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Sarah Maria Childs  
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LA JAULA DE ORO Y DREAMERS: WELLNESS OF LATINX  
UNDOCUMENTED COLLEGE STUDENTS IN A DIVISIVE POLITICAL  
CLIMATE AND #45 ERA PRESIDENCY

A Dissertation Presented

by

Sarah Maria Childs

to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctorate of Education  
Specializing in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

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## ABSTRACT

Undocumented, unafraid, and unapologetic is how our students should be able to communicate to us; yet this is not the reality for many. There are an estimated 65,000 undocumented students who graduate from high schools every year in the United States, and another 7,000 to 13,000 enrolled in colleges and universities. As of September 2017, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program has granted about 800,000 individuals deferment from deportation. DREAMers are those brought to this country, are out of status, and likely also qualify for the DREAM Act if it were passed. Many undocumented students in general are prone to experiencing stress that exists as a result of their immigration status. Fear and concerns about physical safety cause many students to keep their status a secret from peers, school personnel, and even close friends. Their fears are rooted in a system that separates families, imprisons migrants without due process, and incites violence against those who are undocumented or are perceived to be, in this country. Thus, navigating life in the shadows for them is understandable; but doing so also comes with real consequences, negatively impacting them academically, socially, and psychologically.

The purpose of this study is to seek to understand the experiences of Latinx undocumented college students in the current political climate and under the current administration in terms of how their student experiences and overall wellness as Latinx undocumented students are being impacted. The study was guided by several questions: a) How do Latinx undocumented students talk about their experiences on the college campus? b) How do Latinx undocumented students perceive how the institution responds to issues they face due to their undocumented status? c) What incidents in particular have most impacted them as college students? And, d) How do students describe their own sense of efficacy and self-care as they navigate college within this current climate?

Through the lens of Latino/a Critical Race Theory and semi-structured interviews with college students in New England and California, coupled with reflections from field experiences, analysis of multiple forms of data, and the researcher's personal connections to immigration via family history – findings of this study illuminate the lived experiences, challenges, and trauma faced by these students within the ongoing political divisiveness around matters of immigration.

It is important that we as higher education and student affairs personnel understand the lived experiences of these students so that we can more compassionately and competently serve the community while also enabling their success and wellness. It is intended that the findings from this study will illuminate the experiences of undocumented students and provide new ways to support and guide these students.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“Que viva Calvillo, mi tierra natal. Lindo rincón. Te rullo bendito.

Que no tiene igual.”

--*Que Viva Calvillo* sung by Teresa Au de Silva

My doctoral journey may have started about five and a half years ago, but my journey into student affairs and higher education actually started in the summer of 2001. I was a first year student at Northern Arizona University (NAU). It was at NAU where I identified my first mentors who also happened to be the leadership of the multicultural center – Hilda Ladner and Austin Shepard. Hilda and Austin were also my first examples of what student affairs professionals could look like, sound like, and be like. For a young and impressionable 18 year-old woman of color, their example was important to my growth and development as a college student and budding student affairs professional. Next, there was my first and only Latina professor who expected nothing but excellence from me as a student and educator, Dra. Laura Sujo de Montes. Finally, there were my hermanas from the Omicron Chapter of Gamma Alpha Omega Sorority, Inc. It was all of you who helped to shape my understanding of the importance of civic engagement and the responsibility we have to our own community. Thank you all.

This dissertation is dedicated to all the freedom fighters out there. In particular, this dissertation would not have been possible without the courageous decision, and I suspect leap of faith, that each study participant took to contact me in order to participate. You entrusted your story with a stranger and I hope that your actions to do so will in return only help to positively impact your lives and those of your family and friends. Luna, Miguel, and Gaviota – my sincerest and deepest hopes are with you for your health, happiness, and success. May you all have continued opportunities to achieve educational goals and live your life to your fullest potential. May you and your families be unified and safe regardless of which administration is holding office.

I wish to somehow communicate in words my sincerest feelings of gratitude, admiration, and love to a group of former students who have been among the most influential people in my life and who initially inspired me to pursue doctoral studies and this study – the original crew of the Council for Minority Student Affairs at Texas A&M. Greisa Martínez Rosas, José Luis Zelaya, Selene Gomez, Daniel Hernandez, Lilia Loera, Hilda Campos, Jacob Cobb, Maria Fernanda Cabello, I will always remember your relentless courage to stand up for justice and equity. I learned how to be a better student affairs professional because of you all. I learned how to better serve DREAMers and how to fight for justice because of your example. I am eternally grateful that our paths crossed.

