have anxiety and fear around being discovered as undocumented. While this is the case for many (Lachica-Buenavista, 2018; Negrón-Gonzales, 2013), a growing group of undocumented students have taken a new direction by publicly disclosing their status as political act (Galindo, 2012).

Lachica-Buenavista (2018) did a study with 15 undocumented Asian Americans to examine how Asian American students “simultaneously resist and reinforce racial stereotypes to contend with their undocumented status, as a response to the punitive treatment of undocumented immigrants” (p. 79). Lachica-Buenavista (2018) found that similar to their undocumented Latinx counterparts, undocumented Asian Americans, too dealt with the treat of disclosure. Although I discussed the factors the contribute to the psychological burdens of undocumented students individually, it is important to note they are inextricably linked. In other words, undocumented students cannot fear deportation without having feelings of not belonging. Nor do they worry about disclosure of status without fearing deportation. As suggested by Jacobo and Ochoa

(2011), “undocumented student have the constant worry or trauma of not being “legal” and living under stress (p. 24). In addition to facing financial and psychological burdens, undocumented students also struggle with social capital.

Black Immigrants in Higher Education

To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a rage almost all the time
- James Baldwin

Historically, studies that have examined the educational experiences of Black students in higher education have treated Black students as a monolithic group (Daoud, English, Griffin, & George Mwangi, 2018). Black immigrants come from counties in Africa, the Caribbean, as well as other regions (Thelamour & Johnson, 2017). In fact, the literature on Black immigrant students is scant. Recently, however, scholars are creating a body of literature that specifically discuss the experience of Black immigrant students who navigate U.S. colleges and universities (Daoud, English, Griffin, & George Mwangi, 2018; Mwangi, 2017; George Mwangi & Fries-Britt, 2015; George Mwangi & Fries-Britt, 2014). In this section, I review the literature that discuss the educational experiences of Black immigrant students in higher education. In the reviewing the literature, I found that two main themes: (a) sense of belonging (b) racial and ethnic challenges

Sense of Belonging

Immigrants who come to the U.S. go through a process known as acculturation as they try to understand their new environment (George Mwangi & Fries-Britt, 2015,). In this way, Black immigrant students find themselves trying to make sense of their new environment as they make “cultural adjustments academically and socially on college campuses” (George Mwangi & Fries-Britt, 2015, p. 18). One example of cultural adjustment is how Black immigrant students come to understand their racial identity within a U.S. context. Racial identity is defined as “one’s

thoughts, perceptions and level of investment in the cultural patterns of one's racial group" (Sanchez & Awad, 2016, p. 32). Black immigrant students come from countries where race is not constructed and understood in the same way as in the United States, and therefore struggle to understand their new racial minority status. In the United States, race is understood within a Black/white binary, whereas Black immigrant students identify with their ethnic group (Jamaican, Kenyan, African, etc.) (Mwangi & Fries-Britt, 2015; Mwangi & Fries-Britt, 2014).

In a qualitative study conducted by George Mwangi (2016), they looked at the sense of belonging among ten Black international students at an HBCU. Mwangi and Chrystal (2016) found that perceptions of race and nativity shape Black international students' university experiences as they "sought to maintain national identity while adjusting to the HBCU environment and engaging in cross-cultural interactions with Black Americans" (p. 1015). One participant when talking about fit and sense of belong said "I am Jamaican first and then Black second". Another student pointed to the constant discussions about race among her African American/native Black peers. She noted, "African Americans "talk about race constantly" and that she did not see race as such a major definer of her identity before coming to the United States" (p. 1025). These examples point to the difficulty Black immigrant students have as they come to understand being categorized as marginalized racially.

Racial and Ethnic Challenges

Black immigrant students come from countries where a social class is the organizing fact and not race. Once they arrive in the United States, they are unprepared for a racial system that discriminates and oppresses them because they are Black (Xue Lan Rong & Paul Fitchett 2008). For example, in a qualitative study, Stebleton and Aleixo (2016) interviewed 12 undergraduate Black African immigrant college students attending a predominantly White institution (PWI) to

learn about their experiences and perceptions of belonging. Their findings suggested that Black African immigrant students' sense of belonging was "largely shaped by interactions between the student and the intersecting systematic factors within their environments (i.e., their ecology)" (p. 95). One of the participants, an Ethiopian woman, said that she noticed that her white classmates would choose group partners based on their assumptions about her physical appearance. She notes:

You would go into chemistry lab for example, and then you'd be told to pick your partners ... [students] pick based off of cultural stereotypes of people—like Caucasians will choose to be partnered up with Asian and then they would [make assumptions] because the way I'm dressed. Because nobody picks you as a partner, and the funny thing if you're actually smarter than half of those people, but they just assume you're not. (p. 9)

In a similar study, conducted by George Mwangi, Fries-Britt, Sharon (2015), titled *Black Within Black: The Perceptions of Black Immigrant Collegians and Their U.S. College Experience*, the authors wanted to examine the diversity that existed with the Black students represented across campuses, due to the increasing number of Black immigrants navigating U.S. colleges and universities. The initial goal of the project was to study Black students majoring in Physics, but the authors realized that 18% of their participants were Black immigrants' students. George Mwangi and Fries-Britt, (2015) found that Black immigrant students felt that U.S.-born Blacks were too quick to point to racism as the reason for negative incidents on campus. This points back to the difficulty in understanding racial identity in the United States for Black immigrants. In fact, one participant noted that "they did not see color". However, over time, the authors note that Black immigrants became aware of their racial identity as they experience microaggression and acts of overt racism on their campuses. For example, one student, in taking

about his experience, noted, “nobody wants to work with you ... then you realize maybe it’s because of my race.” (p. 19).

Chapter Summary

The literature above paints a clear picture of how race was created through immigration policies and practices. The exclusion of people based on skin color and ethnic origin paved the way for this notion of undocumentedness and created a deep disdain for particular groups of people. Much of the literature cited above highlights the various barriers undocumented students face while navigating higher education. Undocumented students, as a result of their immigration status, face significant financial barriers and psychological barriers such as fear of deportation, disclosure of status, sense of belonging. Undocumented students also have very limited social capital which shapes their educational experiences in higher education. While the literature highlights the experiences of undocumented students, none discuss the educational experiences of undocumented Black students. As a result, and because Black students are not imagined as being undocumented, there are huge gaps in the literature on undocumented students. How scholars have documented the experiences of undocumented students in higher education as evidence in the literature above, paints a clear picture of the general experiences of undocumented students. However, NONE talk about the specificity of Blackness (Wynter, 1989) and what that means in the undocumented discourse.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you. - Maya Angelou

To frame my methodology, I begin with a vignette that represents my epistemological grounding and relationship to this work (e.g., positionality). Following the vignette, I describe my methodology, data collection methods, and analytical plans.

My Story: Generational Knowing

May 5, 2017. Two of my friends, Qiana and Yeukai just graduated and became Drs. Green and Mlabmo respectively. I was so excited for them! The opportunity to celebrate two Black women getting PhDs and just Black success in general, was, and is, something to marvel in. As a part of the weekend of festivities, we decided to go to Detroit to steep ourselves in its rich history. Our first stop was the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, founded in 1965. I had never been, so I was really excited.

As we made our way through the different exhibitions, I wondered off and arrived at the “And Still We Rise: Our Journey Through African American History and Culture”, the museum’s largest single exhibition on African American history in existence. Using multiple mediums, such as wax figures and audio, the exhibit tells the gruesome story of the Transatlantic slave trade. The exhibition took me 70 feet underground and carried me through the torturous and inhumane stages of the Transatlantic slave trade.

I found myself spending more time at each exhibition. I kept re-reading the notes and kept looking at images of suffering before me. As I moved through the exhibition, I could feel my body shifting. Shifting physically, as I adjusted my body weight from one leg to the next. Shifting internally, as I started to feel my heart drop into an intense pain, but also, feelings I cannot

accurately describe in this re-telling. I eventually made my way through, approaching the final stage of the exhibition — the deck of the slave ship.

As I made my way up to the deck of the slave ship, the journey became harder. To get to the deck of the ship, I had to enter a dimly lit area and climb, what felt like, the steepest set of steps in my life. If I am being honest, at the time of climbing the stairs, I did not know I was heading to deck of the ship. In the haze of my pain, I must have missed the plaque that would have alerted me of the next part of the slave trade. With each climb, I felt nervous. Nervous because I did not know what was at the top of those stairs. Nervous, because the combination of the narrowness of the stairwell, the dim lighting, and the steepness of the steps, triggered immense fear.

I finally made it to the top of the stairs, and I was immediately overcome with weakness. I had to hold onto the door jam for support as tears ran down my eyes. All the pain finally broke through my body. Before me were wax bodies of women, men, and children, crammed lying next to each other on wooden shelves. I was FROZEN! Stuck in the doorway. I had to eventually pull myself away from the doorway, because of the group of people behind me who kept saying, “excuse me”. With tears running down my face, I walked through the deck of the ship. There they were. My ancestors... shackled, broken, and confused. I was broken. But just when I thought I could not feel any more pain; speakers broadcasted the frightened screams and groans of pain of the enslaved. I could not take it any more... that was it! I ran out of that exhibition!

Out of breath and steeped in pain, I made it out of the exhibition. Disoriented, I bumped into a Black woman whom I had seen earlier at the beginning of the exhibition. She saw the tears on my face... still flowing uncaptured. We shared a look. She said nothing. But in that silence was love and support because she knew, too, the pain that was just re-inscribed on my body.

I opened this chapter with this vignette because Gloria Anzaldúa (2015) reminds me that I “pick the ground from which I speak a reality into existence” (p. 23). In this way, my epistemology, which is how a researcher comes to know and think about the nature of knowledge is informed by a critical perspective. According to Sipe and Constable (1996), a critical perspective suggests that there are many truths, but that reality is undergirded by a system of socio-political power. I took a critical epistemological stance in my work because I believed power cannot and should not be bracketed out of conversations about knowing and reality.

Theoretical Framework: Intersectionality

Although Crenshaw (1989) introduced the term intersectionality to the scholarly literature, her thinking was informed by the work of scholars and activists before her time. Collins and Bilge (2016) argue that intersectional work and thinking can be traced as far back as the late 1960’s and early 1980’s during “a period of social movement activism in the United States” that the catalyst for many of the “main ideas of intersectionality” (p. 64). The 1960’s and 1970s were particularly important for the core ideas of intersectionality as a result of movements such as the “Black Power, Chicano liberation, Red Power, and Asian-American” (p. 65).

During these movements, women of color (WoC) came together to address structural inequities. Rather than being “positioned as leaders”, WoC were expected to “serve agendas led by men” (Harris, & Patton, 2018, p. 4). Therefore, intersectionality is concerned with the overlapping of identities and how those identities interact with larger systems. Intersectionality, therefore, is guided by key axioms that are helpful in understanding the how being both undocumented and Black simultaneously shape the educational experiences of undocumented Black students. I used paradigm proposed by Collins and Bilge (2016) in addition to Drs. Jessica Harris and Lorri Patton (2019) four set of assumptions of intersectionality, which were compiled

from literature, to inform my dissertation. Taken together, these assumptions collectively align with my study. Harris and Patton (2019) have four assumptions of intersectionality, but I used the two that was best for my study.

1. Intersectionality examines how power relations are intertwined and mutually constructing (e.g., race, class, gender, citizenship, religion, etc.)
2. Intersectional analyses must promote social justice and social change by linking research and practice to concrete holistic approaches to the eradication of disparities and to changing social and higher education institutions
3. Intersectional research must generate transformative knowledge, which is used to transform institutions of higher education
4. Intersectionality includes citation practices, methodological approaches, who and what are analyzed in intersectional research, exploring the history of the theory, and the offering of generalist or specialist definitions, amongst other aspects.

Undocumented Black students have overlapping marginalized identities based on race, gender, sexuality, and citizenship status. Through the use of intersectionality, I trouble assumptions that position undocumented Black students as non-immigrants and not being undocumented.

Undocumented Black students are at the intersection of race and immigration status in a society that understands the immigrant experience outside of the Black experience. Intersectionality therefore is helpful as it is concerned with the relationship of overlapping identities and the ways they interact with systems of power. Next, I discuss in detail how narrative inquiry informed this study as I sought to understand how being Black and undocumented shape students' educational experiences.

Methodology: Narrative Inquiry

“We dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative. In order really to live, we make up stories about ourselves and others, about the personal as well as the social past and future.” —Barbara Hardy

As I thought about my storytellers and what I wanted to learn from them, I thought deeply about a methodology that would not only humanize them but allow them to share aspects of their lives in a way that would not constrain them. At the forefront of my mind was the fact that as undocumented Black students, their experiences are not highlighted in the same ways as other undocumented students, who are cast primarily as Latinx and sometimes Asian. I felt narrative inquiry, a methodology that provides people the freedom to articulate their lives as experienced was most congruent with my aims. Importantly, narrative inquiry also aligned with the principles of intersectionality, including the power of stories that can counter or complicate dominant narratives.

I spent a lot of time reading about narrative inquiry to ensure that I made the right decision, and I was convinced when Clandinin and Connelly (2000) highlighted that “experience happens narratively, narrative inquiry is a form of narrative experience” (p.19). I remember reading that line over and over again because it was simple yet powerful. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) further emphasized the dynamic nature of narrative inquiry, which provided me with a deeper understanding of the methodology. They note that:

Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving, and

retelling the stories of the experience that make up people's lives, both individual and social. Simply stated...narrative inquiry is stories lived and told. (p. 20)

While I understood that stories are collected, analyzed, and used as data in narrative inquiry, I asked myself if that was all I needed to, simply collect stories? As I continued learning about narrative inquiry, I recognized that stories were not just stories. They were not static experiences that needed to be collected; instead, they involved a series of movements. Stories moved inward and outward, backward, and forward. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe these movements as a three-dimensional narrative space which they categorize as: (a) personal and social (interaction); (b) past, present, and future (continuity); (c) place (situation) (p. 50).

The personal-social dimension points to the inward and outward aspects of the story. Inward pointed me "toward the internal conditions, such as feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions" (p. 50), and outward, "toward the existential conditions" (p. 50). Moving backward and forward pointed me to "to temporality- past, present, and future" (p. 50). And place allowed me to "attend to the specific concrete physical and topological boundaries of inquiry landscapes" (p. 51).

As I journeyed with my storytellers, I kept the three-dimensional space in mind and ensured that I shifted my gaze inward, outward, and backward. I was attuned to reactions such as pauses, silences, outbursts, and gestures. I paid attention to comments that indicated that storytellers forgot to mention an event, which would help create a cohesive timeline. I paid attention to the specific places or objects that they mentioned and that inevitably shaped their stories. Working within the three-dimensional inquiry space, I also saw myself in the midst "located somewhere along the dimensions of time, place, the personal and social" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 63). I quickly realized that I couldn't bracket myself out of the stories because

of the collaborative nature of narrative inquiry. I did not exist as a narrative inquirer on the outside, peering into the lives of my storytellers. I was firmly planted in a set of stories—their story and our story. I was confident with my realization and, to be honest, my decision to journey with my storytellers, because Clandinin and Connelly (2000) notes “moving into close relationships with participants is necessary work in narrative inquiry. Why not fall in love with one's participants?” (p. 82).

Retelling a story is not easy. I worried about missing critical events or getting the stories “right.” However, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) reminded me that “difficult as it may be to tell a story, the important task is the retelling of stories that allow for growth and change” (p. 71). Stories are not static and as individuals, we continue to live our lives, and our stories continue to play out, and we retell stories repeatedly. And we choose the parts of our lives we want to share to allow listeners to garner specific meanings. Narrative research does not “claim to ‘represent the exact ‘truth’, but rather aims for ‘verisimilitude’ – that the results have the appearance of truth or reality” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 4). Therefore, as a narrative researcher, I understood that there was no correct version to the stories and that I had my interpretations of the stories told to me, which was also valid (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Research Design

Prior to seeking storytellers for this study, I applied for and received institutional review board (IRB) approval through Michigan State University IRB’s office. As outlined by the MSU’s Human Research Protection Program, my study complied with all relevant federal, state, and institutional policies and procedures. Once the study was approved, I submitted all the pertinent paperwork to MSU’s IRB. I did not contact potential storytellers or collected data until my study

was approved by the IRB office. Below, I detail the specifics of my research design, beginning with my recruitment process.

Recruiting Storytellers

To recruit storytellers, I created recruitment materials in the form of a flyer and email to identify potential storytellers. To assist me with identifying storytellers, I used personal networks and cold called key people at colleges in the New York City area. For example, a professor and colleague who works with undocumented students, circulated the flyer to students he knew as well as individuals within his network who worked with undocumented Black students. Once I received IRB approval from MSU IRB office, I identified undocumented Black students using snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a recruitment method that allows me to identify storytellers based on interconnected social networks. Snowball sampling was useful because undocumented Black students are a “hidden population” due their vulnerability resulting from their immigration status (Browne, 2005). Therefore, I used social networks to identify undocumented students. Specifically, I reached out to researchers I knew who currently work with undocumented students in the New York City and surrounding area tri-state area. I provided them with my recruiting materials so that could distribute them among their network of undocumented students and individuals who worked with and alongside undocumented Black students. I choose to conduct this study in New York City because New York City “is a unique urban setting, [as] it hosts more undocumented immigrants than any other US metropolitan area” (Hsin, & Reed, 2019, p. 23). With so many Black immigrants living in New York, it severed as a rich site for data collection.