Benito, my fur baby, there are lots of walks, car rides, and treats awaiting you since you were such a patient and loving soul as I did my work when you just really wanted to play.

A mi querida familia en Calvillo, Aguascalientes, México, siempre recordaré mis raíces. Ustedes son mi sangre y herencia y fué por los sacrificios de mi abuela y nuestra familia que yo puedo tener una vida llena de oportunidades en este país. Yo reconozco que soy parte del sueño Americano y mi vida aquí no será en vano. Aunque yo nací en los Estados Unidos, me siento profundamente orgullosa de ser Mexicana. Con mucho amor y respeto le doy mil gracias a mi abuela y a mi familia en Calvillo.

To all of my dear community who came to the United States from other parts of the world (México, Peru, Iraq, Kenya, Somalia, Nepal, etc.), I see you. I honor your right to leave the country you were born in for opportunity and life in another country. However you came, the complicated and difficult decision to migrate here and build a life here is not lost on me.

الدعم من تبدلونه ما كل أقدر وأنا. حياتي من جزءا كونك على لك شكرا وعائلاتكم، سهاد أحلام، صحار، إلى العملية هذه طوال ساعدتني التي اللذيذ والطعام والصلاة، والتشجيع.

My committee – Dr. Reyes, Dr. Huh, Dr. Mares, Dr. Aiken – I consider you all my dream team. Each of you brought helpful perspectives, life experiences, wisdom, and significant professional knowledge from your areas of scholarship. You are a group of all-around bad-ass women on UVM’s campus. We are fortunate to have you among our faculty community and I am fortunate to have you as my committee. Thank you for your encouragement, time, and attention that helped make it possible to actually complete my dissertation and get to my defense. To Dr. Aiken, my Program Advisor and Dissertation Advisor, I will always remember your firm but warm push to get to the finish line. I cannot express enough how much our advising sessions at the table in your office meant to me. It was in those moments that I could be vulnerable and share my struggles and doubts but also where I knew you would help to pick me up and give me a gentle nudge forward. You of all people know how personal this dissertation is for me and with the utmost respect and gratitude I thank you for enabling me to make room for my stories, identities, and of course this study.

To my family, friends, students, and colleagues, thank you for your love, support, and interest in my dissertation and in my successful completion of my doctoral studies. To those of you who spent time with me doing work in libraries, coffee shops, and homes around the 802 – thank you for being on this journey with me. To an inspiring group of doctoral students and women of color I grew to love and look up to in my time at IUPUI – Samantha Ivery, Andrea Robledo, Shannon McCullough, DiAnna Washington, Tiffany Kyser – you helped make it possible for me to persist in the early days of this journey. To Dr. Nick Negrete and Fahimeh Bahrami, I am so grateful that you two were my people in the program at UVM. Nick, you were among my earliest and most

intimate examples of excellence and what it meant to be a Latinx scholar. I definitely attribute some of my success in the program to you and your guidance, encouragement, and solicited/unsolicited advice. To one of the most brilliant humans I know, my grandpa – Hugh Au – thank you for always taking the time to invest in my academic success. You have instilled in me an appreciation for learning and problem solving and your lessons have served me well in life. To the rest of my family, and in particular my mom, dad, brother, and Michelle – thank you for your constant encouragement and support throughout my time as a student. To my mom and dad, thanks for making me believe from an early age that girls are capable and for teaching me that I always had choices. To my hermano, Aaron, thank you for Dragon Dictate and for lifting me up in times when I was most stressed. To the matriarch and queen bee, a.k.a. my mama, Dolores Marie Au – you were my first teacher and role model. It is because of you that this once shy girl could blossom into the learner and curious person I am today. I always remember and appreciate your consistent presence all along my educational journey – staying with me in class on my first day of kindergarten, attending open houses and parent-teacher conferences, moving me in and out of my residence hall most semesters at NAU, supporting my decisions and having faith in me even when you did not know what I was getting myself into. Thank you for empowering me to make choices for my life, including educational experiences and opportunities, which you may not have even had yourself. Thanks for all the prayers too.

¡A mi comunidad--te aprecio, te agradezco, y te quiero muchísimo! My degree may be in my name but it is for my community, too.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

“Pa’ una ciudad del norte yo me fui a trabajar. Mi vida la dejé, entre Ceuta y Gibraltar. Soy una raya en el mar. Fantasma en la ciudad.  
Mi vida va prohibida dice la autoridad.”  
--*Clandestino* by Manu Chau

This dissertation began with a focus on “out” Latinx undocumented college students and how being a member in a student organization that advocates for undocumented students mediates a certain culture that promotes mental wellness for these students. Though I am interested in the ways in which organizational culture engages membership in discourse, important to also understand are the ways in which the organization supports students around the politicization of an undocumented identity. As I engaged more deeply into my study and the literature, this is not where this journey has taken me. Being “out” in an organization of this nature might be the only place where a student is willing to be out, or the first place where a student has openly shared their status outside of close family members. While student organizations and spaces play a critical role in the lives and well-being of many students for a number of reasons, the current political climate has been disturbingly wrought with anti-immigrant rhetoric. This rhetoric has been polarizing and, in some ways, induces more fear and stress for students and other individuals or families who are impacted in some way by matters of immigration both directly and indirectly. Therefore, the

direction of my study has evolved to include a focus on the political climate and current presidential administration.

### **The DREAM ACT**

It is important to understand some history related to DREAMers. Previous administrations failed to pass or enact any measure that gave national and far-reaching relief to undocumented youth until the Obama administration.

However, even with President Obama, it was the coalescence of undocumented youth, or as some say *DREAMers* or *freedom fighters*, who organized themselves in communities across the nation to lift their voices above the noisy rhetoric around them and to lead the conversations and push for administrative action that to this day has been unprecedented.

In 2016, there were an estimated 11 million undocumented<sup>1</sup> people within the United States. Of this 11 million, Passel and Cohn (2009) found that “about three-quarters (76%) of the nation’s unauthorized immigrant population are Hispanics. The majority of undocumented immigrants (59%) are from México, numbering 7 million.” Behind individuals from México are Central Americans (11%) and South Americans (7%) (Passel & Cohn, 2009). The Fact Sheet, published by Educators for Fair Consideration (January, 2012), states that there

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<sup>1</sup> Undocumented, a term used to refer to a person who is a foreign national who: (1) entered the US without inspection or with fraudulent documents; or (2) entered legally as a nonimmigrant but then violated the terms of his or her status and remained in the US without authorization (Fisseha, 2013).

are an estimated 7,000 to 13,000 undocumented students enrolled in colleges and universities throughout the US. Additionally, in Passel and Cohn's (2009) report, *A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States*, a major finding among 18-24-year-old unauthorized immigrants exposes that, "...half (49%) are in college or have attended college. The comparable figure for U.S.-born residents is 71%" (p. iv).

The DREAM Act<sup>2</sup> was first introduced in 2001 (Hatch, 2001) as a federal measure and has continually failed to pass. Some loosely refer to adopted state legislation as DREAM Acts but this is inaccurate. While some states have adopted legislation with provisions allowing in-state youth who are undocumented to pay in-state tuition rates, given they meet other requirements, this does not mean that those same individuals are put on pathways to citizenship as a federal bill would do, if adopted. Currently, there is no federal

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<sup>2</sup> The Development, Relief, and Education of Alien Minors Act or DREAM Act, would provide conditional status for individuals who entered the US as children and meet the following requirements: 1) the alien has been continuously present in the US since the date that is 5 years before the date of the enactment of this act, 2) 15 years of age or younger on the date the alien initially entered the US, 3) a person of good moral character since the date the alien initially entered the US, 4) has not participated in the persecution of any person, 5) has not been convicted of breaking any federal or state laws or spent an aggregate 90 days or more in prison, 6) has earned a GED or high school diploma or has been admitted to an institution of higher education, and 7) is 35 years of age or younger when DREAM Act is enacted. The DREAM Act has yet to be adopted even though it was first proposed in 2001 (Durbin, 2011).

legislation that would put qualified undocumented youth on any pathway to citizenship.

As a result of these issues, the current climate has been defined majorly by inflammatory comments coming from Congress, certain news media outlets, and the White House towards immigrant communities and has had direct impact on undocumented people. For example, such rhetoric creates fear among undocumented students about the break-up of families, students in college not being able to work, and/or students not being able to go to school, just to name a few. In this current political climate with an administration and national discourse perpetuated by our political leaders, the sense of disdain, disrespect and lack of concern for those who have immigrated to the US has left many of those who are the most marginalized, underserved, or oppressed to have everything to fear with more uncertainty about their futures.