The storytellers in my study were a mix a graduate and undergraduate students who were both DACAmented (have a DACA status) and undocumented (without a DACA status), who

were between the age of 18-35. I reached out to 10 students, but ultimately, I worked with four undocumented Black colleges students in New York City who were currently enrolled college. Out of the four, one was enrolled in a graduate program and the others were in an undergraduate program. These storytellers were in their early to late twenties and all migrated to the US under or at the age of five years old. Two of the storytellers moved from the Caribbean, one from Africa, and the other from Latin America. To some, a sample of four participants may seem small, but Kim (2016) notes if the goal is to collect life stories “the sample of interviewees will usually be smaller” (p. 161). In other words, having more in-depth interviews with fewer participants allowed me better to understand the storied lives of undocumented Black college students. In the next chapter, chapter four, I introduce my storytellers fully, providing rich context for their higher education experience.

Confidentiality

Undocumented Black students are vulnerable population, and it was important that I maintained their confidentiality. All storytellers chose pseudonym which I used in all correspondence and notes. As the researcher, I was the only person was present in the room with the storytellers and I was the only person who reviewed all documents including consent forms received from the storytellers. The nature of this study was face-to-face interviews and as a result of that, anonymity could not be provided. However, storytellers’ privacy was protected to the maximum allowable by law. Specifically, all consent forms and audio-recordings were kept in a separate and secure location. The ensured to keep the identity of the storytellers confidential in all transcribing, analyzing, and reporting of the data. All data was kept in password protected files accessible only by me, the investigator.

Data Collection: Unearthing Stories

Narrative inquiry allows for several types of data collection. In keeping with narrative inquiry methods, I employed a series of loosely structured interviews with a small number of participants. Kim (2016) suggest that data collection methods should be grounded in narrative thinking, which “is the method of making a story out of an experience” (p. 156). Thus, in this study, I conducted two loosely structured interviews. In addition to loosely structured interviews, I asked participants to share artifacts or any material that might further illustrate their experience. This was particularly helpful for exploring if and how undocumented Black students found or sought joy during challenging educational times.

Interview One

In the first interview, I asked my storytellers to share demographic information with me before asking them to begin to share with me what I call “their life story” [SEE APPENDIX C]. The life story interview lasted between 90-120 -minutes and consisted of three sections: childhood, schooling (K-12 and higher education), and the joy exercise. Specifically, I asked participants to talk about their childhood because I wanted to create a timeline of their biographies. While recounting their childhood, storytellers shared their memories, experiences, and events of their birth country and time in the U.S. For example, storytellers told their migration stories and emotions/impression of their new home in the U.S. Then, I asked questions about undocumented Black student’s K-12 experience. Learning about the educational experiences of undocumented Black students at the K-12 level allowed me to gather an understanding of what life had been like before entering higher education. I also asked questions that focused on their experience as college students. I was particularly interested in understanding how higher education administrators, faculty, and staff shaped their college

experience. In the third and final section, I asked participants to prepare for a joy exercise, which I describe below.

The Joy Exercise. I asked my storytellers to participate in a joy exercise because I wanted to acknowledge the life giving moments that exist in the midst of any challenges they faced as they navigated higher education. I recognize that for undocumented Black students, barriers, and structures in the form of policies and laws exist that weigh on the mind and soul of these students. Asking my storytellers to talk about joy was a way for them to resist and show they are still living. These four Black undocumented storytellers shared their joys as was to highlight their existence. Additionally, because we spent the first interview that last for 120 minutes reliving traumatic experiences, I wanted the second interview which lasted for an hour, to focus solely on happiness. It was my way of pushing feelings of harm out of their bodies.

Interview Two

In the second interview, which lasted 60 minutes, I asked my storytellers to think of moments or artifacts that brought them joy that they lean on during difficult times, particularly in relation to their status as undocumented Black people, I asked them to discuss their understanding of joy and discuss the different ways they pulled on joy to help them navigate higher education. Asking my storytellers to relieve those moments can be traumatic and I wanted them to spend twenty minutes thinking about joy. I wanted to reflect on joy so they could identify their strength and recognize that they are doing more than surviving. I wanted our last minute to be filled with happy thoughts, smiles, and sense of peace. [SEE APPENDIX D]

Analytical Strategy

Theory helps us understand, analyze, and evaluate stories - (Bal, 1997)

When conducting narrative inquiry, the analytical process begins with the data collection phase and continue as one moves from field text into research text. When I was in the field collecting data, as I sat and interviewed my storytellers, I documented my emotions, feelings, thoughts, and wonderings in research journal for each storyteller. I noted pauses, gestures and reactions storytellers displayed. Often, I would write comments such as “this is exactly what the literature says” or “what does this mean?... follow up”. During the data collection phase, I started to form some interpretation about the stories that were told to me. However, later on, after working with my storytellers, it was time to organize my data. As a reminder, I collected with two interviews per person for an average of three and a half hours for each interview plus material from the joy exercise, leading to a significant amount of data. I listened to the audio and transcribed each story which resulted in 147 pages of narratives. Based on the volume of my data set, I decided the best way to organize my data was by using qualitative computerized software, MAXQDA.

Using MAXQDA, I was able to upload and organize each storytellers' narrative by name, which allowed me to look at their stories individually. As an additional step, I spent time reading and re-reading each individual transcript, and paid attention to events, stories, and experiences that storytellers shared with me. I edited the transcripts again for misspelled words and noted any questions I had for my storytellers. After I completed the transcription phase, I followed Clarke's (2005) recommendation and gave myself permission to sit, “digest, and reflect” on the stories shared by undocumented students (p. 84). While I sat, digested, and reflected on the stories, I sent my storytellers a copy of their transcripts and I asked them to review their stories for

accuracy and also as a form of member-checking. All four storytellers followed up and responded to questions I had, which were clarify a comments, and noted they were okay with the transcripts.

After receiving the transcripts from my storytellers, I reflected on my methodology, narrative inquiry, and Clandinin and Connelly (2000) the three-dimensional space, because it was important that my analysis reflected a narrative approach. Therefore, I turned to Polkinghorne (1995) for specific guidance on a how to conduct a narrative analysis. Polkinghorne's (1995) guidance noted that I could either use a paradigmatic mode of analysis and look for themes across stories or a narrative mode of analysis that highlights the uniqueness and richness of a single story. I decided that a narrative mode of analysis would be the best approach for analysis, because the result of narrative mode of analysis "an explanation that is retrospective, having linked past events together to account for how a final outcome might have come about" (Polkinghorne 1995, p. 16). The goal of narrative mode of analysis is to produce "stories as the outcome of the research" (Polkinghorne, 1995). In order to develop rich narrative findings, I did not break apart the participants' stories or apply line-by-line coding, which is antithetical to the nature of Polkinghorne's narrative analysis. Instead, I read each transcript holistically and used my research questions to zoom in certain aspects of the transcripts to help me craft each story.

Using my research questions allowed me to 1) identify storyteller's distinct K-12 and higher education experience, 2) any challenges they experienced, 3) their migration story and 4) the ways they pulled on joy to sustain themselves. See table 1. After zooming in and highlighting those aspects of the transcripts, I read my transcripts a second time and used my theoretical framework, intersectionality. I considered the three assumptions concerning intersectionality that

guide this study. During this analytic process, I focused on one of the three assumptions: that power relations are intertwined and mutually constructing (e.g., race, class, gender, citizenship, religion, etc.). For example, I paid attention to how socio-economic status and citizenship status impacted the educational experiences of my storytellers. Keeping this key assumption in mind allowed me to focus on how my storytellers' overlapping intersectional identities interacted with structures. In other words, working within the areas of the transcripts that I previously highlighted, I looked for narratives that highlighted challenges as a result of their citizenship status, low-socioeconomic status, and examples of them feeling invisible within educational structures. For example, I highlighted areas where storytellers talked about financial challenges, issues with their racial identity, mental health, etc.

After using my research questions and theoretical framework to help me identify key events and stories, it was time for me to create a single story for each storyteller. In order to create a story, I created a plot, which Kim (2016) defines as the "integration of events and happenings into a temporally organized whole with a thematic thread" (p.197). Polkinghorne (1995) notes that plots compose events into a story by:

- (a) delimiting a temporal range which marks the beginning and end of the story, (b) providing criteria for the selection of events to be included in the story, (c) temporally ordering events into an unfolding movement culminating in a conclusion, and (d) clarifying or making explicit the meaning events have as contributors to the story as a unified whole (p. 7).

I engaged in what Polkinghorne (1995) described as a recursive movement in order to create a plot that led to a coherent and final story. These recursive movements included reading and re-reading – reading, and then reading with theory, and then reading with the three dimensional

space to create the final story. I constantly moving inward, outward, and backward, and forward. At I read the transcripts inward, I paid attention to feelings, reactions, and hopes that were present in the story. I focused outward which allowed me to note extensional conditions or instances that created pressure or hardship for my storytellers. For example, Church Hill having to drop out of college because he did not have the financial means to continue as a student. I then I moved backward and forward that allowed me to pay attention to time so I could create a cohesive and chronological story as best as possible.

Table 1:

Analytical Questions drawn from Research Questions

Research Question	Relevant Excerpts
How do undocumented Black students experience challenges as they navigate higher education?	So, the thing is, for one, I don't identify as being Black. I think being Black is, um, almost like an insult to my being. And I say that, and I've had conversations around this, and people would always disagree with me, but I think being simplified to a color, it's the biggest insult you can give a person, right?
How do undocumented Black college students find joy during challenges in school?	They say happiness is external, but I think there are moments of joy in the happy moments and in the stress.... There are days, or there are moments when I feel like, wow, oh, am I really in graduate school? Am I really in higher education? And then I think about it like, I am proud of my undergraduate thesis.

Trustworthiness

No matter the methodology, it is important that a researcher works to establish the trustworthiness of their work. In this study, I employed three strategies to ensure trustworthiness: (1) member checking; (2); triangulation; and (2) debriefing with two close friends. To confirm the accuracy of the findings and the meanings derived from the interviews with undocumented Black students, I asked each storyteller to review, or member check, their documents. All four

participants responded and confirmed accuracy of the transcripts. I read the stories undocumented Black students shared to ensure that their voice was centered, and that I constructed their story accurately. I also discussed my findings with my dissertation advisor throughout the process. Additionally, I went back to the literature on undocumented students to check my findings against the literature. These steps ensure the trustworthiness of my work.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I described my positionality, my methodology, my research design, and data analysis. In the next chapter, I provide an overview of my storytellers as a way to begin to understand their experiences as undocumented Black students.

CHAPTER 4: STORYTELLERS

*So,
Here you are
Too foreign for here
Never enough for both*

— Ijeoma Umebinyuo

Introduction

As a reminder, the purpose of my study was to understand the educational experience of undocumented Black college students in higher education. Undocumented Black students, like their Latinx and Asian peers navigate higher education, yet little is known about their educational experiences. In this chapter, I help my readers begin to understand the lives of the storytellers. I say begin because the lives of these storytellers cannot be fully encapsulated in this dissertation. In introducing each storyteller, I provided key events and experiences that should help the reader imagine the storyteller. I describe how and why each person left their home country and migrated to the U.S. I also describe their family structure and dynamics. Finally, I provide some details about their K-12 educational experience.

Overview of Storytellers

Love is an act of will, both an intention and an action
— bell hooks

During the process of writing this dissertation, and still today, it is not safe to be an undocumented/DACAmented individual living in the United States. At any moment, without notice, any of my storytellers can find themselves in a detention facility being prepped to be sent back to a country they have little to no memories of. Although all my storytellers are DACAmented or have DACA except for one, Izzy, none of my them are “safe”. As noted earlier in chapter 1, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals or DACA is an executive order that was

passed in 2012 under the Obama Administration (Gonzales, Terriquez, & Ruszczyk, 2014). Storytellers who have DACA are temporarily “protected” from deportation. However, that “protection” was threaten as the Supreme Court decided if they should uphold the current administration’s decision to rescind DACA. Keeping all this in mind, as an intentional act of love, I chose to ensure my storytellers anonymity by omitting identifying makers and key details as an attempt to “protect” my storytellers as best as I can.

Church Hill Fordham

Church Hill Fordham is a 26-year-old Black man. We met in lower Manhattan on a chilly fall day as I asked Church Hill to share about his life, which had started in Africa. Church Hill left Africa at the age of five for the U.S. and has never returned. We shared a look when he said that he had never returned to Africa, as I wondered what he would share next about his short five years on the continent and his journey overall. Tell me about your childhood, I asked Church Hill.

Um, most of it’s a blur. So, from an early age, I just remember kind of like living in a private boarding school, so I didn’t necessarily know who my mom or dad were until I think the day of my birthday, my fifth birthday when I had to come to America. We lived in a nice complex that my father owned. So, the complex was almost like a C shape, and my father owned the whole thing. But he never lived there because he was here [USA], one of the reasons why we were able to afford it, I think.

As he continued his story, I felt Church Hill’s longing for family as he reiterated his lack of connection to his mom and dad. I nudged him a bit to tell me more about his family. So, can you talk about your family a bit more? I mean, you just mentioned you have a sister [he mentioned her in passing a second or two earlier...very casually though] but tell me about your

siblings, your family make up. He told me his sister also attended his boarding school and that he had a younger brother who was a year old. Although Church Hill and his sister went to the same school, they never saw each other and were not close. He only came home for Christmas and when it came to the overall family dynamics during holidays or in general, “um, there wasn't really any kind of like family communication whatsoever”. Church Hill did not spend a lot of time talking about his family or his time in Africa, so our conversation led to his migration story very quickly.

Yeah, I think the most I knew about family at that point was, before I left to come to America, which was like, oh yeah, like this is your dad and this is who you going to go see. And I'm looking at a picture and I'm just like, who is this dude? But okay, clearly that's daddy, but, um, let's just go on vacation to go meet this dude and I'll come right back.

Hmm, so you felt like you were going on vacation to the U.S to see your dad and come right back? “I always felt like I was coming back,” Church Hill said, “um, but I think as time kind of went on, I was just like, I think this is a forever thing. I was just like [long pause], and I have no say in when I can go back.” A heavy feeling filled the room when he finished his thought....one akin to betrayal. I watched as Church Hill eyes wondered towards the ceiling and back on me again. I took a second or two before asking the next question because I felt he needed it. So, tell me the story about your family moving to the US.

So, on my fifth birthday I met who I would now know to be my aunt for the first time. And she came to Africa to essentially bring me to America, but she lives in London. Um, so she took me from Africa to the London where I spent like a few months. Um, and then from there I came to America.

What was the actual journey like, I asked? He expressed a mix of excitement and fear. Excitement getting on a plane for the first time, seeing snow, and so many people. But he also distinctly remembered the fear that filled his little body as he stood by his aunt's side as customs border agents questioned her upon their arrival to the UK. Although Church Hill did not understand what was happening, he "could tell there was a lot of anxiety in the air, because I felt that from my aunt." Church Hill spent a few months in the UK with his aunt before they eventually made their way to the U.S.

Now in America, Church Hill experienced a lot of first. It was his first time meeting his dad, his stepmom, stepsister, and starting school. Somehow, Church Hill started the third grade at the age of five and he probably was one of, if not, the youngest in his grade. When I asked Church Hill to tell me about his K-12 experience, he immediately started with middle school. He told me middle school was tough because he didn't have a teacher for the first two years. He attended one of those middle schools that started at grade five. Students were tracked academically based on performance and were placed in specific classes. Church Hill was in 510, which meant he "was like two classes away from being in the worst class". With no teacher for two years, Church Hill and his classmates "just kinda like roamed the halls... just like hung out", and, the administration, well, "they just kinda pushed [them] along". Church Hill made sure to tell me he "didn't learn anything".

In high school Church Hill had a better experience because he played on every sports team and was the "jock" everyone liked. Academically and socially, he seemed fine, "but once the whole college application came into play, [he] felt like all of that high [he] was having all the way up to that point, got chopped". When Church Hill asked his father for his social security card and taxes to complete his application for college, he was not prepared for him to say, "you

don't got that you don't got that". You see, it was at 15 years old Church Hill found out he was undocumented. And in that moment, he recalled that his life was going to be different from his peers as he looked at me and said, "clearly, there's now a separation between me and them". Church Hill eventually made it to college at the age of 15 but failed out his first semester. It took him eight years before he would pursue higher education again. At the time of our interview, Church Hillis was enrolled in a bachelor program where he transferred in from a community college after completing his associate degree. He is DACAmented.

Steven

When we met, Steven and I were sitting on the opposite sides of the same room. After realizing that we might be who the other was looking for and exchanging the "I am waiting for someone look", we greeted one another with exaggerated call outs: "Kaaaaaayon?" "Steeeven?" We laughed through our introductions as we made our way to a smaller and quieter room for our interview. Steven is 24-year-old Black man from the Caribbean who, like Church hill, moved to the U.S. at the age of five. When I asked Steven to tell me about his childhood, he smiled. He shared fond memories of his time in the Caribbean going to school, running home to watch Pokémon, and his mom making him do dictation, which meant he wrote the words as she spoke them. He smiled and proudly stated, "education was a big theme in our house". I asked him to tell me more about his family and he immediately started to tell me about his migration story. For him, the two were inextricably linked because of the role the migration played in the expansion of his family.

We [including his mom and dad] had tourist visas, so we went back and forth between the ages of, I'd say four and five. My younger brother was born here [U.S] during one of

those stays. My mother was the first to overstay [B-1 visa] because when she stayed, at that point in time, she was working, you know, off the book jobs.

I nodded and scribbled YES! in my notebook as he said that because I was happy, he was debunking the largely held belief that undocumented individuals “sneak” into the U.S.

So, uh, when my mom was working, we migrated back to Caribbean for a bit, and then I'd say less than six months after, we all formally migrated here, lived with some family for a bit and then moved consistently through basements and in low-income neighborhoods for a few years.

Steven did not share much about what the journey or the emotions he felt as he made his way to U.S. However, looking back, he said, he did not realize he would not see his maternal grandma again. As Steven continued to share more about his family moving to the U.S, he shared the reason for the migration. It was always, “oh, we are moving so that we can have a better life and you can have a better education”, Steven said. However, as time went on and through context clues, he realized that his family moved to the U.S because his grandmother's killer was being released from prison and the family did not feel safe. I think he saw my eyes widen with empathy because he responded, “I know, I know”.

Steven's first reflection of his new home in the U.S. was not filled with the same happiness as his birth country. In fact, he told me, “I never felt at home in the U.S”.

It was... cause we were consistently moving every few years. It was always the rent got higher or we had to find a new apartment to stay. It was always in the same neighborhood but rent consistently goes up and the cost of living consistently goes up. So, it was always like, okay we can stay in a basement for maybe two or three years.

Mentions of being low-income or living in low-income communities was central to how Steven spoke about this life in the U.S. There was “nothing was too stable” he said. By this time, Steven’s second brother was born, which meant that he was a part of a mixed-status family with his brothers being U.S citizens. Steven’s awareness of his family’s economic status was not the only thing that he was attuned to at a young age. Steven was always aware of his immigration status...he knew he was undocumented. To protect him, his mother always told him, “you’re not illegal until you’re 18”. Suddenly the room became quiet as the sound of his voice no longer filled the space. He continued,

but at this point in time, that's clearly not the case. We all understand and learn that undocumented and illegalities exist from the moment you come here without your proper status. So, I would say I was sheltered. I was very sheltered in terms of the severity of the situation and the severity of...the gravity of the immigration situation.

Steven started K-12 and it was “normal up until high school, well, as normal as being low in come in a city can be”. He noted that his immigration status didn’t impact him in elementary, well, except that time he applied to a school program and his mom said he did not get it because of his lack of social security. Steven had supportive teachers throughout his K-12 experience, in fact, his 8th grade teacher signed him for a specialized math exam which lead him to be accepted into one of NYC’s elite high schools that specialize in STEM.

His time in high school was great due to supportive teachers and friends, and because education was important in his family, he began the college search process. Steven participated in a non-profit after school program that was focused on creating and enforcing opportunities for low-income students. Steven is currently completing his master’s degree and he is DACAmented

Elizabeth

I stood at the door of our agreed upon location, wet from the rain, as Elizabeth and I texted back and forth. I told her she would not miss me because I was wearing a bright red coat and also, that I needed her to sign me in. We met and proceeded to go through the many security measures her school had in place for visitors. Elizabeth, a 22-year-old Black woman, sat down with me one rainy day to share pieces of her life. She is from a small town in a country in Latin America and moved to the U.S. at the age of three. I asked her about her childhood upbringing, and she spoke about it from a place of both happiness and sadness. Back in her home country, Elizabeth lived with her mom, dad, and her grandmother. It was clear that Elizabeth was really close with her grandmother because she spoke about the times they spent at the park, the meals she and her grandmother used to share. Elizabeth's deep relationship with her grandmother made more and more sense as we talked. I learned that Elizabeth's parents migrated to the U.S. before she turned three years old and that her grandmother raised her. Elizabeth did not have many memories of her father in particular, because he "migrated to the U.S" when she was a newborn. Elizabeth's father migrated first, and her mother followed soon after. Once Elizabeth shared her parent's migration story, her own story was not far behind. Elizabeth, I said, tell me the story about your migration story.

So, the person that brought me was a person that actually lived really close to my mom in South Carolina (her mom migrated here). They knew each other because they were neighbors, but I didn't know this woman at all. So, I just remember my grandmother telling me, Oh, this is your aunt. You've never met her, but she's your aunt. She's going to take really good care of you and she's going to take you to see mom and dad. Elizabeth stopped for a second and looked at me as if she was asking for permission to continue her story. I obliged and encouraged her to go on...

Um, so we met up with the lady and then it was, it was really.... the journey was really me and a couple of other kids. Um, and I don't remember their names. I just know that there were two other twins that were there, and they kept me company and I kept them company.

Elizabeth ended her story, but I needed to know how she arrived in the U.S. and the emotions she felt as she made the journey. The lady, “she drove us across the border. I’m pretty certain all the children in the car were under the age of five” Elizabeth said. As they journeyed to the U.S she felt scared, because she realized she was not going to see her grandmother again. Elizabeth finally made it to the U.S, but her first stop was in South Carolina where her parents lived at the time. By this time, her parents had another daughter, and she suddenly became the member of a mixed-status family.

Elizabeth started her K-12 schooling in the south and was surprised at how quickly she learned English. Similar to Steven, Elizabeth’s parents shared with her very early about her immigration status.

So, when I was little like my mom would always tell me like you can't tell anybody that you're undocumented, that you cannot talk about this. And so, when I would talk to my friends, I mean it just in general, like it made it really hard for me to like to engage with other people as I was learning English. Like I wanted to share everything with everybody. While Elizabeth started her new school and made friends, she could not share a big part of her life. She had to keep a secret from her friends so she could protect herself and her family.

Elizabeth schooling was cut short at the age of 12 when her father was deported, and her family had to move due to threats against their lives. Elizabeth’s migration story started again as her mom, sister, brother, and her, drove through the night to New York. Elizabeth started K-12 again

in the fifth grade in New York and she had a good experience. Some of her teachers knew about her immigration status and provided support. New York was the first time Elizabeth felt she could talk about her status and as she did so, “it became like more of a slap in the face when [she] did realize like what it meant for [her]”.

High school came around and it was “awesome” for Elizabeth because she attended her first choice, even though it was in “really bad district”, Elizabeth wanted to go. She made friends and did well academically. Elizabeth started to realize what it meant to be undocumented as noted earlier, but it was not until the ninth grade that she really understood. While all her friends were applying for summer youth, a NYC organization that provides summer jobs for high school students, she could not because she did not have a social security card. She was really upset because all her friends were making money and she needed to help her mom out with money for the house. “It was more than just like; I want to buy myself shoes or I want to do my nails. I actually needed money to pay the rent or help with a bill, and I couldn't. I couldn't work”.

Elizabeth mom searched for schools to relocate her because she expressed so, and in the process, she ran into a woman in Chinatown who told her about DACA.

So, then she came home, and she was like, you should apply to DACA. So, it was around this time I ended up applying to DACA and the next summer I had a job.

Elizabeth is completing her bachelor's degree and she is DACAmented.

Izzy

There was something familiar about Izzy. I was not sure if it was the Caribbean/ West Indian energy we shared, but she felt familiar, and we joked about it. Izzy is a 27-year-old woman from the Caribbean, a place she left at the tender age of four. I asked Izzy to tell me about her childhood and she started with her time in her birth country.

So, I came from like a big family as far as sibling wise and um, brothers, and sisters. We lived in a big house... Um, I just remember being so free. Like, my childhood was playing, running around, climbing trees, it was fun. I was still kind of young. I wasn't like really in school

I smiled as Izzy reminisced about running around and climbing trees because I did the same as a child. At the time, Izzy lived with her dad because her mother was living in the U.S., and without asking, Izzy immediately started sharing her migration story.

So, I came up here [America] only for like a family vacation and then I ended up just staying. Like, they were just like, Oh, you know. At the time I was my mom's only daughter and she wanted me to stay up here, but I ended up coming and I stayed with my grandmother.

Like Steven and Church hill, Izzy believed she was going on vacation to visit family in the U.S and would return home to the Caribbean when her visit was over.

I felt alone because...Okay, family vacation, cool. Cause I'm like, my brothers are here [US] so I'm around people I know. But then when they left it was just like, oh snap. Like, I'm here by myself. I have to get to know them. They are family, but they're strangers to me cause I didn't grow with them.

Izzy spoke about her first years in K-12, and she spoke about the friendships she formed. However, she also spoke about her immigration status.

Um, so I want to say K-5, I didn't know my status. I didn't understand that I was undocumented in that I couldn't. Like, I didn't know what being an immigrant was. I didn't know this thing existed, especially that I was a part of it.

When Izzy said that, I could not help thinking about the other three storytellers who also expressed feelings of sadness, anger, shock, and confusion when they found out they were undocumented. Izzy, although she found out at 11 which meant she was in elementary school at the time, did not think about her status. She “didn't have to think about stuff like that cause [she was] a kid. You know, adults supposed to be working on that”. She did not know it was a problem. She continued,

So, once I got into middle school, where I'm meeting new friends, like an older set, they're like, “oh yeah, I can't wait to do summer youth. We get to a certain age and you get to do this”. I'm like, oh, I could do that too. I can apply, I could work, I can volunteer. And then I remember having this conversation with my grandmother, and she's like, “oh no, you can't because you don't have a social security, you can't get that. I'm just like, well, why? Why not? And that's where the conversation unfolded. Well, “you have to go through steps, you have to be filed for and you have to get your status adjusted.” I didn't think too much of it at the time. It's like okay, this seems like it's a problem, but it will get fixed.

Izzy went through middle school now aware of her status, but similar to Steven, not really understanding what it meant to be undocumented and the gravity of her situation. However, once she started high school, she began to really understand what it meant to be an individual who was undocumented. Once again, Izzy found herself in a situation where her friends were applying to jobs and she could not. Izzy's grandmother, her guardian, moved out of state which meant Izzy had to switch high schools. Unfortunately, administrators did not accept paperwork that showed Izzy's grandmother as her guardian and they did not accept her in high school. Izzy spent three

months out of school. As she shared this part of her story, I could feel the sadness enveloping her. However, I felt a powerful shift in her emotions as she said,

That was like the most depressing phase ever. Like, I can't go to school. This is a new place for me cause it's nothing compared to New York. Like, I can't get up and go anywhere. I don't know anybody. And I would just remember like, oh my gosh, I kept saying like if I ever get the opportunity to go to school, I'm going to do my best. I'm going to like to put my all because being out of school just showed how much, like I miss being there.

Izzy moved back to New York and resumed her studies in high school. However, as conversations about college started to ramp up, she found herself worrying about how she would pay for it because of her status. Izzy said,

Like, how am I going to like, you know... how is this gonna work? And that to me was like the biggest slap in my face. Realizing this is about to be real. Like I'm about to come to that age that okay, maybe I'm going to have to do this on my own. Like I don't know the steps and the procedures.

Izzy dropped out of high school and “for two years, put [her] life at a standstill not knowing what to do.” She said, “I can't go to work. I can't...like there's nothing. I didn't know where to go”.

Izzy eventually went to a GED program where she received her diploma. Izzy is finishing up her bachelor's degree this year. She is undocumented.

Chapter Summary

Immigration... migrating from different countries can look very different. Like, it's not always a border. It can be plane; it can be so many different things.

— Elizabeth

I close out this chapter with a quote from Elizabeth, one of the storytellers who, among the other storytellers, was gracious and strong enough to share her time and story with me. Elizabeth's quote elucidates the different ways that people migrate. In doing so, she disrupts the widely held belief that undocumented individuals only migrate by walking across a physical border. While this chapter shows a very small piece of the lives of the storytellers, it captures the myriad reasons and ways people leave and how that process emotionally imprints on their lives. It is important to note that leaving in this case, is not just the physical act of moving to the U.S on a plane or by car which is marked by a specific day and time. Leaving, is the ongoing process that is still shaping the experiences and lives of these storytellers. Through me, storytellers shared stories of their families and their K-12 experience, and in doing so, occupied a very scary, yet open and vulnerable place. Across the next few chapters, I share each participant's narrative in ways that speak to their educational experiences as undocumented Black students in higher education.

CHAPTER 5: CHURCH HILL FORDHAM

Churchill's challenges with higher education did not start in college. Remember he found out he was undocumented when he was only 15 years old during the college application process. His dad told him he did not have a social security number nor any of the other documents needed for his college application. Church Hill was crushed, but he eventually made it to college, nonetheless. He decided to attend Northern College Evers College, a city university in New York or WUNY as most people refer to it, that serves mostly immigrant and predominately Black students. However, Northern College Evers was not Churchill's first choice and his decision to attend was largely informed by his lack of financial capital as shown below.

Um, so I went to Northern College at first because I couldn't go to the schools that I really wanted to go to. They were too expensive. I received a scholarship, but it was not enough for me to get over there and do what I needed to do. And I wasn't going to pick up and go and then I'd be stuck there. So, once my top choices were gone, WUNY was all I had left. And Northern College Evers was close enough to my house where it was just like if I'm going to go to school. I guess I gotta be close by, cause taking the train back and forth, I couldn't fund that, right. My parents were not going to give me money to go to school or to buy a Metro card [bus and train pass] to go to school. So, I needed a school I could walk to. So, Northern College Evers was that choice. So, I needed something I could walk to. So, Northern College Evers was that choice.

Here, Church Hill realized that because of his socio-economic status and a lack of financial support, he had to choose a school that was closer to home so that he could walk instead of taking public transportation. However, although he received a scholarship, Churchill knew that he would "get stuck there [at a state school]" and would not be able to complete his

studies. Church Hill's decision to go to college was solely based on his inability to afford the cost of his education which meant he had to go to a school closer to home. Church Hill story highlighted the challenges many first-generation Black students face. Many Black first-generation students come from low-income families and live in communities that are predominately Black with low resourced schools. Being a Black student from an immigrant family that was low-income, Church Hill had to sacrifice his dreams and goals of going to schools he really wanted to attend.

When Church Hill shared his reason for attending Northern College Evers, it confirmed what I already knew as someone who has worked with and alongside undocumented students, but also what the literature highlights. Undocumented students usually come from low-income families, the first to go to college (Bjorkland, 2018), and often have to find creative ways, if possible, to attend college due to financial constraints. As Church Hill continued to share, I could not help feeling angry. I was angry because there I sat listening to another example of how being undocumented significantly shapes the educational experience of students in higher education. I think he noticed the shift in my demeanor because he paused for a second and gave me that, "I know, right?" look. Church Hill continued to share:

Um, so it was my first year in college at Northern College Evers College, and I couldn't attend it for the full semester cause I couldn't pay for it. Like, that was like very embarrassing, you know. It's mostly embarrassing because I'm sitting in class and my professor is like, "your name is no longer on this the attendance sheet". And I was just like, why? And he's asked, "did you get all your financial aid pieces done?" And in my mind, I was thinking, I had just found out that I was undocumented, you know. And I didn't necessarily understand what being undocumented was. Um, but after a semester of

not being able to like, pay for school and the faculty members not even help me figure out a way to still attend school, it just. And the whole rollercoaster, um, from being pointed to from one department to another to another to another and not getting any answers, I was just like, I don't want to be in an all-Black school. Right. Because all-Black schools have no resources and these all Black faculty don't care enough, you know, to do their jobs effectively enough to like to get what I need. And that's what took me to BCC. I was like, BCC is in the city, surrounded by a bunch of white people.”

Through his story, Church Hill explained he “felt embarrassed” because he was told in front of his classmates that he was no longer on the attendance sheet due to financial issues. In addition to feeling embarrassed, Church Hill also felt that the “all-Black faculty did not care enough” to assist him in finding resources pay for school. Instead, he was shuffled around from department to department. Church Hill ultimately felt that because he attended an all-Black school with no resources, he did not have the resources he might have had, if he had been able to attend a predominately white school. It is critical to stress that although Church Hill attended an all-Black school as a Black student, he felt invisible as an undocumented Black student. I argue that Church Hill felt that his needs should have been addressed because he was at a school that served Black students. Therefore, they should have been better equipped to address the various needs that ALL Black students had which included those who were undocumented. Church Hill’s story highlighted the complexities of Blackness and the challenges he faced being undocumented and Black.

Although Church Hill made it to college, he had to drop out which is, unfortunately, the story for many undocumented students. Undocumented students due to financial barriers, drop out of college on average XX percent. And, although New York State passed the José Peralta

New York State DREAM Act in January 2019, which allows undocumented/DACAmented and other students access to New York State-administered grants and scholarships to support higher education costs (The New York State Senate, 2019), it was not in place when Church Hill needed financial support. Also, it appears that the faculty at Church Hill's school did not have any sensitivity to the idea that this Church Hill, a smart Black kid could also be an immigrant kid that needed supported. Interestingly enough, a high percentage of immigrant student attend Northern College Evers, yet Church Hill, an undocumented Black student, felt unsupported.