These actions commonly perpetuated by the current administration in Washington and conversations across the nation are partially what inspired me to adjust my research questions, recognizing some of the effects and potential impact on students who currently identify as being out about their status. While I do believe that student organizations can play an important role in creating affinity spaces, spaces of mattering and visibility, and lead efforts in advocacy of particular student communities – I felt a need to acknowledge the climate that the current presidential administration has produced and the ways in which

Latinx undocumented college students are navigating through these newer realities given the state of politics. Additionally, because of local, state, and national politics and policies around such a polarized topic, the role and influence of higher education and student affairs personnel is perhaps now more important than ever in recent times. Thus, my research focus attended to the sense of efficacy and well-being of these students as they navigate their roles and identities as college students and implications for higher education and student affairs professionals.

As I engaged in this study, I recognized how I have been influenced by my own family's story and how it has shaped me as a student affairs practitioner. With this understanding in mind, I also recognize that there is need for more focus on mental wellness and general wellness of this community as well as more collective intentional efforts as a professional community in support of this student population. As a professional who works in higher education and student affairs directly with diverse student communities – including students of color, first generation college students, immigrants, refugees, and undocumented students – I believe that the higher education and student affairs community around the nation needs to take a stronger and more collective stance in support of our DREAMers.

This is a watershed moment in the history of our country. We are seeing cumulative effects of poorly constructed immigration policies that have been in

existence for several decades and over the course of multiple presidential administrations; this is the so-called broken immigration system that people, particularly undocumented youth, are referring to. In Chapter 2, I discuss some of the history of immigration in the US as a context for the now rescinded Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA<sup>3</sup>) executive order. Also, just as in other periods of our U.S. history within the past 100 or so years, we are again witnessing xenophobia, racism, and scapegoating towards certain immigrant communities that in ways mirror times such as Japanese internment era bigotry and xenophobia<sup>4</sup>. On the National Public Radio (NPR) program All Things Considered, a 2013 report titled “From Wrong to Right: A U.S. Apology for Japanese Internment” described how in 1980, “Congress responded by establishing a commission to investigate the legacy of the camps. After extensive interviews and personal testimonies from victims, the commission issued its final report, calling the incarceration a “grave injustice” motivated by “racial

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<sup>3</sup> Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) is an executive order by President Obama that was issued in 2012. Certain people who came to the US as children and met several guidelines may request consideration of deferred action for a period of two years, subject to renewal. They are also eligible for work authorization. Deferred action is a use of prosecutorial discretion to defer removal action against an individual for a certain period of time. Deferred action does not provide lawful status. DACAmented is a term used to indicate that a person who is undocumented has been granted deferred action. As of September 2017, DACA was rescinded for nearly 800,000 individuals by #45.

<sup>4</sup> “Xenophobia is a form of attitudinal, affective, and behavioral prejudice toward immigrants and those perceived as foreign...scholarship suggests that ethnocentrism, nationalism, nativism, and belief in a hierarchical world order have been strongly associated with xenophobia” (Yakushko, 2009).

prejudice, war hysteria and the failure of political leadership” (Qureshi, 2013). In this example about Japanese-Americans who were detained in camps under executive order 9066, many were born in the US; this is but one example of a country and presidential administration’s xenophobic attitudes towards an entire community not perceived to be white.

As leaders in higher education, we have a moral and ethical obligation to our students. If colleges and universities are going to take time and money from our students, students should be able to expect that their campus leadership has their best interest in mind and are committed to their success – which includes their overall wellness. Through this study I examined the current well-being of undocumented students on three college campuses and how as a professional community our collective conscience can compel us to do what is just on behalf of our students and colleagues, in particular those who are undocumented – DACA or no DACA.

While this dissertation could easily be written as a tale of hopelessness and tragedy, it is not that. The experiences of our students are important to bear witness to, understand, reflect on, and share but the point is not to paint a picture that leads people to believe this is a lost cause or that there is no place for hope in the matter. On the contrary, DREAMers have demonstrated to the world and this country their audacity to hope and their power to will into existence a reality that has not yet existed or only temporarily existed. As the life force of the



undocumented student movement, we can see over time how this community has persisted despite incredible odds, hardships, and constant exclusionary practices on local, state, and national levels. Several examples of exclusionary practices that undocumented students face in accessing higher education and persisting to degree attainment are noted in a 2014 report entitled, *“Removing Barriers to Higher Education for Undocumented Students by the Center for American Progress.”* The author, Zenen Jaimes Pérez (2014), writes:

As the cost of higher education continues to soar, undocumented students continue to face challenges paying their tuition, particularly without access to state and federal financial aid and loans. In more conservative states, undocumented youth have been almost completely excluded from beneficial tuition equity laws. In Alabama, South Carolina, and some college systems in Georgia, undocumented students face enrollment bans, while Arizona and Indiana explicitly prohibit in-state tuition rates. (p. 7)

The example alone that DREAMers have modeled should cause those of us who are not in the same immigration position to be thirsty and imaginative in our aspirations for our undocumented students and peers. Individuals and the larger collective of undocumented students have much at stake compared with those of us who have status or citizenship. We can use our positional influence and authority to advocate and create policies and practices in support of this community.

## **Researcher's Context, Assumptions and Beliefs**

Though relevant literature and data in this study addresses some general and more focused contributions of undocumented people and undocumented students, I am touching upon some of that literature only because of the relevance of certain information to the context of this subject matter. It is neither my point nor my intention to center the lived experiences of DREAMers or DACAmented students from an economic or capitalistic perspective. This approach is antithetical to why I stand with these students and the general undocumented community. I do not want for this community because of any anticipated economic benefit to myself or the rest of this nation. I want for this community because I want all individuals in this country to be included, welcomed, and well. I will not blame parents or families, nor will I tolerate the blaming of parents or families, for their role in bringing babies or youth to the US. I support the reunification of families and efforts to keep families together. I have supported and will continue supporting DREAMers because all people ought to have dignity and quality of life regardless of immigration status and regardless of how people get to this country. The entrepreneur, activist, and writer Anil Dash (2018) recently wrote on his Twitter page the following:

I'm in favor of immigrants who come to America to not do anything remarkable, who just hang out and sometimes spend time with their friends and family, who are flawed, regular people. I'm in favor of

immigrants who don't have to be super heroic or economic martyrs to justify access.

These words spoke to me because I also want to interrupt rhetoric and actions that perpetuate divisiveness among communities. I want to get rid of this "good immigrant/bad immigrant" binary or expectations that demand for any and all immigrants to be exceptional at everything.

While I am the researcher in the study for this dissertation, it should be understood that I am not taking a neutral stance in this matter. I am writing subjectively as a person with real and personal connections to the subject matter of this dissertation. My perspective throughout this dissertation is one of compassion and humanism. My decision to write on this topic comes from a place of having witnessed students' fear, sadness, pain, humiliation, struggle, and fight. This is not a generic topic with subjects who I can forget about after I defend or graduate. This is a topic that haunts me and keeps me up at night. I have seen much through my positions as a student affairs professional at three different universities and in three distinct and politically diverging states. My experiences in these three unique communities has culminated in a profound understanding of what student experiences have been and what they could be given certain factors. There is no secret to this community; yet, many in this country, including my fellow student affairs professionals, act as though there is mystery around this topic. I assure you, there is no mystery. If you want to

support undocumented students—I believe you can. If you want to understand the experiences of these students—I believe you can. And, quite frankly, I believe if more leaders in higher education and in our communities operated under the assumption that there are undocumented students on their respective campuses, our students might feel more welcomed and affirmed in their undocumented identity. Even if campus leaders do not know names of students and if they do not understand how it is that a person can become undocumented, I believe one can learn. Questioning the latter has its relevance in the larger conversation about supporting undocumented students but supporting students and advancing critical conversations should not come at the expense of people’s willful ignorance. Understanding of undocumented student experiences and the various paths students must traverse is what I hope this study can help attain.

As a student affairs professional, I believe we need to be taking a more firm and supportive position on matters impacting our students locally and nationally. Several studies and national reports have addressed this issue and how as professionals we can support undocumented students, but need to do more (Cisneros & Cadenas, 2017; Gilbert & Quintana-Hess, 2009; Pérez, 2014). Many of us who work directly with students have the ability to not only deeply understand the issues affecting our students, but also develop an understanding of what we should be advocating for with respect to their success and wellness. We are privileged to have daily opportunities to engage with students and know

them well. To not take these opportunities to learn from students and become more engaged in changing campus culture, policies, and protocol in ways that make the overall student experience more positive and welcoming is unacceptable and contrary to standards we have set forth in our profession and espouse to uphold.