Church Hill eventually made it back to college. It took him eight long years and a lot of jobs in between, but he found his way back. He met his then partner, who encouraged him to re-enroll in school. She played a huge role in his life as she provided emotional support and was one of the few people outside of his immediate family who knew he was undocumented. He trusted her and he felt safe with her. During Church Hill's eight year hiatus from school, he applied for and received DACA. He quit the job he had, "which was occupying so much of [his] time and just took whatever money [he] had in [his] savings account and paid for school out right". Ready to take on college gain, Church Hill enrolled in the Brokdale Community College (BCC), a WUNY school located in Tribeca in Manhattan. However, once again, Church Hill found himself at an albeit different, but familiar crossroad.

So, I paid for my first semester, and it was just so horrible. I think I finished my first semester with like a 3.5 GPA. I said three. No, I'm lying, a 2.5 GPA. It really broke my heart because I was just like, yeah, I'm going to come in here and I'm going to do so well and it's going to be a great start. Nah, it didn't happen that way. And, I was like, I'm going to drop out because clearly school is not for me. But then my ex-girlfriend encouraged me to go again one last time. And I just studied, and I finished that semester

with a 3.7 GPA. And then from there I got involved on campus. I got a job on campus, and it was just like everything just kind of clicked. So, the following three semesters, I finished each semester with a 4.0 or 3.8

If you were sitting in the room with me, you would have seen the smile that covered Church Hill's face when he told me about his success. I could tell it was one of those smiles where your face hurts afterward, because that amount of happiness definitely required an extra-wide and lingering smile. He was so proud and was visibly overcome with joy, after all, he had gotten the grades he wanted, and he felt great about it. He had made a significant improvement from his first semester and dropping out of school was now thing of the past. However, soon, in what felt like seconds, I watched the corners of his mouth that were once stretched by his smile, slowly return to its natural form. Something else was on his mind, and I immediately sat upright in anticipation of him sharing.

So, it was a huge transition for me in terms of, um, I guess my education. So, when I got to BCC, I think that's why I struggled that first semester. And it took everything. Like, study in the morning, and study in the night, and go to class to really be able to grasp the concepts that they were being taught in class. Even now, I'm just like, imagine if I had went to a better school. Imagine if I had better teachers. Imagine if I had parents who understood what the educational system was like, you know. Being a first generation Black student, it's not fun. And then not having parents who really cared about your educational process was even more detrimental to my ability to really learn. Cause it's like, oh my parents don't care if I go to school or not. My father was like, "drop out of school and go to work". You know, so hearing that was just like...

In the above story, Church Hill shared that he it was a big transition for him when he attended his new school, BCC. He noted that “it took everything” out of him to understand and grasp concepts. He had to study in the morning and at night. Church Hill recognized that his struggles were related to his status as a first-generation Black student and the lack of support he had in his educational journey. He specifically pointed out that he would have done better in school if he had 1) teachers who were invested in his education, 2) parents who understood how to navigate the educational system, and 3) parents who cared about his education. Church Hill’s story points to the challenges many first-generation Black students face due to lack of support at home and also attending low resourced schools. Church Hill, as a result of attending a low-resourced school which was in a predominately Black community, did not have the educational tools to be successful in college.

I did not react immediately when Church Hill told this story. I gave him some time to process, and to be honest, I too, needed time to process. Hearing him share his curiosity about an imagined world where he had better teachers or parents who were knowledgeable about the U.S educational system, brought me to an earlier point in our conversation. Church Hill’s wonder about a world with better teachers brought me back to when he reflected on being Black and what that meant for him as it related to his education. I couldn’t help but see the connection to the unpreparedness for college that Church Hill highlighted in our conversations.

So, I guess in the process of getting an education, I didn't feel like it [being Black] was [an issue], but I think as an adult now who kind of understands the system little bit more, I can say that it does. Um, simply because I think the image of being Black and living in a Black community limited how much access to educational resources that were going to be available to me. Now, if my parents had not been Africans who knew what the

American educational system was like, they would have done things differently. I hope. Um, like they would have taken me to a private school, or they would have taken me to a school even outside of the Flatbush area [a predominately Black, low-income, and immigrant community]. Like a school like Bedford High [a magnet and college preparatory school located in Tribeca, a rich area in Manhattan, where 72.6% of the student body is Asian and 18.9% is white], which is the school I remember hearing about all the time. I'm like, damn! They were doing such great thing! The students were leaders, they were sitting with politicians, they were just doing so many things! And I was just like, I go to a law school, why haven't I done that? My high school was a law focused school. So, the most I remember doing was sitting there every Saturday reading law books, doing mock trials. And I was just like, is this it? I hated law. I don't want to be sitting here in a classroom all day, every day reading the same book. I was like, I don't want to be a lawyer. For this? I'm not making a difference. Reading books and not getting to know anything beyond what's in these books. No, that's not what I want to do for the rest of my life. So, I came out of that. But I felt like if I had gone to a school like this [Bedford high], having access to politicians, having access to judges, I probably would have still been a lawyer today. I probably would have finished high school a lot faster, as well. You know, I'd finish college and all these extra things, because the opportunities granted to these kind of students, I mean, it's nowhere near what we [Black students] got, right. The most access we got was if I excelled in a sport, that was the closest access point that I was ever going to get. In a school like Bedford, you can excel in the sport, yes. But if you excel in the classroom, your access is also open. But excel in the classroom in a school like his high school, no one cared. You know, my teacher could

be like, Oh, you're doing really great. You know the material, dah dah, dah. And I was like, yeah, but nothing came out of that. They didn't take me to meet no special person, you know. So, for sure, I think being Black definitely diminished a lot of the opportunities and being Black in the Black community definitely restricted a lot of the opportunities that I would have gotten.

In this story, Church Hill shared that initially he did not see a connection between his identity as a Black student and his ability to access educational resources. However, as an adult who began to understand the educational system, he realized that being Black, living in a Black community, and attending school in a Black community, “limited how much access to educational resources that were going to be available” to him. He pointed to a magnet school in very wealthy, predominately white neighborhood in Manhattan as evidence of how certain students have access to more educational resources based on their racial identities and where their schools are located. Church Hill was certain he would have completed high school faster had he not attended a low resourced school in a predominately Black neighborhood. He realized that being an undocumented Black immigrant from an immigrant family, neither he nor his African parents understood what “the image of Black” or being stamped as Black would mean for his educational trajectory. He noted that maybe his parents would have placed him in a private school that had more resources or taken him to a “school even outside of the Flatbush area” which is a predominately Black, low-income, and immigrant community. This story highlights the challenges that Church Hill faced not only because he was undocumented but also because he was Black who lived in a Black community that had a low resourced school. Through his story, Church Hill highlighted that ways race and immigration status are entangled and how

both identities created challenges for him as a student and as he noted, “diminished a lot of opportunities” for him.

Unfortunately, Church Hill’s experience with the school system as an undocumented Black student is an experience that many Black students, with or without legal status, share (cite). Nikole Hannah-Jones, a correspondent for the New York Times, wrote a powerful essay called *Choosing a School for My Daughter in a Segregated City*. Nikole walked her readers through the polarizing decision she and her husband Fariji made about their daughter’s education. They thought, should their daughter attend a public school in her Brooklyn community of Bedford-Bedford, a low-income and predominately Black neighborhood similar to the community Church Hill grew up and went to school? Or should she go to a school that was significantly more resourced but predominantly white? Nikole highlighted that the United States Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights reported that “schools with large numbers of Black and Latino kids are less likely to have experienced teachers, advanced courses, instructional materials, and adequate facilities” (Hannah-Jones, 2016, p. 3). This is what Church Hill was talking about! Exactly this! Sure, he may not have had the statistics or an educational report to reference, but he knew what he felt. He knew what he experienced. He did not have the same opportunities as those students at Bedford, the college prep high school nestled in the wealthy community of Manhattan where a large percentage of the student population. Remember in his profile in chapter four when he told us that he went without a teacher for two years during K-12? When he, along with his friends, for two years just roamed the halls of the school? It was these moments that Church Hill constantly pointed to, explicitly or not, as a way to frame his experience in higher education. I continued to listen attentively as Church Hill shared more about his experience at BCC. By this time, we were about half an hour into our interview. I looked at

my watch and thought, wow, we haven't been here for long, yet I have learned so much. Church Hill started reflecting and sharing about his experience with the administration and faculty at BCC. There was a steady tone of annoyance that was woven through his voice as he shared.

Um, they didn't know what to do with me. Um, because there weren't enough cases [undocumented/DACAmented Black students] where protocol was set, or a certain guideline would have been made as to like, what do we say to this student? A lot of them were just like, "you're an international student?", I'm like no. "So, you're a citizen, right?" I'm like, no. There was a lot of question marks around who or what I was more like, what I was, you know. So, faculty members would just send me to different places because they didn't know what they could give me. Even the scholarship office. I was like, I can't apply for this, I can apply for this. And there was a lot of, I can't apply for this. And they were just like, but why? You have a high school diploma, you have this. And I was just like, it's asking for a US citizen, I'm not that. Like that's the one qualification that I don't have, you know. They were just like, wait, so, do you? They would give me international scholarships and I would say, I'm not an international student either. I can't apply for those. And they were just so confused. And I was confused cause they were confused, you know. Um, so there was a lot of confusion going around. For the most part, I felt like I was like one of those like surfboards that was just like spinning around in place and I saw them doing the exact same thing, you know. So, like that's how faculty and administration kind of like dealt with me at that school.

Here, Church Hill highlights that there were not protocols in place in at his school to work with undocumented Black students. Both the faculty and administrators did not know how to address his needs as an undocumented Black students. Church Hill specifically noted that in

seeking scholarship in the scholarship office, administrators were confused that he did not qualify for scholarships for international students or scholarships for US citizens. They also felt that because he had a US high school diploma, he should be able to apply for the scholarships they provided him. Church Hill story is evidence that school administrators and faculty members are not knowledgeable about resources for undocumented Black students so they can address their needs. Additionally, I would argue that in addition to not being knowledgeable about the needs of undocumented students, administrators were confused because Church Hill was a Black student and undocumented students are mostly cast and seen as Latinx. This is another example of how Black students who are undocumented are invisible as a result of their Black racial identity.

I wanted to exchange a look of shock as Church Hill shared, but I all could give were nods in agreement I felt his frustration and I wanted him to know. Administrators, also called institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar, 2011) and faculty play a key role in shaping the educational experience of undocumented students, yet many/some do not possess the proper training and or knowledge to support undocumented/DACAmented students (Nienhusser, & Espino, 2017). Some even, according to Contreras, 2009 study, “not all college staff were willing to provide information to undocumented students. In fact, some staff either behaved in a discriminatory manner or discouraged undocumented students from accessing the answers they needed regarding financial aid, programs, or courses” (p. 628). Undocumented students face several barriers as they navigate higher education and the lack of knowledge and skills needed to support them is a major barrier. So, no, I was not surprised at Church Hill’s telling of his experience. Now, remember, Church Hill is Black. And to be Black and undocumented is somewhat of a misnomer. In fact, Church Hill shared his feelings about being categorized as being Black.

So, the thing is like for one, I don't identify as being Black. I think being Black is, um, almost like an insult to my being. And I say that, and I've had conversations around this, and people would always disagree with me, but I think being simplified to a color, it's the biggest insult you can give a person, right? Because like, African Americans come so many different shapes come from different parts of the world. They come with different languages, they come with different accents, and they come with different values. So, for you to label me Black, it's to stamp me as one thing, right? Because I believe we're all so much more complex than the word Black. I'm not big on being called Black African. I'm from Africa, you know, like born in Africa, raised in America, but I'm still African. I speak the language, I sound horrible, but I speak the language. So, for me, to be called Black it's almost like telling me that I'm American. And to tell me that I'm American and America doesn't except me, it's a whole other conversation to be had. So, I don't necessarily want to be identified with something that I can't have or doesn't want me. So, that's always been my argument. Um, but the thing is, having an argument like that with African Americans who can't see what it feels like to be on the outside looking in at all times, is an argument that goes almost nowhere?

In the story above, Church Hill shared that he does not want to be labeled or considered Black because he believes that Black people “all so much more complex than the word Black”. Black people migrate from different parts of the world and speak many languages as evidenced in his case as an African immigrant who speaks tribal dialect. He noted that by labeling him as Black, meant to “stamp him as one thing”. However, Church Hill specifically did not want to be considered Black because being considered Black was saying that is was American and as an undocumented Black individual, America does not accept him. He noted that his views on not

wanting to be considered Black was a view that Black African Americans could not understand. Church Hill story highlights that even within the Black community, as a Black undocumented individual, he struggles were not understood. As an undocumented Black individual, documented African Americans did not understand how being both undocumented and Black created unique challenges that Church Hill had to navigate. In this story, church powerfully highlighted the invisibility that he faced as an undocumented Black individual within his own community.

As I have reflected on Church Hill's perspective, I think of the Caribbean sociologist Roy Simon Bryce-Laporte's concept "double invisibility." Bryce-Laporte discussed double invisibility in his 1972 article, *Black Immigrants: The Experience of Invisibility and Inequality*. He noted that there has never really been space given to Black immigrants as they are, "perhaps the least visible" (p. 31). Intersectionality also offers another way to understand Church Hill's experience and why the language of Blackness was not something he wanted. Intersectionality highlights the ways overlapping social identities interact with systems of power. For Church Hill, as a Black man, he knew what it meant to be Black in America and as an undocumented person, he also knew what that meant.... no sense of belonging. While policies fail Black people and policies fail undocumented people, to be Black and undocumented is to be further marginalized because both identities do not exist for most people who are outside of the undocuBlack community. Therefore, how can Church Hill exist? Church Hill's story speaks to my research question that ask: How do undocumented Black students experience challenges as they navigate higher education? It is clear that Church Hill's race, immigrant status, and low socioeconomic status together, presented challenges as he navigated higher education. Although Church Hill faced challenges with his identity, financial barriers among other things, he told me about the

living-giving joyous moments he experienced. Those moments of joy kept him as he navigated higher education. Below I share Church Hill's joy.

Joy

Before the end of our interview, I asked Church Hill to take twenty minutes to reflect on joy. Specifically, I asked him what does joy mean to him in higher education? I asked Church Hill to identify times, spaces, people, and things that have helped him navigate his higher education experience. The day of our second interview arrived and I sat with Church Hill excited to hear him unpack his understanding and experience with joy. He mentioned or confessed rather (there was a penitent tone woven throughout his comment), that he had only remembered that morning after my follow up email. He was very apologetic, but then we shared a deep and loud laugh because, well, we both knew life is a series of forgetting and then remembering.

Funny enough, I actually thought about that story this morning just before you emailed. I was overcome with joy when my ex told me I need to go back to school, you know? And within that joy, obviously there was some anxiety and fear about all these things, but I had genuine joy. She was just like; you need to go back to school. Cause for the longest, um, I think I told you last time, my parents were like, no school for you, just go straight to work and just get your money up. So, I was overcome with joy because she was somebody who was just like, you could be more than just a job. You'd go to school and create a career and figure out what it is you want to do. So, for me that was huge. Um, and then the second piece was like, she was like, if you can't pay for it, I'll pay for your first semester in school. You know? Um, not that I want her to, but just knowing that

someone was going to go that hard for me to get back into school. It's like something that I never experienced before.

Here Church Hill shared that he experienced joy when he reflected on the many times his ex-girlfriend supported him as he navigated higher education. She provided not only financial support but also emotional support and encouragement. Receiving that kind of support was crucial for him because his ex-girlfriend showed him that he was worth more than “just a job”, which is what his parents told him when they advised him to focus on getting a job instead of attending school. This kind of appreciation was “something he had never experienced before” and it brought him joy. This story showed the role positive experiences and support from the right individuals can contribute to feeling joy.

As Church Hill shared more about his joy, I watched his body shift. His shoulders became a little more relaxed and his hands wandered across the table. His voice was filled with excitement but also a soothing and longing tone. In noticing and experiencing Church Hill’s shift, I began embodying feelings of calmness...feelings of joy. I noted how I was feeling and then quickly shifted my attention back to Church Hill as he continued to share.

My first semester, I had a lot going on... the semester was rough. I was just like, I don’t know what Blackboard is, I don’t know how to use WUNY first. I don’t know any of these things. And she [ex-girlfriend] was just like, “I got you”. You know, to kind of have somebody there who was there every step of the way. You know, not, not just doing it for me, but showing it to me so I can just be like, you know what? Okay, cool. So, this is how I navigate WUNY first, this is how I navigate Blackboard, this is how I navigate WUNY portal and all these extra things that came along with being at school. You know? Um, like I think for me, that was the kind of support that I needed. I may not have wanted

it cause I was kind of annoyed, you know, at the extra help and the fact that I couldn't do on my own, but it was the kind of support that I needed. And I was extremely grateful and happy that I had gotten it. Cause if I hadn't gotten it, I'd probably just be like, eeeh school is just not happening for me right now. Um, so [she] took a lot of the pressure off.

In the above story, Church Hill shared how his ex-girlfriend helped him navigate learning resources like Blackboard which made his transition back to school easier. He appreciated being shown how to navigate Blackboard from his ex-girlfriend instead of her doing it for him. The process of learning how to navigate Blackboard was the “kind of support” he needed which made him happy and extremely grateful and joyous. With that kind of focused support, the pressure he felt in not being successful was alleviated.

I was not surprised when Church Hill pointed to his ex-girlfriend as a source of joy. She was, one of the most supportive people in his life. Church Hill's educational journey, starting with his K-12 experience, was fraught with uncertainty, shame, and disappointment. I listened deeply as Church Hill told me about finding out he was undocumented and realizing he could not attend college because he did not have the “right” status to get federal aid. I listened as he shared the shame and sadness that overcame him when his professor told him, before the class, that he was on THE list. The list where students were in jeopardy of being de-enrolled because of lack of payment. I listened to Church Hill as he shared his frustrations with the school administration and the lack of knowledge and training on how to support undocumented/DACAmented students. I listened.

Church Hill described experiencing joy the most when he received support from his ex-partner. The support and care that he leaned on as he journeyed through higher education. The support and care that he still reaches for today as he finishes school. Joy, maybe, as Church Hill

noted, is something that one may have “a hard time defining.” He certainly felt that it was hard for him to define joy in how society often ascribes or gives strict meanings to things. However, although he could not define joy, he made sure to tell me that he “experienced [joy] and so that could be [his] definition.” Joy was, and is, for Church Hill, an experience and not something to be defined.

CHAPTER 6: STEVEN

When I introduced Steven in Chapter 4, I mentioned that he was always aware of his immigration status. His family told him when they migrated, he was undocumented. However, although he was aware of immigration status, he still experienced challenges throughout his higher education experience. Him knowing did not protect nor did it prepare him to better navigate an undocumented status. Steven and I continued our interview in the quiet and dimly lit room tucked away in the back of the public library. As he began sharing his higher education experience, he noted he would “try going chronologically, or at least as chronologically as [he could] recall”. So, for him, that meant starting with his college application/ college choice process. If you recall in chapter 4, Steven received assistance with his college applications from a non-profit afterschool program he attended on Saturdays. The program focused on “creating and enforcing opportunities for low-income students” in New York City, and as a low-income student, Steven appreciated the support he received. In re-telling his story about the college application/ college choice process, Steven said

I wasted a lot of money applying to schools that I had no right applying to, in the sense of these elite private institutions. It was suggested that “oh, once you get in, they'll fund it despite your immigration status”, but again, I got into a few and realized they're not going to fund anything. There is no way to get federal loans and there was no way to get a state loans. There's no financial aid that exists besides private loans or out of pocket. Around, uh, the DACA decision, that was the time I was applying to school. So, I was able to get a social number legitimately. And because of that social number, I was able to prove residency in New York city and part of my college application process consisted of applying to a full tuition scholarship to WUNY. And I am blessed in the sense that, I, as

an undocumented immigrant, was still able to graduate undergrad and not have to pay too much out of pocket. So, I went to Queens college. I was part of the Macaulay, scholarship program.

In the above story, Steven shared that during his college selection process he “wasted a lot of money applying to schools he had no right applying to” because they were elite private institutions. He applied to several private, elite schools because he was told that they would provide financial support regardless of his status as an undocumented Black student. Steven realized that the private, elite institutions he applied to did not provide financial support and there was no way for him to receive federal loans because of his immigration status. However, because he had DACA he was able to get a scholarship to attend college. Steven’s story highlighted the financial barriers undocumented Black students face but also pointed to his ability to gain access to scholarship because he was an undocumented Black student who had DACA.

Much like my conversation with Church Hill captured in chapter five, I was not shocked when Steven shared his frustrations about not being able to access federal or state loans. I knew the financial challenges undocumented students face. In fact, the finances played a huge part in college choice process for Steven and was the reason he chose to go to Queens College, a City University of New York (WUNY) instead of a State University of New York (SUNY) school which is more expensive. And although Steven received a scholarship, he would not have been able to go to school if he did not get support. For students of Color and for Black students in particular, the fight for access to higher education broadly, and to elite institutions specifically, is an arduous battle. Higher education serves as a roadblock for Black students because gatekeeping practices are rooted in white supremacy (Wilder, 2013) that manifest into

unavailable and or limited resources, policies, and structural barriers that work in tandem to maintain the equity gap.

Steven continued sharing about his experience navigating higher education and the challenges he faced. He often oscillated between his master's program and undergraduate experience but focused more on his undergraduate experience.

So, I haven't fully utilized the support in the master's program, but it's on my list of things to do to go to the financial aid office and such. But in terms of being Black and undocumented, um, unfortunately the same scholarships that exist for the Black population and just being, uh, associated with Blackness, they're often exclusionary to undocufolx. A lot of the scholarships require you to have legal status or be a lawful permanent resident at the very least. And because of that many scholarships for additional benefits don't apply. Like I was very grateful for the full list of scholarship, but it didn't cover everything and because there was a need for more. So, I like... Thankfully with DACA I was able to work two part time jobs in undergrad and the financial aid support couldn't really... there weren't many scholarships that I could have applied to.

In the above story, Steven shared that in seeking out scholarships, he realized that the scholarships dedicated to Black students were “exclusionary to undocufolx”. In other words, Steven found that only documented Black students were eligible for most scholarships. While Steven had DACA which allowed him to get two part-time jobs, he was still in need of financial support. Here, Steven shines a light, similarly to Church Hill, on the ways in which undocumented Black individuals are invisibilized within the Black community. Steven's story highlighted that being undocumented and Black is a double invisibility that he and the other storytellers in this project had to face. Steven's story also highlighted that administrators were

both uneducated and not proactive in seeking out scholarships for which an undocumented and Black student could apply. I would argue that administrators were unable to imagine that a Black student was not able to access scholarships that were airmarked for Black students. These administrators did not understand that Black students are also undocumented and therefore, would not be able to apply for scholarships even if they are for Black students. To exist at the intersection of Blackness and immigration was a challenge for the students in this project.

What Steven highlighted in the above story is that undocumented Black students are often left in the intersections. What I mean is, to be Black does not mean to be undocumented and therefore, there are not resources available for students like Steven who unfortunately have two overlapping marginalized identities. Scholarships for Black students exclude Steven because of the requirement for citizenship or permanent residency that Steven cannot provide. So, undocumented Black students, like Steven, unfortunately are not supported and face challenges when navigating higher education.

Steven took a moment and then he continued:

The financial aid office never understood my undocumented Black immigrant status, they always had to check in with their supervisors who had to call the administration from the office who then had to call their administration. So, there was always run around and what was supposed to be five minutes appointment took like 20 to 30 minutes because of things of that nature. It makes sense because, I can't expect everybody to understand the immigration law. It's very complex in itself, but when... Queens is touted for being one of the most diverse metropolitan areas in the world, you'd think you have staff on site who can in some way understand, or if not understand at least be able to refer to the proper resources for undocumented Black immigrants.

Here, Steven highlights a similar experience to Church Hill with uninformed administrators and faculty. Administrators did not have processes in place to provide support to Steven because as Steven noted, “they never understood [his] undocumented Black immigrant status”. Steven noted he experienced longer wait times for an appointment that was 5 minutes because administrators in the financial aid office had “to check with their supervisors”. Administrators could not figure out how to support Steen which resulted in him waiting longer. Steven shared that while he does not expect administrators to understand the full extent of immigration law, he expected them to know more because they work with a diverse group of students by virtue of the school being located in a diverse metropolitan area. He felt it was important that there was someone on staff who is “able to refer to the proper resources for undocumented Black immigrants”. Steven’s story again sheds light on the harm uninformed administrators cause when they are not aware of the resources or have set protocols in place to work with undocumented Black students.” I would also argue although Steven’s school was located in a diverse community and served a diverse student body, administrators were unable to imagine that he, a Black student, could also be undocumented.

As I listened Steven, I remembered Church Hill in the previous chapter sharing a similar story, where he too had to deal with administrators who were clueless about the needs of undocumented students. As Steven shared his experience with being bounced around, I could hear the frustration in his voice and see the tension in his body. It was clear that in reliving the moment, the same feelings of frustration and annoyance filled his once more. He continued and I quickly realized that Steven’s challenges were not limited to an uninformed or ill-prepared school administration. Unfortunately, he also experienced harm within the classroom from

faculty. The classroom for Steven was a space that reminded him of his undocumented status. He drew my attention to one particular moment

The moment when we talk about immigrant rights, when we talk about politics, it's at the forefront of my mind because we talk about these things in theory, but they actually affect us. When Trump first got elected, I was in a class with a very, I would say, emotionally detached teacher and the professors said, "think about it. Does Trump's election actually affect you?" He asked the classes and, in my head, I'm thinking, yes, it actually does. His policies actually do affect me directly! He's like, "why is everybody so sad? You know, it's just an election, you've survive worse". And I'm like no, people actually have died in previous elections and it's the same quote that people are using now for the guy in Britain. People are like, "Oh we survived worse". Like no, white cis males maybe have survived. White cis females maybe have survived, too. But there's so many marginalized groups that have not survived, unfortunately. And history repeats itself. So, that's another example where I was aware of my experience because it's played such a significant, like yes, it actively affects myself and my family. It goes back to the thing that people should check their privilege.

Steven's story focused on his experience with a faculty member who asked the class if the election of former president Donald Trump "actually affect you? And why is everyone sad". Steven was upset with that question and noted that he thought to himself, yes, the election of Donald Trump affected him directly. While people with privileged identifies like "white cis males and white cis females" may survive the election, folks from marginalized communities suffer. Steven pointed to this story as another moment when he was aware of his undocumented Black status and of the manly challenge both him and his family face in this country because of

their status. Steven's story, I argue, not only highlighted the violence that undocumented Black students face on college campus from faculty, but also how faculty members can be ignorant to the ways policies impact the lives of different groups of students. As an undocumented Black student, the professor was unable to see that the Donald Trump's would impacted Steven because he was Black. The faculty member was unable to imagine that the policies could harm Steven because he did see the connection to racial identity and immigration status, therefore, erasing his racial identity. Undocumented students are imagined as Latinx, and Latinx people are often imagined as light-skinned with a specific set of observable characteristics. Latinx individuals being closely tied to undocumentedness is an image and narrative widely spread during the Trump administration and historically throughout the political arena. Thus, it is difficult for individuals to conceptualize other populations, such as Black people, as undocumented.

As Steven came to the end of sharing, my body was tight and my hands clammy. It felt as if Steven gave me time to process, because we sat in silence for a while as I privately acknowledged the feelings that were present in my body. Steven's experience with his professor is an example of the kind of racist, nativist, and xenophobic experiences undocumented Black students face. Elizabeth, who shared her story below, also experienced xenophobia and nativism at her school. Muñoz and Darsella Vigil (2018) talk about the undocumented students' "excessive exposure to racist nativist microaggressions while on campus" (p. 12). Eventually I asked Steven to continue. Steven continued telling his story and pointed to an event that deeply impacted him during his higher education experience.

I would say a hindrance though, one that I cite fairly often whenever talking about therapy or a psychotherapy. I went to a psychiatrist in undergrad who very much told me

that uh, what I was experiencing at the time, couldn't be depression because I was too well put together and had friends. So therefore, I was not. I was just experiencing a short term circumstantial, uh, sadness even though it has been circumstantial for almost years. So that really put me off from overall mental health services through the school. Um, he told me I should just get a job and I'll; I'll have less time to think about being sad.

In the above story, Steven shared a bad experience he had with the mental health counselor at this school. Steven sought counseling support because he was experiencing feelings of depression. Instead of feeling supported by the counselor when he shared that he was depressed, the counselor told him that he was just experiencing “short term circumstantial sadness and he just needs to get a job”. Steven noted that how his feelings of depression were not short-term but feelings he had been experiencing for years. This experience turned Steven off from mental health counseling at his school. Steven’s story highlights how woefully ignorant administrators like the mental health counselor are to the psychological burdens and mental health challenges undocumented Black students face. As a counselor, he was not able to see how being undocumented and Black could impact Steven.

I asked Steven asked if this counselor was someone at this school. I wanted to make sure I heard him correctly because I was in complete shock! Sure, I am not surprised that institutions of higher education are violent spaces, but hearing the violence depicted so explicitly as I sat in community with Steven hit me hard. And to be honest, I am never prepared to bear witness to harm being inflicted. Steven continued

Yes, this was in undergrad. I have not tried the counseling services at the graduate level yet. It is on my list of things to do. If I would like to assess whether it remains uniform throughout the WUNY system of their subpar counselors or if it's more of a that that

happened because he must've been in a bad mood or something along those lines. I can't deny that he was a bit right in terms of getting a job because having money does allow you a different... having the means to afford little things at the very least allows you to be more... You're less pressured by certain things. Like, " Oh, I can afford a Metro card, right? I don't have to jump the turnstiles, or I can afford this book. I don't have to spend hours looking on the internet, so I get an old edition". So, something along those lines were very, he was bright[smart], but I realize, and even while talking about it now, I'm realizing that he must not have been familiar with any sort of immigrant experience because being undocumented, it goes back to our earlier discussion about the consistent trauma of being worried about removal proceedings or that that developed fear that just continues to grow and basically build up. So, it seems that he wasn't familiar with that experience and because of that thought things were short term. I wouldn't doubt that maybe circumstantial depression is a thing, but when circumstances are over a decade long, I think that does develop into something else. It doesn't become circumstantial anymore. There's definitely something beyond that there.

Here Steven continues his story and shares that at his current institution as a graduate student, he had not explored the counseling services, but wondered if the “subpar counselors” was a system wide issue. Steven acknowledged that there are benefits in getting a job as suggested because it allowed him to access more, which meant that he would not have to, for example, jump the train turnstile instead of paying to enter. However, he realized that the counselor was not “familiar with any immigrant experience” because of his comment to Steven that he was experiencing short-term circumstantial sadness”. Steven acknowledged that while circumstantial depression is a

possible, he could not be feeling that because he had been feeling depressed for over a decade long.

Steven's experience with the counselor reminded me of the work of Cha, Enriquez, & Ro (2019), where they examined the psychological barriers of undocumented student use of mental health services. Their work highlighted that many undocumented students had a stigma about counseling because counselors oftentimes did not understand their immigration issue and instead made students feel worst. By minimizing Steven's emotions and concern, the counselor caused harm which is, unfortunately an experience many undocumented students face. As Steven and I came to the end of our interview and I asked him if there was anything else, he wanted to expound on or share that would give me a sense of his experience in higher education before I provided the details for our second interview? He paused for a second to collect his thoughts and he powerfully responded

I don't think there's enough spaces for undocumented individuals regardless of race or ethnicity. I don't think, even in academia, there's enough support. I don't. Maybe it's because I haven't looked up enough pieces about it, but I don't think there's enough data/information about the support that exists for undocumented individuals. The imposter syndrome that exists. I don't know if it is the proper term to use, but the imposter syndrome of just belonging in a country. Like, I don't know if there are any academic pieces about that. I think that just touching on that, it's such a big thing to let people know that they're not alone in feeling. One thing that came up, I would say a few years ago, we were talking church that if you break the law, that's technically a sin because you're supposed to follow the law of the land. And then I'm thinking, well, my existence here is breaking the law. Does that mean I'm sinning by just living in this

country? And I asked my dad that and he was like, “no”, it's not the case. But when you think about things logically, things are conflicting. Your identities conflict and then where is the... the belonging? Where is the clarity? What actually is the truth in your truth? That's something.... Like, to know your truth and know.

In the above story, Steven shared that he does not think there are enough spaces for folks who are undocumented regardless of their race broadly, but in academia specifically, there are not enough resources to assist undocumented students. As an example, Steven pointed to the “imposter syndrome of belonging in a country” he as an undocumented Black students and other undocumented student face. He noted that it was important that he and others felt like “they were not alone”. Steven also in story, pointed to how immigration laws work to make him feel alone and not wanted. He asked his father while in church if he was “s inning by just living in this country?”. Steven’s dad told him “No”, but Steven struggled with his father’s response because he did not feel like he belonged because “his identities conflict”. In this story, Steven shed light on the lack of sense of belonging undocumented students face but for him, as an undocumented Black students he has “no clarity”. I argue because Steven exists in a society that is anti-Black and anti-immigrant his existence is often traumatic and dangerous in multiple ways. It is clear that there is no space for someone who undocumented and Black.

With every word that Steven spoke, I kept shaking my head. I eventually moved from shaking my head to repeatedly saying yes. There is this unspoken expectation that as a researcher you have to remain calm or not react to the individuals who you are interviewing. As if I am not baring witness, too. I do not believe in seeming non-human and what and how Steven shared moved me. Steven is highlighting the invisibility of Blackness and how the overlapping identities of being Black and undocumented is not considered. There is little to no research that

centers the experiences of undocumented Black students and for Steven's story points to the need for more scholarship that centers undocumented Black students.

Steven's story pointed to the struggles of undocumented Black students, but specifically, how they are constantly left in the middle. As an undocumented Black student, Steven was living at the intersection of race and an immigration system and therefore faced unique challenges. As an undocumented Black student, administrators and faculty were not able to Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1991) work on intersectionality affirms Steven's experience, as the theory speaks to the ways systems of power overlap and work in tandem to oppress and cause harm to people who hold marginalized identities. Intersectionality Steven's story also further highlighted the challenges undocumented Black students face as they navigate higher education which addressed my research question. Steven, similar to Church Hill, pointed to joyous moments during his higher education experience. He was happy as he reflected and retold his stories of joy. See below.

Joy

Steven and I met at a different location for our second interview. It was a bit of a trek because it was almost the last stop on the E train. We met in the library this time and there was a cozy feel to it. I opened with what seemed to be my usual greeting during the second interview. So, here we are again. I reminded Steven that our interview that day was to hear him unpack what joy means to him in higher education. How has he used on joy to help him navigate higher education. When I asked Steven, he said:

I was struggling with this question so much. I know the activity says to chunk aside 20 minutes and it was very difficult to actually set aside 20 minutes. Throughout the day you get a five minutes here, five minutes there. Um, but I really sat down and thought about,

and joy is complex. It's uh, I struggled like... thankfully you had said within higher education.