My values have been reinforced by two of the major professional organizations for student affairs professionals - National Association of Student Affairs Professionals in Higher Education (NASPA) and College Student Educators International (ACPA). Both organizations serve as governing bodies to help inform practices on college campuses among other roles. Additionally, both organizations have made commitments to equity, inclusion, and social justice and public statements have been disseminated through public statements made to membership as well as through print and online platforms. NASPA's (n.d.) statement reads:

NASPA affirms the importance and centrality of the values of equity, inclusion, and social justice to student affairs professionals, both in their daily lives and in their work on behalf of and with students and other constituents. NASPA believes that equity, inclusion, and social justice require continual pursuit to ensure that members from all identities, backgrounds, abilities, and belief systems have access, voice, acknowledgment, and opportunities to participate at all levels within the

Association and the profession. Additionally, NASPA strives to ensure that our membership, leadership, scholarship, and programming are reflective of these values, and through our standards of professional practice we hold our members and the Association accountable to these principles in our work on behalf of the profession.

While I do hope that the information contained in this dissertation is helpful to understanding specific student experiences, it is equally important that the findings have the potential to push and encourage individuals to enact helpful changes on their respective campuses and organizations. This study is meant to push people well beyond the 101 or *What is Halal* type questions. My intent is to help student affairs professionals to be prepared to support this population of students.

I believe that these undocumented students seek higher education opportunities, just as many other students who were born in the US. They want to build their lives, learn, engage in leadership opportunities, pursue fields of interest, and establish a professional or career trajectory. Despite the soundest academic goals and earnest attempts at being involved in a myriad of leadership roles in local communities on any given college campus, these Latinx<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Latinx is a term used to include all possible gender and sexual identities. Latinx/a and Latin@ were once more common but as folks seek to be more inclusive and move away from gender binary common in the Spanish language, Latinx is being adopted by some (Logue, 2015).

undocumented students face daily mental stressors (Gonzales, Suárez-Orozco, & Dedios-Sanguineti, 2013). These stressors have the potential not only to negatively impact their psychological wellness, but also to influence and derail them academically, all as a result of their immigration status. In William Pérez's (2012) book, *Americans by Heart: Undocumented Latino Students and the Promise of Higher Education*, this challenging reality is detailed aptly when he writes, "At every turn undocumented students face constraints on their ability to participate in civic life. Because of limitations, accomplishing the most simple of tasks often means taking uncertain risks" (p. 25). Undocumented students in general cannot afford to wait for others who are documented or citizens to support and join the undocumented student movement; thus, Latinx undocumented students and the greater undocumented student community across the US, as well as other countries, have been instrumental in raising the bar and pushing conversations and actions to take place at local, regional, and national levels.

For this study, I also believe it is important to first honor the work that countless numbers of undocumented youth and their aspiring ally peers have engaged in to advocate and fight for themselves, their families, and their fellow undocumented peers. I share here one brief, yet significant, story of how students organized to fight for their right to public education in the fall of 2009 on the campus of the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA).

Carlos Amador (2011), a former undocumented graduate student at UCLA, paints a vivid picture of events that led up to the UC Board of Regents meeting in which their board members were expected to vote on a tuition raise. Students, on a campus that was, according to Amador (2011), known for a generally apathetic student body, mobilized to lead efforts against the proposed tuition hike. Coordinated actions on the part of students from UCLA and surrounding areas included a variety of dissenting and counter actions including protests, discussions, performances, and testifying before the regents. Undocumented students were involved in every aspect of organizing efforts. In this particular matter, undocumented students arguably had the most to lose with a rise in tuition. Even though “nonresidents” or undocumented students who meet certain requirements in California can receive in-state tuition under Assembly Bill 540, or AB 540<sup>6</sup>, a tuition increase still would have made paying for college expenses challenging for undocumented students given that certain financial aid barriers remain present, such as exclusion from receiving Pell grants and other federal funding. At the time, DACA did not exist so college-going undocumented students could not be authorized to work in any paying position

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<sup>6</sup> AB 540 is a California state law that allows certain non-resident students who complete at least three years of high school in California to receive reduced in-state tuition at public colleges and universities (Cal State University, University of California, and CA Community Colleges). In 2009-2010, 40,076 students qualified for AB 540 (January, 2012).



that required a social security number and in some cases a state issued identity card.