How so, Steven? I asked

In the church environment you're told joy is inward joy comes from God and you're just being contented everything. And that's not always the case. Joy...and they say happiness is external, but I think there are moments of joy in the happy moments and in the stress. Like we talked about imposter syndrome last week and we talked about how there are moments when you feel like you don't belong. There are days or there are moments when I feel like, wow, Oh, am I really in graduate school? Am I really in higher education? And then I think about like, I am proud of my undergraduate thesis. It wasn't the most well-written one, nor is it the thing I'm most passionate about. It didn't follow the direction I wanted to go to, but the fact remains. I wrote a 47 page paper with data tables and citations, and I gathered a lot of information. So, I have that on my LinkedIn. Whoever reads it, I'm glad you're able to, but it exists. And similarly, there are moments when I think about papers that I wrote or I will look over... Yeah, there are moments where I would accidentally stumble across old papers and I said, wow, I wrote this. I am smart. And those moments, it's similar to the acknowledgements that you are, it's like I'm acknowledging myself or you actually did this, you something great came out of this.

It was evident that Steven was processing what joy was to him in the moment. Often, he would look up at the ceiling and back at me as he shared how he experienced and leaned on joy. It was beautiful to watch him come to a language and examples he could use to point to joy. He finally brought it around and summed it up in a really powerful way.

In the above story, Steven shared that joy and happiness are found in moments of stress. There were days when he did not feel like he belonged because of his identity as an undocumented Black individual, but then there were days when he felt like “wow, I am really in graduate school”. Steven shared that he found joy in knowing that he completed assignments, for example, his “47 page paper with data tables and citations”, which he listed on his LinkedIn. Joy for Steven was looking back at old assignments and acknowledging his accomplishments and taking solace in knowing that “something great came out of this” assignment. In this story, Steven highlighted the importance of finding joy in the small things and being reflective so that you can find joy in the moments of stress.

Steven continued,

To sum it up, joy is just to find stability in what I can control and contentment with what I can't. So, with that, I cannot control my immigration status. It's hard to be in control, so therefore for me, it's hard to be joyful in this situation. So, a lot of it [his focus] is spent on what I can control. I can control not impulsively buying things that I will regret in the future, or I can control making constructive decisions and deciding to study instead of going out when a test is the following day. Something like that. Um, joy for me is being able to... Something along the lines of ...joy is found in moments when I choose or when I chose to actively prioritize my health and wellness. Like joy for me is in those moments cause you can't control much externally, but you can't control how you treat yourself. And as a marginalized individual, both in undocumented status, um, being a person of color, it's very difficult to find overarching acceptance and support like New York city and the larger cities are exceptions, but throughout, feeling like you're not wanted in this country, it doesn't help if you don't want yourself. So that's something that I'd say my joy

comes from, growing towards that goal of wanting yourself and being comfortable with who you are and increasing who you are.

Here, Steven summed up his understanding of joy as knowing what he can control and what he cannot control. For Steven, what he could control was his health, not impulsively purchasing items, and making “constructive decisions to study instead of going out”. He noted that as an undocumented Black individual, it is hard to find spaces where he felt like he belonged especially because he lived in a country where he was not wanted. However, although he exists in a country that does not want him, it was helpful that he wanted himself and that is where his joy came from, which for him moving closer to place where he increasingly wants himself and is comfortable with who is as an undocumented Black individual. Steven, in this story highlighted the power of redistributing energy towards the areas of your life you can control, which I argue is an essential part for self-preservation and self-care.

Joy for Steven was not a big splash or giant signpost that reads, see joy here. For him, he found joy in the small moments. He focused on what he could when he could because doing anything else would not move him towards his goal of wanting himself. I am reminded of the three assumptions of intersectionality, particularly the call for intersectionality to generate transformative knowledge. Undocumented Black students face many challenges as they navigate higher education, but they also experience joy, which, to me, a beautiful example of generating transformational knowledge.

CHAPTER 7: ELIZABETH

Elizabeth and I had a connection from the moment we met. To be honest, it felt as if we had walked the earth before because of the ease in which we navigated the space and our conversation before turning on the recorder felt like home. I reminded her why we were meeting, and she immediately started to share her higher education experience. Similar to Church Hill and Steven, Elizabeth faced financial challenges as she navigated higher education. While going through the college search process, Elizabeth worked at a college access center, so she was familiar with the process of applying for scholarships and the huge financial support scholarships would provide. Due to her status, Elizabeth “felt so not eager to go through the process” because she was aware of the challenges undocumented students faced in terms of receiving financial support.

Like I did not want to do it. I was scared. I was really, really hopeless at the time. I told myself if this one scholarship does not get back to me, I'm not doing it [going to college]. I don't have time for this. I need to find a job. I need to help my mom. Like, um, it was May, and I didn't know what was going to happen. All my friends were talking about college. Where are you going to go to college? I had no clue. Everybody was getting acceptances and even though I was applying to all these big universities, the amount of funds that they were giving me was nothing. I remember I applied to a university, I think it's in Virginia, it was called the Bridgeview University. I only really applied because a counselor recommended it. Um, but I remember calling them because I had not gotten my financial aid package or know how much funds they were going to give me. And on the phone, they told me, that I needed to give them my social security number. So, after I told them I didn't have one, they told me that they did not accept undocumented students....

they did not accept immigrant children. And I said, okay. They just said that... I don't know who I spoke to, but like I said, I was already like...I felt really hopeless. I didn't wanna ask her, I was scared. It was one of those things where I didn't want it to keep picking at it.

In the above story, Elizabeth shared a challenge she faced during the college choice process. As an undocumented Black student, getting financial support is crucial and she had a hard time securing a scholarship. Elizabeth told her mother that she would find work instead of attending school if her efforts to secure a scholarship failed. Elizabeth also pointed to one university as an example of how higher education institutions do not provide support for undocumented Black students. The university she applied to explicitly told Elizabeth that they do not admit undocumented students. Elizabeth felt “hopeless” hearing the university’s policy. Elizabeth story is evidence that undocumented Black students struggle during the college choice process because institutions of higher education are not welcoming spaces for them and shows undocumented Black students are not seen as smart, knowledgeable students who can positively contribute to the university.

Elizabeth sounded defeated as she retold her experience. I could see it in her face with every word she spoke. Coming to terms with the reality that she was not able to attend that school because they did not provide financial support to or accept undocumented students. I am reminded of work of Thangasamy & Horan (2016) who noted that one of the main challenges college bound students face is cost. However, for undocumented students specifically, “the cost barrier is further exacerbated by their undocumented status” (p.113). Elizabeth continued sharing her experience at her school. She said for the part, she felt supported by mentors and counselors who understood the needs of undocumented students. She spoke an immigrant office that catered

to the needs of undocumented students in different ways. However, having counselors or an office that supported undocumented students, did not mean that Elizabeth did not have challenges as she navigated her school. In fact, she the following story

We had the, I Stand with immigrants [event]. It falls in October every year. I think we've only celebrated the past three years and last year's poster was vandalized shortly after it was put up by who campus security says was, um, "guest" like not students. I don't, I don't, I don't believe that it was not students, because it wasn't guests who were who were using the space. Um, and they were really like hurtful things. They wrote like, "Oh, deport these illegals". Um, what else? Um, like, "go back to your country" Things like that. And it was...it sucked because at last year's event, we had taken pictures with our shirts and those pictures were on the posters. So, it was like an identity kind of situation, where people were scared. My picture was there. Even if I wasn't undocumented, let's say I was like an ally supporting at the event, how do I know that like I'm safe on campus? And so that brought up a bigger issue on campus and we took it to the president at a town hall meeting where we said, hey, like we are undocumented. And we had like a whole bunch of undocumented students come in. Which is why I say like, I feel really safe because I feel like even if certain resources are not there, I feel like the, the community in terms of student support is, is there, like it's there. Um, but we all went to a town hall meeting, and we told the president, like, you need to be doing more. Like you need to, you need to be implementing safer measures for when things like this happen because people don't feel safe. Students don't feel safe. And in reality, like it's really your job as a president to be taken care of these things. And she responded really ignorantly because she said that she was on vacation when this happened. And she had some nerve to say

that she was on vacation! People cried. People were hurt and people were like, you can't say this because when you're gone, who is going to be taking care of us? Like, who's going to? who's gonna watch out over us? And she said like, I remember this like it was a yesterday cause it was so hurtful. She said, "you guys cannot blame me for this. I put a lot of money into that Immigrant Student Success Center. The reason it's there is because I funded it, blah blah blah". She said a lot of things like that, and students were like, "you really cannot say that. We pay tuition, we pay tuition. And that centers really there because of us, because of people, students, student led activities, student led movements that, that have asked for that center to be there. We fought for that center, and it was beyond your funding. What did you do? Sign a check?" So, after that she issued a public apology saying that she cares for undocumented students, but my point is, there's always going to be, you know, that lack of support. But as far as having other people there, having staff that care, um, I definitely do have that sense of safety and I'm a LSS major, so the Latinos department is very like, it's very there for like all Hispanic led events. Um, and it's there to like, it caters a lot to like undocumented folks. Even Black Latino folks and just Black undocumented folks. Yeah. I was so upset when she said that if you were so mad, people were like, you can't say that.

Here, Elizabeth further highlighted how institutions are harmful spaces for undocumented Black students. Elizabeth shared her experience about a time when she was in a I Stand with Immigrants poster and it was vandalized on her college campus. Elizabeth felt afraid but also frustrated and in solidarity with other undocumented students, attended a townhall where they shared the incident with the president of the college. The president noted that the students could not blame for the incident because she invested a lot of funding in the immigrant center which

should be evidence that she supports undocumented students. The president issued a public apology, but Elizabeth felt the president's actions were "just for show", and thus was not true evidence of support for the undocumented student.

I would be lying if I said I was surprised at the response of the president. There are too many examples of institutional leaders espousing support, yet students are still navigating spaces on campus that are violent still face barriers. This is particularly true for Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) students. Money, as a symbolic gesturing in towards support, does not mean and investment in the advancement and well-being of students. And, especially for undocumented students. There is danger in assuming t there is value in anything that is funded, funding an immigrant center but is not synonymous with support for undocumented students. Elizabeth had more to say so she continued her story:

And I remember a gross thing, like, we're going to hold you accountable for saying what you just said. And she was like, "I was on vacation. I didn't check my emails" We were like, so who's, who's in charge when you're gone? That's really the question. Who is in charge when you're gone? And she said "nobody". Like she didn't have a response. And that was like, that was like a real like wow, like a slap in the face because what do you mean nobody's in charge when you're gone? Like or it almost feels like for other events or for other issues that have... People have said because we get email.... There's always funding on campus all the time for Law and Order for shows. They switched up our dining hall to make it into an airport because they wouldn't be filming the show. But we get emails every single day to tell us that there's going to be filming. So, people are like, we get film, we get emails for filming, but when the vandalizing happened two times... it happened two times in two different spaces, we have to reach out to you so that you can

issue some sort of like statement? Not to mention we have to reach out to you but like when we're holding events in our Latino conference room, you don't show up. Why aren't you there? If you say that you support us as much as you do, you don't attend. And when you need to be there as much as we're there or at least send somebody else on your behalf.

In this story, Elizabeth continued to point out the lack of support the president of her university provided to undocumented students. As Elizabeth and her fellow undocumented friends continued to express their hurt and fears about the vandalized poster, the president shared that she was “on vacation [and she] didn’t check emails”. The students asked the president who was in charge when she is out of the office to which she responded, “nobody”. Elizabeth expressed that she was frustrated because the student body receives emails when there events happening on campus or when there is filming on campus, yet when the poster was vandalized, which happened twice, no emails were sent. Elizabeth story highlighted that “support” is subjective because what the president considered support, is not what Elizabeth and other undocumented students saw as support.

I must have written the word “yes” in my research journal a thousand times as Elizabeth spoke because I empathized with her. In my view, support goes beyond money, institutional leaders need to be more empathetic and attuned to the needs of their students (Enriquez, 2011). Not just financial needs but emotional needs which is essential for undocumented Black student’s successful navigation through higher education. Elizabeth’s story highlighted the ways institutional agents are implicated in further marginalizing undocumented students. Her story shows how power is wielded to create challenges in her higher education experience. Collins and Blige (2016) and also Crenshaw (1991) offer up intersectionality as an analytical tool to make

sense of Elizabeth's experience. Collins and Blige note that the organization of power is better understood as shaped by one social division be it race or class, but many axes that work together to influence each other" (p.193). As undocumented and Black student, Elizabeth's did not feel as if she belonged. Elizabeth's story highlighted the many challenges undocumented Black students face, whether it is financial or having to deal with institutional leaders who do not fully support them. Elizabeth journey through higher education is not only filled with challenges, but there were instances of joy that she relied on to help sustain herself. Below I share Elizabeth's joy

Joy

Elizabeth and I took a while to get settled for the second interview. Although she reserved the room, we had to ask the occupant who was in the room at the time to leave. Eventually we sat down and got settled to start the interview. I recapped the instructions for the joy exercise and asked Elizabeth to share when she was ready. Similarly, to Steven in chapter six, Elizabeth told me that she struggled a bit with the concept of joy. Or, rather, locating it in her life. However, she was able to pull on moments where she felt joy.

Yeah, so for me like it's hard cause I feel like I don't feel a lot of joy often with everything that goes on, like in my personal life, or like at home with family. Um, but when I do feel like slight bits of it, it's always when I'm with family or when I feel like I'm competent at something. Um, which is always either like in workspaces or in certain academic spaces. Um, but I'm good at something, I cling onto it because it makes me, it makes me feel joy. But also, because a lot of my joy comes from like helping others and engaging with other people. Um, so last time that we met, I was talking about my internship in New York city council with their participatory budgeting team. It's fairly new; I started two months ago. I started in late September, but I've been going to a lot of

different neighborhoods that are in my district that I never had ventured into. So, it's been really, really interesting because I think when we think about “the ghetto”, or when we think about certain neighborhoods and all the stigma that we attach to them specifically like in the Bronx, it's sad. Like, you say the Bronx, and everybody gets all these, Oh my God, but it's so dangerous. It's so violent. It's so this and the other and all these negative things attached to it. Um, I think a lot of those things like I internalized too living in the Bronx. And so, I've been going into spaces and neighborhoods that are like further out. I remember the first time I went...I got out of a meeting, well we went to tell people about what the process is and how it works. And it was so interesting because there was this African American guy talking about undocumented issues. He was talking about the lack of access to food for undocumented folks living in the projects. And that's just something that I guess... cause I don't live in that in the projects, it's easy for me to gloss over and not think about. Um, but that brought me joy, to see that there's intersectionality in spaces that we wouldn't think of and to see that there's such closeness and community among those who are Black and undocumented. It made me really happy to experience that.

In the above story, Elizabeth shared about the work she did at her internship and how it allowed her to “venture into different neighborhoods”, which allowed her to reflect on the stigmas attached to neighborhoods. In doing so, she realized that she herself internalized some of those stigmas as well. However, she was able to interrogate why she internalized and found joy when she saw that people in those neighborhoods were standing in solidarity with undocumented Black individuals. In one instance, one man highlighted the intersection of Blackness and immigration which brought her joy.

I could see it in her smile, and I could hear the enthusiasm and happiness that filled her voice, Elizabeth truly felt joy. I too felt joy because it was powerful to be reminded, in that moment, of the importance of my work with my storytellers. Much of my happiness also was for Elizabeth and the fact that she was able to bear witness as an undocumented Black woman, to another person calling attention to the plight her community. Elizabeth highlighted that even though she advocates for the visibility of UndocuBlack folx's as a member of the undocuBlack community, it is possible for her to miss the different ways social inequities impact her community. Elizabeth's story made clear that even though you belong to a community, you must always use an intersectional lens because it is still possible to render groups of people silent even if you are advocating for them.

Nudging Elizabeth, a bit, I asked, so, how have you used joy to help you navigate higher education?

So, I like to talk about issues [social justice issues] a lot. I like to connect my experiences with my learning. So, there are always times where I'm sharing my experiences to write papers or I'm writing papers about issues that are important to me and that I feel are important to my community. Um, so that has helped me a lot because like, when you connect your education, it's much more passionate and there's a stronger connection than when you're just taking class that you don't care about. Um, which is initially what had happened. Like I came here to Hubert School, and I was a Law and society major in the humanities and justice minor, and everything that I was learning in the classes was very like criminal justice, but from like legal perspectives. And often what those classes were admitting where a lot of information like, historic or social things that happen in low-income neighborhoods and all those things were actually really interesting to me because

I was seeing it around. I was seeing violence. So, taking that and knowing how to, or understanding why those things work and operate the way that they do have helped me a lot in understanding my education.

Here, Elizabeth shared that her passion for social justice and the importance of centering it in her learning. Being able to incorporate what she learned in the community in the classroom provided joy for her. She found that the community work she did allowed her to add context to issues in class that impacted her community thus making the learning space richer.

Elizabeth's joy came from her ability to do community work. To be able to be present in spaces where Black folks, undocumented or not, loved each other by centering the community's needs. Joy, for Elizabeth, was taking her commitment to justice and connecting it to work she did in the classroom. Joy, for Elizabeth, meant she leaned into her experiences and picked the moments that filled her up. Elizabeth's experience with joy also highlighted that despite her intersectional identities that have created challenges for her as she navigated higher education, there were life-giving moments.

CHAPTER 8: IZZY

Izzy and I spoke at length about her experience in higher education. She was not really very talkative this interview. I made a joke about the two check points that visitors had to go through to get in the building. We laughed but then I said... that's pretty good. At least you know the security guards are working hard to keep the school safe. As soon as I got settled and turned on all my recording devices, I asked Izzy to share about her higher education experience. Izzy attended a community college before attending the four year school she was currently completing her bachelors. So, she went back and forth between the two schools when talking about her experience.

It's hard. And it's just like, I felt like apart from having like tuition assistance, like with, um, the GED program, like you still have to do things. I still have to find how to buy my textbook by myself. Cause like everything I still have to do by myself, I have to. Um, cause you don't help. That doesn't come from the school unfortunately, but it's like, okay, you're here you have, it's a law school. So, we have, um, police officers that come in visiting. They're like, oh, join the cadets and cadets, they tell you what they offer. And just like, this is amazing. Ah, just being a part of the program, you get \$2,500 every semester just to do what you want to do with it. And it helps it, but you just have to dedicate yourself to being a police officer after you graduate for two years. I'm just like, I want to do this. Wait, you cannot do this, and it is just so unfair. And I don't want to look at like I envy other people, but it's just like, this is so unfair. And, as much as like, this is amazing to be from Hubert School, I'm setting myself, I'm getting my education, it's just like I still can't take advantage of certain opportunities that I would love to. So, like when those people come in classes, it's like, [Sigh] I kind of tune them out because I'm like, this

doesn't apply to me. Like, and I think that's like the worst part. I can't take advantage of that. I think that that's the hard part.

In the above story, Izzy shared the challenges she faced as she navigated school. Although Izzy received tuition assistance, she still needed support purchasing her textbooks because she did not receive sufficient financial support because she was an undocumented Black student and she was unable to receive assistance from her school. Izzy shared that as an undocumented Black student, she was ineligible for certain opportunities. Specifically, Izzy was not able to take advantage of the NYC cadet program which would have assisted her with her financial struggles. The cadet program provided students with a \$2,500 stipend each semester, which would have been a tremendous help to Izzy. Additionally, Izzy had interests in law enforcement so the program would have been especially relevant to her career goals. It was challenging for Izzy as an undocumented Black student because although she attended a school that provided opportunities that were essential to her career goals, she could not participate because she was undocumented and Black. Izzy's story highlighted the role her immigration status played in her ability to fully participate as a student.

Izzy was really frustrated with the fact that she could not do some of the things she wanted to do. In our interview she referred to undocumented status as a master status and how it constantly posed as a challenge in her life. She would often disengage with employers because she knew she could not do those jobs because she was undocumented. Izzy was the only storyteller who did not have DACA so not having DACA posed as an additional challenge for her. While undocumented students overall face challenges, DACA provides access to work permit, deferred action on deportation, and driver's license (Gonzales, Terriquez, & Ruszczyk, 2014), which cannot be accessed by students who are undocumented without DACA.

Izzy's experience is exactly what scholars like Crenshaw (1989) and Collins and Blige (2016) talk about when they discuss intersectionality. As an undocumented Black student, Izzy faced challenges as she navigated higher education as a result of her overlapping identities. What was also an additional challenge for Izzy was that she did not have DACA which did not allow her to work or find full work upon completion because she did have a 2 year work permit that comes with having DACA. Both Izzy's race and immigration status work together to shape how she experiences marginalization. Although Izzy had her challenges as an undocumented Black student, there were certainly moments of joy. Izzy focused on joy as a way to combat the challenges she encountered. Below Izzy shares the moments of joy that kept her as she navigated higher education.

Joy

Funny story, Izzy and I met in the same room as Elizabeth and I. Remember, they both attend the same school. I mentioned that to Izzy that I thought it must be a sign that we were going to have a great conversation since it was my second time in that room in two weeks. So, Izzy, I said, "I am curious to hear you talk about like joy and how you use it to sustain you in higher education",

Um, so I did say joy is more, constant and cultivated internally. It comes when you make peace with who you are, why you are, and how you are. So, like, I started with that and then you started with talking about grace outreach [GED program] and, and I specifically remembered walking into the school, and I remember the day probably 2017. I walked into the school just to visit, and they had this big poster up, and the poster was of me giving my speech because I was valedictorian for the program for scoring so high. And I remember I went on Facebook, and I wrote a post, cause a lot of people don't know the

struggles I've been through as far as where I am coming from. So, I posted it and I said “I hate this picture but that's beside the point. Thanks to Grace Outreach, I was able to do a 360 in my life. I said, this picture was taken back in 2015 since I scored the highest on the GED exam. I was a valedictorian of the program that year. Prior to that I dropped out of high school, and I picked up some bad habits along the way. I started heading down the wrong path, but looking at how far I've come, I'm so proud of the woman I am today because within two years I made a change for the better. I will be the first of my mom's children to graduate from college. So, when I say I go hard to make my mom proud, I really mean that. I said, so many nights I cried because I didn't know if I was going or coming, but now it's all tears of joy because I'm doing the damn thing. And it wouldn't be possible without having my faith in myself and God”. The joy I felt walking into Grace Outreach the other day and seeing my picture on the poster and the face as of the program literally brought tears to my eyes, because it's a reminder of how far I've come, and that failure is not an option. So, I was like, progress, blessing and growth. The best is yet to come.

In Izzy's above story, she shared that she experienced joy when she visited the GED program she attended and there was a poster of her as the valedictorian giving her speech. She was overcome with joy seeing herself on the poster which prompted her to write a post on Facebook sharing her journey and the challenges she faced. Although she faced challenges and “picked up some bad habits along the way” she was able to enroll in the GED program and graduate at the top her class. The joy she felt walking into the GED program and seeing her face on the wall led her to tears because she knew how hard it was for her to make it so far. Izzy's

story highlighted that even though she is an undocumented Black student who faced challenges, there were specific moments where she experienced joy.

Izzy was beaming! She found the Facebook post and so she read it to me verbatim. I sat and watched her smile widen with each line she read. When she finally looked up, we both smiled. I think she thought I was going to ask her if she had it in her phone, because she said

It's like saved in my phone and it's always a constant reminder for me. And on top of that there was always.... this so corny, but there was a fortune cookie and, um and I remember when I opened it and it said, “you will show what you're capable of “. I’m just like, yes. And I posted that on my Instagram. Like, those little things are like constant motivation and joy for me.

I smiled and she continued

And I remember the date too and I was like, “Oh my God, if this is not the spirits talking to me”. And I think of that [fortune cookie message] specifically because [it said] you will show what you're capable right now. I feel like I have strings attached. I'm not able to do what I want to do as far as taking the next step into my career level because of my [undocumented] status here. So, it was just like, I'm equipping myself with everything... I'm getting my degree, so when the opportunity comes, I will show what I am capable of. Those things to me bring me joy. Yeah.

Here, Izzy pointed to words of wisdoms for example, a words found in a fortune cookie, as a source of joy. One such fortune cookie reminded Izzy that she will see “what she is capable of right now”. Izzy noted that she knew that she will not be able to do all that she wanted as a result of her being undocumented and Black, but all the knowledge she acquired prepared her for the opportunity that she will be able to take advantage of in

the future. Knowing that she was being prepared for something greater brought Izzy joy. Izzy's story highlighted the role of exercising patience and focusing on the process as an element of joy. Believing that better will come.

Even though Izzy had challenges, she found joy. For her, seeing her journey and how far she came was the source of her joy that served as a reminder that she should continue striving for educational dreams. She also leaned into the little signs the universe provided in the form of things like fortune cookies. How Izzy has pulled on joy addresses my research question that asks about using joy to sustain herself. Her story also offers a unique opportunity to advance intersectionality by discussing or centering life-giving moments that do exist amid challenges

CHAPTER 9: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*So, here you are
Too foreign for home
Too foreign for here
Never enough for both*

— Ijeoma Umebinyo

I return to Ijeoma Umebinyo's poem, *Diaspora Blues*, often. As a foreign-born Black woman, I am very familiar with the in-betweenness and the never fitting perfectly into spaces. Too foreign for home, too foreign for here, Ijeoma says... simple, yet in eight words, she captured a sense of belonging and othering that is so powerful. When one leaves home, they are no longer the same person, they go through versions of themselves that are informed by their experiences. I found that the more I learned from and about my storytellers, the more Ijeoma's poem rang true. For these four undocumented Black storytellers, Church Hill Fordham, Steven, Elizabeth, and Izzy, there was a lot of contorting, wondering, hoping, and uncertainty that filled the corners of their lives. I found myself humbled each time they graciously and bravely shared their stories.

In this chapter, I synthesize the storytellers' stories in relation to the research questions and my theoretical framework. Throughout my synthesis, I discuss how their stories align with or expand the existing literature. I close with implications and future research recommendations. As a reminder, my study was guided by three research questions:

1. What are the educational experiences of undocumented Black college students?
2. How do undocumented Black students experience challenges as they navigate higher education?
3. How do undocumented Black college students find joy during challenges in school?

Through conversations with my storytellers and in sitting with and stitching their stories together, I was constantly reminded that although undocumented Black students share similarities with other undocumented students, their racial identity compounded their higher education experience. These four undocumented Black students faced significant challenges as they navigated higher education. These challenges were compounded by the overlapping marginalized identities of being Black and undocumented. For the purposes of this discussion and with my research questions in mind, I discuss my undocumented Black storytellers' stories. Because I want this work to be helpful to future researchers and practitioners, I spent a significant amount of time considering how best to consolidate and share what I learned from my storytellers. Thus, I present my discussion in three distinct sections. In the first section, I Institutional Challenges, which addresses Invisiblizing Undocumented Black Students. In the second section, I discuss Identity-Related Challenges and the notion of Being Stamped. Finally, in the third and final discussion section, I discuss Joy and Life-Giving Moments: Joy.

In this section, I discuss stories in relation to my second research question: How do undocumented Black students experience challenges as they navigate higher education? The stories that students shared spoke to the challenges that undocumented Black students faced while navigating higher education. I remember during my first interview with Steven, he said, "I'm always happy when a friend or family member manages to escape from being undocumented because it is...it is a prison." I thought...a prison. I looked up the meaning of prison and while there was the traditional understanding of the word, which means a building or physical structure used to confine individuals who have committed crimes, it also means a "state of confinement or captivity" (cite). So when Steven said he felt like he was a prison, he was not only talking about a physical space, which would be the limitations of movement and access for

undocumented folx, but also an actual state of being. Church Hill, Steven, Elizabeth, and Izzy faced many challenges during their higher education experience which in many ways, refers to Steven's prison metaphor. For undocumented Black students, they are caught in the intersections because of their Blackness. Often, they are not seen as being undocumented because they are Black and therefore, contest current understandings of undocumentedness. Below, I make clear this argument.

Institutional Challenges: Invisibilizing Undocumented Black Students

Erasure of Black Identity

In the stories shared by Church Hill, Elizabeth, and Izzy, shared several instances where administrators and faculty their identities made them feel invisible. For example, Steven described how a faculty member asked if the election of former President Donald Trump “actually affected [him].” The question the professor asked was a painful reminder for Steven that his identity as an undocumented Black student was invisible. I argue that based on the professor's comment, he did not think there were students in the class who were affected by Donald Trump's policies, nor did he care. As a result of the widely held belief that undocumented students have a particular image, Steven, although undocumented, was not seen as being affected by the policies because he is Black.

Similar to Steven, Church Hill also felt that his Black identity was invisible. Although Church Hill attended an "all-Black" school, the faculty and administrators did not know how to support him. Church Hill felt that he should have received support because the school's focus was teaching and preparing Black students for the world. However, Church Hill's story is evidence that even within spaces designed to support students based on their racial identity, some Black students will not be considered based on a fixed understanding of the needs of Black

students. This finding is important because Black students are not a monolith and come from various ethnic groups and hold multiple immigration statuses. Institutions of higher education, including those that are, as Church Hill noted, "all-Black," are therefore complicit in erasing the identities of undocumented Black students.

Financial Challenges

The stories shared by storytellers, particularly Church Hill, Elizabeth, and Izzy, highlighted the financial challenges they faced as undocumented Black students in higher education. These financial challenges looked differently for each of them but were barriers nonetheless which troubled and at certain points, impeded their higher education journeys. For Church Hill in particular, learning that he was no longer registered for class due to non-payment of tuition and fees was difficult for him to navigate. He had only recently learned about his status and was beginning to understand and adjust to what it meant to be undocumented when he was de-registered from his class. Undocumented Black students are usually first generation students who come from low-socioeconomic backgrounds with limited financial resources to support pursuit of a college education. Financial support, in the form of grants and loans, therefore, is essential to help them access higher education and persist to graduation. In this way, the financial challenges undocumented Black students face in securing funding is similar to that of their non-Black counterparts.

This finding is important because each year 98,000 undocumented students graduate from high school (Zong & Batalova, 2019), and many undocumented Black students move onto higher education, institutions are often ill equipped to address students' peculiar financial needs. Colleges and university are tasked with educating a group of students who face financial barriers unique to their undocumented status. As told by my storytellers, there is limited if any financial

support for which undocumented students are qualified to apply. Undocumented students, included DACA students, are not eligible for federal post-secondary education aid.

Undocumented students find that availability of aid varies greatly depending on state, scholarship, or institutional rules. For example, both Church Hill and Steven shared their frustration with the scholarship office at their institutions which did not have any scholarships for undocumented Black students. It is not uncommon for undocumented Black students to struggle to find supports in the form of scholarships for which they are eligible because scholarships typically available for Black students require students to have citizenship or permanent residency status. In addition to the erasure of their Black identities and financial challenges, students also shared that they had challenges with uninformed administrators, staff, and faculty discussed below which completed finding one: Institutional Challenges: Invisibilizing Undocumented Black Students.

Uninformed Administrators, Staff, and Faculty

This key finding responded to the research question in that it centered the challenges undocumented Black students faced with administrators, staff, and faculty. The challenges storytellers faced with administrators, faculty, and staff manifested in different ways which made it difficult for my storytellers to navigate higher education. Church Hill, for example, explicitly said that there were not any “protocols” in place to work with undocumented Black students to assist them with financial support, counseling, among other needs. He was being shuffled from department to department because no one knew how to support him as an undocumented Black student with financial support. Steven confirmed Church Hill’s comment based on his own experience with administrators and staff, but also offered up another example of the dangers of having uninformed administrators, faculty, and staff. Steven described seeking mental health

counselling from a counselor at his higher education institution who invalidated his experience of depression. The counselor told Steven that he did not have depression but instead, was experiencing circumstantial sadness and that he just needed to find a job. Steven had difficulty accessing the psychological support he needed because the counselor failed to recognize and listen to Steven as he shared how his identity as a undocumented Black individual was causing him stress.

Steven's experience of psychological distress is common for undocumented students. Undocumented students in general carry significant psychological burdens and challenges particularly around their status such as deportation, sense of belonging and exposure of status (Jacobo & Ochoa, 2011; Patler, and Pirtle, 2018). Undocumented students battle anxiety and stress (Patler, and Pirtle, 2018) as a result of their status that is absent from the lives of students who are documented. Mental health support is crucial and coming in contact with institutional agents who are tasked with providing mental health support but refuse to do so is harmful and violent.

On one hand the experiences of the storytellers align with the literature in that it supports other research that shows that undocumented students face psychological burdens (cite). However, on the other hand, the literature does not highlight the relationship between race and psychological burdens and its impact on the lives of undocumented Black students. So, what does this mean for undocumented Black students who already exist within the intersections?

My storytellers shared their frustration with dealing with administrators, faculty, and staff because of the lack of understanding and protocols in place to assist undocumented Black students with the various challenges they face as they traverse the higher education space. Storyteller told stories of distress directly linked to their undocumented status and Black

identities. Storytellers did not feel supported primarily because it was very clear to them that institutional agents did not have the tools, knowledge, or resources to help them as they navigated their schools. While many researchers have shown that administrators typically do not have a sense of the needs of undocumented students as a broad population of students (Contreras, 2009; Gildersleeve & Ranero, 2010; Nienhusser, 2014, Nienhusser et al., 2016) stories in my research specifically demonstrate that, administrators exhibit far less understanding of the needs of undocumented Black students because these students do not fit the social imaginary of who an undocumented person looks like. Undocumented students are cast largely as Latinx (Bjorklund, 2018) and in some cases, Asian (Lachica Buenavista, 2018), but never as Black.

Identity-Related Challenges: Being Stamped

Identity-Related Challenges: Being Stamped, highlighted the challenges undocumented faced because of they felt their identity resulted in them not feeling like they belonged. They were stamped. While some of the stories occurred in the institution, others occurred outside of the institution. Nonetheless, these challenges impacted their lives. Undocumented students are whole human beings and they do not leave their personal struggles at home or outside of the institution. Below I discuss how storytellers' stories indicated that the undocumented Black students at the center of this study lead whole lives.