This example of student activism serves as but one case that highlights how Latinx-serving organizations have played a crucial role in being a voice for Latinx undocumented student communities, especially where institutional administration has been inadequate. IDEAS, or Improving Dreams, Equality, Access, and Success, is an acronym for a student organization at UCLA that is an undocumented student advocacy and support group. Even on a college campus where students should feel safe, there was a pre-determined safety phrase, “The IDEAS bus is leaving,” which those students would shout aloud when police intervention was imminent. This is one story of their courage to keep their rightful place on our college campuses.

As a student affairs practitioner in higher education, I view these experiences faced by undocumented students not only as problematic and concerning, but ones that could be mitigated if administrators, faculty and staff on our college campuses were more engaged in related discourse at a local and national level and proactively involved in advocacy efforts and policy creation/changes in support of these students. It is troubling to humor xenophobic behavior as a normal part of life that any of our students ought to endure. The university community always has opportunities to be a leader in creating campus climates and cultures in which the needs and lived realities of

this particular student body are considered and addressed in a validating and compassionate way. Pérez (2012) highlights how this is not actual practice on many campuses when he noted that some college staff are unwilling to provide information to undocumented students while others have political differences from or may even discriminate against students. Perhaps because this is too common an experience for many undocumented students in many communities including college campuses, students have taken it upon themselves to organize in a collective vow of solidarity to take actions that counter oppressive racial, legal, and institutional forces designed to exclude this community both intentionally and unintentionally.

There are countless examples across the country of how student communities on a multitude of college campuses have built spaces and mobilized to address unmet needs, advocate, fight for human dignity, and equal access and support to higher education. Two examples come to mind with respect to the establishment and evolution of spaces on college campuses – student organizations and emerging undocumented student services offices.

### **Research Statement and Questions**

Student-led organizations that exist to support undocumented students have formed on college campuses around the country. As significant a role as they may play for some students in their respective communities, what is less obvious is the decision-making process behind why a student would come “out”

within the context of a particular organization. While research on the topic of undocumented students, specifically Latinx undocumented college students exists, there is less research that focuses explicitly on mental wellness or overall wellness. Furthermore, I believe there is more to understand related to the role of college student organizations that advocate for undocumented students and what the involvement of Latinx undocumented students in such an organization can play in promoting mental health as a result of being “out.” “Out,” in the context of this study, refers to undocumented students who willingly divulge their status to the general public, to a particular person, and/or in particular spaces. This term is used to indicate that a student has shared their status of undocumented, being without papers, “DACAmented,” or other related self-selected vocabulary to note their immigration status in the US.

The overarching subject of my study is not unique – Latinx undocumented college students – but what is different from the large body of literature that exists on this community and even undocumented students in general is research that is anchored in the realm of mental wellness or wellness overall. Anyone who is remotely familiar with the literature about the experiences and life narratives of undocumented students knows that stress and anxiety are all-too-common feelings among many in this community. But, what I wanted to know now, particularly given the current presidential administration’s frequent racist and xenophobic language and behavior (Leonhardt & Philbrick,

2018), is how Latinx undocumented college students are persisting despite this fact. I focused on the factors and contexts at play for individual students that allows for self-efficaciousness despite systems and people in high positions of power working against them because of their status. With the understanding that racist nativist perspectives and discourse ultimately leads to racialized and xenophobic acts of discrimination against people of color, and in this case, Latinx undocumented college students, how do these individuals cope and move through these experiences to carry on with usual daily activities and not become paralyzed by fear and anxiety?

The primary purpose of this study was to seek to understand the experiences of Latinx undocumented college students in the current political climate and under the current administration in terms of how their student experiences and overall wellness as Latinx undocumented students are being impacted. The study was guided by several questions: a) How do Latinx undocumented students talk about their experiences on the college campus? b) What student organizations do undocumented students select to participate in and why? c) How do Latinx undocumented students perceive how the institution responds to issues they face due to their undocumented status? d) What type of incidents related to their identity as Latinx undocumented students have most impacted them and in what ways? And, e) How do students describe

their own sense of efficacy and self-care as they navigate college within this current political climate and administration?

Through the lens of Latino/a Critical Race Theory lens and semi-structured interviews with college students in New England and California, coupled with reflections from field experiences, analysis of multiple forms of data, and researcher's personal connections to immigration via family history – findings of this study illuminate the lived experiences, challenges, and trauma faced by these students within the ongoing political divisiveness around matters of immigration. For this study, this problem was discussed more deeply with three participants who each happen to be from California. One student was recruited from a small public liberal arts school in New England and the two others were recruited in California from two different public universities. I discuss these student experiences in more in Chapter 3.