Sense of Belonging

The literature talks about the different ways undocumented students struggle with sense of belonging (Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012; Contreras, 2009; Pérez Huber & Malagon, 2007). Sense of belonging is the degree to which an individual is able to cultivate positive feelings or emotions to their environment (Contreras, 2009) Storytellers pointed to the different ways their mere existence was questioned and challenged which ultimately impacted their sense of

belonging and was challenging for them. Church Hill, for example, shared that he did not like being labeled Black because to be Black means to be American and America does not want him. Church Hill's rejection of the label highlights his struggles with belongingness that is common among undocumented students and is one of the many psychological barriers they face. As an undocumented Black individual, not only is he constantly navigating spaces that deny his existence, but also his identity.

Elizabeth also battled feelings of a lack of sense of belonging. Elizabeth felt a deep rejection of her identity by her campus community when the poster she was featured in for the 'I stand with Immigrants' campaign was vandalized. Although she was told by university staff that guests and non-students who came to the campus committed the vandalism, Elizabeth remained unconvinced because currently enrolled students were the ones who had access to and used the space where the poster was hung. By minimizing the vandalism as an act committed by an outside entity somehow magically disconnected from currently enrolled students, and by not empathizing and seeing how students could feel threatened by this vandalism, that the president fails to understand how sense of belonging, i.e. that feeling of being connected, cared for and valued, is particularly fragile for undocumented students who constantly struggle with belonging in all aspects of their lives because of their undocumented status.

Further compounding Elizabeth's situation was the university president's lack of empathy for the concerns and fears of undocumented students. Instead, the president highlighted the fact that she provided funds to the immigrant center and so therefore, thought that was the only support undocumented Black students and the undocumented student community needed. By minimizing the vandalism as an act committed by an outside entity somehow magically disconnected from currently enrolled students, and by not empathizing and seeing how students

could feel threatened by this vandalism, the president failed to understand how sense of belonging, i.e. that feeling of being connected, cared for and valued, is particularly fragile for undocumented students who constantly struggle with belonging in all aspects of their lives because of their undocumented status. Elizabeth's experiences and feelings mirror that of many undocumented students who express Also, as a Black woman, this experience for Elizabeth is destabilizes her trust in her institution and its agents, because historically and currently Black women are marginalized and oppressed in higher education spaces.

In line with sense of belonging, Church Hill did want to be considered Black because from his experience being called or labeled as Black meant that he was American, and America did not want him. Church Hill realized that although he was Black, members from his own communality were unable to see his challenges as an undocumented Black student. Church Hill's story is another example of how undocumented Black students struggle with sense of belong even in their own community.

This key finding confirms what the literature states that undocumented students suffer psychological barriers like sense of belonging (Cha, Enriquez, & Ro, 2019), but what is absent from the literature are the different ways undocumented Black students struggle with visibility because undocumentedness has been positioned as only a Latinx phenomenon. Undocumented Black students, similar to other undocumented students face challenges, but the complexity of Blackness adds an additional layer that further compounds these students' higher education experience. Elizabeth and Church Hill's stories shed light on the challenges undocumented Black students face around visibility.

Life-Giving Moments: Joy

When I think about joy, I am always drawn to a quote by Bettina Love (2019). She said, “what is astonishing is that through all the suffering the dark body endures, there is joy, Black joy.” (p. 15). As I listened to my storytellers share how they experienced, understood, and pulled on joy to sustain themselves in higher education, I realized that for them there were different manifestation of joy. Each storyteller’s understanding of joy was different which shows that joy is an experience and not something that can always be defined. For Church Hill, joy came through the support he received from his ex-partner as he navigated higher education. Not being familiar with the course management system posed challenging for him and having the support of his ex-partner was what he needed to be successful his second time going back to college after he dropped out for financial issues his first time. He drew on the memory of his relationship with his ex-partner to as a way motivate him and remind him that he could continue to strive for the best.

For Steven, joy came from his relationship with himself and being reflective and realizing that he had done great things. He had completed his undergraduate degree and was currently in graduate school. Examples of joy or objects that brought him joy were old academic papers he had written. Joy is not always external; joy can be found in the quite moments and in the parts of our memories that we think we have forgotten.

Elizabeth pulled her joy from community and coalition building. Doing community work and hearing community members advocate for undocumented Black folx was truly a joyous moment for her. These joyous moments also translated for her in the classroom because she was able to pull on her community work and use it as a guide to inform her learning. And for Izzy, she also found joy as she looked back at her journey and acknowledged how far she came and

how much she accomplished despite her undocumented status. Joy provides a certain amount of wholeness that is needed to navigate difficult spaces (Tichavakunda, 2021).

While Elizabeth, Izzy, Church Hill, and Steven did not explicitly say this, joy, for them, was resistance (Tichavakunda, 2021). It was their way of pushing back against all the challenges that colored aspects of their educational experience. Whether it be institutional, or identity based challenges.... they resisted. Audre Lorde powerfully notes that the sharing of “joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference.” (cite). I learned so much from my storytellers and I experienced so much joy through them and shared an experience that was truly special. Like Izzy said, I felt like I was in conversation with my storytellers and “the ancestors”.

Using narrative inquiry as a methodology allowed me to explore the experiences of undocumented Black students through storytelling which enhanced storytellers’ ability to move inward and outward, backward, and forward through their experiences to discover and talk about joy. It should be noted that the challenges that students experience because of their identities do not reside within the students themselves but rather, these challenges are imposed by a society that places value on whiteness, citizenship as defined and constituted by the nation-state. Joy sustained my storytellers, provided a lifeline when they felt alone or adrift, helped them to thrive by feeding their needs for connectedness, validation, and love.

Implications and Recommendations

My study highlighted the educational experiences of undocumented Black students. Specifically calling attention to the challenges they faced as they navigated higher education.

Based on my conversations with Church Hill, Izzy, Steven, and Elizabeth, I identified two major implications. Below, I discuss my future research and each implication in detail.

Future Research

Due to the majority of empirical research centering the experiences of Latinx undocumented students, more research is needed on the lived experiences of students who are Black and undocumented. My conversations with Izzy, Church Hill, Steven, therefore, have informed my interest in pursuing research around anti-blackness and identity development among undocumented Black students. From the knowledge gained from my storytellers, I will continue to work with practitioners at all levels to educate them and ensure that programs and policies are in place that respond to the needs of all undocumented students. I will also work with faculty to think about actionable ways through curriculum development. And ensure that justice frameworks such as intersectionality is situated at the center of discussions so that a holistic approach. Future work will also explore the relationship between undocumented Black students and mental health

Overall, there need to be more expansive understanding of justice work. Researchers, administrators, and practitioners need to recognize the humanity of all people and recognize the overlapping marginalized identities undocumented Black students hold. This study, while focuses on the educational experience of undocumented Black students, can inform policy, and practice for other undocumented populations and move towards a more holistic approach to educating undocumented students.

For Student Affairs Practitioners: Understanding the Complexity of Blackness

As discussed throughout this study, it is evident student affairs practitioners do not have the knowledge and tools needed to respond to the needs of undocumented Black students.

Faculty and administrators need to recognize the intersectional lived experiences of college students who are Black and undocumented with and without DACA. For student affairs practitioners specifically, there is also to understand the complexities of Blackness. Thinking back to Church Hill's dissonance with being labeled Black because being Black means American and America does not want him, practitioners should be aware that students who phenotypically appear Black may not identify with being Black. Therefore, practitioners need to be intentional about how they create programs for students.

Additionally, it is not uncommon for student affairs practitioners to create terms or acronyms that categorize students based on identities to foster community. However, the stories of these undocumented Black students demonstrated the need for student affairs practitioners to be aware that undocumented Black students struggle with visibility. For example, Church Hill sharing that African Americans cannot understand his struggles as an undocumented Black student is crucial to know. Student affairs practitioners who are not intentional about using an intersectional lens to investigate and understand the experience of Black students are complicit in rendering undocumented Black students invisible, as evidenced in the stories highlighted in this project.

Therefore, I recommend that student affairs practitioners gain a deeper understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of intersectionality and actively work to identify ways to use the framework to inform their practices and policies to serve the needs of undocumented Black students better. Applying an intersectional lens when working with Black students would allow student affairs practitioners to serve this population's needs better.

For University Leaders and Faculty

Resources are crucial for all students, particularly undocumented Black students, to navigate higher education institutions successfully. From the stories shared, it is clear that institutions do not have enough resources available to serve the needs of undocumented Black students. Research on undocumented students shows that these students rely on financial support, mental health support, and other support types to be successful. Thus, higher education institutions need to be proactive in creative ways to leverage existing resources or identify new ones.

Given the above, I recommend that institutions work with peer institutions to form a consortium and collectively create resources that address the needs of undocumented Black students. For example, Steven could not apply to scholarships geared towards Black students because he did not have legal status. Working with peer institutions would, as a part of a consortium would allow undocumented students access to more scholarship opportunities and more advising support. It is important to note that resources can also mean the investment in people and leverage existing knowledge. Therefore, in addition to the recommendation above, I suggest that university leaders hire a staff person or a team of individuals responsible for conducting training across campus to assist university leaders and faculty with protocols on how to work with undocumented Black students. These individuals can be external but also internal. Thus, first, universities should survey their campuses to see if individuals work with undocumented populations and who currently write and publish in the area. Second, they should use the expertise of the individuals working with undocumented students and communities to inform their training and policies. As an additional step, institutions can work with local

organizations or form coalitions within or outside of their networks to gain the necessary tools to train and increase the awareness among faculty, staff, and administrators.

Conclusion

In this project, I discussed the stories of four undocumented Black college students. The aim of this study was not to compare undocumented Black students to non-Black undocumented students of color. Instead, this study aimed to draw attention to a population that is woefully understudied by understanding: (1) How do undocumented Black college students experience challenges as they navigated higher education and (2) How did undocumented Black college students use joy to sustain themselves as they navigated higher education This study shows that although present on college campuses, undocumented Black students are invisible due to their racial identity? Steven, one of my storytellers, summed it perfectly:

The financial aid office never understood my undocumented Black immigrant status; they always had to check in with their supervisors who had to call the administration from the office who then had to call their administration. So, there was always run around and what was supposed to be five minutes appointment took like 20 to 30 minutes because of things of that nature. It makes sense because I can't expect everybody to understand the immigration law. It's very complex in itself, but when Queens is toted for being one of the most diverse metropolitan areas in the world, you'd think you have staff on-site who can in some way understand, or if not understand at least be able to refer to the proper resources for undocumented Black immigrants.

Like the other three storytellers in this study, Steven highlighted that there was confusion around who they were because they were undocumented Black students. Both administrators and faculty did not have the knowledge, tools, or resources to serve these four undocumented

Black students, which rendered them invisible. Although these four undocumented Black students attended schools with a large population of students who held marginalized identities, as Black students who were undocumented, their existence was not understood.

In addition to highlighting the erasure of their Black identity, these students also had financial challenges and battled feelings of a sense of belonging. Although Elizabeth, Church Hill, Izzy, and Steven experienced challenges throughout their higher education journey, they also experienced moments of joy that they used to guide them on their journey. Therefore, this study also centered on the happiness and joy that four undocumented Black students experienced despite their challenges. Joy is often not juxtaposed against challenges. This study demonstrated that both joy and challenges could exist simultaneously. Still, it also provided a space for these undocumented Black students to reflect on and appreciate the good that exists in the various corners of their lives.

Institutions of higher education are not prepared to adequately serve the needs of undocumented Black students. The first step in serving these students is acknowledging that they exist and then identifying their unique needs. The current processes in place or the lack of protocols creates challenges for undocumented Black students. Higher education needs to do better if they truly want to attend to the needs of ALL students.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Recruitment Letter

Dear Student,

Hello. My name is Kayon Hall. I am a doctoral student in Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education (HALE) at Michigan State University's College of Education, and I would like to invite you to participate in my dissertation study entitled **"UndocuBlack: A narrative inquiry study into the storied lives of undocumented Black students"**. My IRB approval number: STUDY00002960

Broadly stated, the purpose of my project is to understand the educational experiences of undocumented Black students in higher education. For this research, I am recruiting participants who are between the ages of **18-35** who identify as **Black and undocumented** and who are **currently enrolled in an undergraduate or graduate degree program**. Please note that your participation is completely voluntary, meaning that there is no legal or formal obligation to participate.

The extent of your participation would include two interviews. The first interview will take between 120 minutes. The second interview will take between 60-90 minutes. Interviews will be conducted in person at a time and place that is chosen by you, the participant. **All interviews will be recorded, encrypted, and will be stored as a password protected file.** I will be the only person who has access to all recordings. If applicable, following the interview, you could be contacted via e-mail with follow-up or clarifying questions. In this case, the follow-up will require no more than ten minutes. The risks are minimal in that you will be fully protected by a pseudonym and the university will be masked. Also, this research does not require you to engage in any physical activity.

To thank you for your participation, you will be given a \$50 gift card.

If you are willing to participate, please complete the attached Interest Form and email it to me at hallkayo@msu.edu with "Study Participant" in the subject line. If you should have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you for your consideration,

Kayon Hall
Ph.D. Student I Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education (HALE)
Research Assistant I HALE PhD Programs
College of Education I Michigan State University
E: Hallkayo@msu.edu

APPENDIX B

Interview Consent Form

Research Participant Information and Consent Form

1. EXPLANATION OF THE RESEARCH and WHAT YOU WILL DO: *(Must state “research”)*

Dear participant, you are being asked to participate in a research study titled: UndocuBlack: A narrative inquiry study into the storied lives of undocumented Black students. The purpose of this study is to understand your educational experience as an undocumented Black student in higher education.

- Before we start the interview, I will ask you few demographic questions
- First, I will ask you about your childhood and journey to the U.S.
- Second, I will ask you questions about your college experience.

Here are some details about the interview:

- You must be at least 18 years old to participate in this study
- This interview will last approximately 120 mins (2 hours).
- As previously indicated in my invitation, I will treat your identity and stories with the strictest confidence (i.e., by requesting you please provide me with a pseudonym) I will never use your name in public reports of this study. I will always use the pseudonym you provided.
- However, in a study like this, there is always the possibility that your confidentiality may be breached.
- As we proceed through the interview today, please point out any issues that you may wish to keep “off the record” in published reports.
- During our interview, please do not use/state any identifying information about yourself. As a participant in this study, I you will always identified by the pseudonym you chose.
- At no time during our interview should you provide identifying (names, address, email, etc.). information about others who may be discussed during our interview.

2. YOUR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE, SAY NO, OR WITHDRAW:

- Please know that your participation in this study is completely free and voluntary. I want you to share only what you feel comfortable sharing. You may refuse to respond to any questions, and you may discontinue the study at any time. You will still be eligible for your incentive gift card.

3. COSTS AND COMPENSATION FOR BEING IN THE STUDY: *(If applicable)*

- You will receive a \$50 gift card for participating in the study

4. CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS: (*necessary; HRPP contact info is NOT required for EXEMPT research*)

If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact me, the researcher at the below contact information:

Kayon Hall

Hallkayo@msu.edu

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, 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 or regular mail at 4000 Collins Rd, Suite 136, Lansing, MI 48910.

APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol # 1

Segment One - About You (15-20 minutes)

I. DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTION

- a) How do you identify racially?
- b) How do identify ethnically?
- c) What is your gender identity?
- d) How old are you?

II. CHILDHOOD

- a) Tell me about your childhood/upbringing.

Prompts:

- a) Can you talk about your family unit? (siblings, parent (s), living situation)
- b) Can you tell me about what it was like when your family decided to move to the U.S.? or can you tell me the story about your family moving to the U.S. from your home country?

Segment Two – College (60-70 minutes)

III. CONTEXTUAL QUESTIONS

K-12

- a) Tell me about the time period during your K-12 (primary, preparatory, elementary through to high school) schooling in the U.S., your birth country, or both?

Prompts:

- a) Can you talk about what it was like for you socially in K-12?
- b) Were there particular teachers or administrators who played a role in your life?

Society

- a) How would you describe your experience as someone who is Black and who is undocumented living in America?

Prompts:

- a) How has your experience being Black in the U.S. context differ from that of your birth country (if applicable. Maybe they do not remember based on age of migration)

IV. HIGHER EDUCATION

Can you tell me about your time during higher education?

Prompts:

- a) Can you tell me the story about your decision to attend your institution (s)
- b) Tell me about your experience as an undocumented Black students as it relates to institutional support (e.g., programs)

- c) Can you discuss your experience with administrators and faculty as an undocumented Black student?
- d) Can you discuss if there are/we particular teachers or administrators who have been helpful or hinderance?
- e) Where there specific places/spaces where you are aware of your race and or citizenship?
- f)

V. JOY PROJECT INSTRUCTIONS

Black joy can be defined as anything that brings you happiness and provides moments of escape.

In preparation of our next interview, I would like you to:

- a) Carve out 20 minutes to reflect on what Black joy means to you.
- b) Identify times, spaces, people, things that have helped you deal with/navigate your educational space.
- c) Be prepared to discuss how you understand Black joy and what does it look like in your life.
- d) Please bring in items/tokens/trinkets or anything that is a representation of Black joy in higher education.

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol #2

JOY EXERCISE

- a) How would you describe joy in higher education... what does Black Joy mean to you in higher education?

Prompts:

- a) Tell me about the role of joy
- b) How has Black Joy been helpful for you as you navigate higher education as an undocumented Black student?

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