Following I also provide a list of common terminology found throughout this dissertation.

**45<sup>th</sup>**

A term the author of this dissertation is using to refer to the current president of the US in order to avoid using his name as much as possible.

**AB 540**

Assembly Bill 540 is a California state law that allows certain non-resident students who complete at least three years of high school in California to receive reduced in-state tuition at public colleges and universities (Cal State University, University of California, and CA Community Colleges). In 2009-2010, 40,076 students qualified for AB 540 (January, 2012).

### ***Advance Parole***

Advance Parole is a process managed through USCIS in which individuals who have filed an application for permanent residency or to adjust their immigration status are granted authorization to travel outside of the US and return to the US without abandoning the pending adjustment application. Upon return to the US, the individual must present their issued authorization card to request parole at the given port-of-entry. (USCIS, February 2, 2018)

### ***BRIDGE Act***

Introduced in the Senate and House of Representatives in January 2017, the Bar Removal of Individuals Who Dream and Grow Our Economy, or BRIDGE, was proposed bipartisan legislation that would have allowed the same individuals who qualified for DACA, and who met nearly the same qualifications as DACA recipients, to receive both provisional protected presence and work authorization for a maximum of three years. This bill was introduced as a way to provide DACA recipients with continued support while larger and more comprehensive immigration reform measures were worked on. (National Immigration Law Center, February 25, 2018)

### ***Chingonas***

A term that signifies power, a bad-ass, fierce and strong woman (Revilla, 2004).

### ***Critical Race Theory***

“Critical race theory (CRT) first emerged as a counter legal scholarship to the positivist and liberal legal discourse of civil rights. This scholarly tradition argues against the slow pace of racial reform in the United States. Critical race theory begins with the notion that racism is normal and in American society. It departs from mainstream legal scholarship by sometimes employing storytelling. It critiques liberalism and argues that Whites have been the primary beneficiaries of civil rights legislation. Since schooling in the USA purports to prepare citizens, CRT looks at how citizenship and race might interact.” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 7)

### ***DREAM Act***

Development, Relief, and Education of Alien Minors Act of DREAM Act, would provide conditional status for individuals who entered the US as children and meet the following requirements: the alien has been continuously present in the US since the date that is 5 years before the date of the enactment of this act, 15 years of age or younger on the date the alien initially entered the US, a person of good moral character since the date the alien initially entered the US, has not participated in the persecution of any person, has not been convicted of breaking any federal or state laws or spent an aggregate 90 days or more in prison, has

earned a GED or high school diploma or has been admitted to an institution of higher education, and is 35 years of age or younger when DREAM Act is enacted. DREAM Act has yet to be adopted even though it was first proposed in 2001. (Durbin, 2011)

### ***Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals***

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) is an executive order by President Obama that was issued in 2012. Certain people who came to the US as children and meet several guidelines may request consideration of deferred action for a period of two years, subject to renewal. They are also eligible for work authorization. Deferred action is a use of prosecutorial discretion to defer removal action against an individual for a certain period of time. Deferred action does not provide lawful status. DACAmented is a term used to indicate that a person who is undocumented has been granted deferred action. As of September 2017, DACA was rescinded for nearly 800,000 individuals by #45.

### ***Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents***

Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA) is an executive order issued by President Obama in November 2014. DAPA allows for employment authorization for three years without fear of deportation. People were considered if they met the following requirements: have lived in the US continually since January 2, 2010 to present time, were physically present in the US on November 20, 2014 and at the time of making your request for consideration of DAPA with USCIS, had no lawful status on November 20, 2014, had on November 20, 2014, son or daughter of any age or marital status who is a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident, and not convicted of any felonies, misdemeanors, or an enforcement priority for removal. (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, January 30, 2015)

### ***Freedom Fighters***

Freedom Fighters, according Greisa Martínez, the Advocacy Director for United We Dream, are people who believe that family separations are immoral and should end, who believe that immigrants are here to stay and see the connection between immigrant justice and racial justice.

### ***Ganas***

A Spanish term that can be translated simply as the will to do something or desire for something.

### ***La Jaula de Oro***

La Jaula de Oro is a well-known corrido made famous by the Norteño group, Los Tigres del Norte. As the corrido genre typically goes, the song is a narrative of an oppressed group and on a topic that has remained socially and politically relevant more than 20 years after it was first released. The actual lyrics translate to, "I have my wife and children whom I brought at a very young age. They no longer remember my beloved México, which I never forget and to which I can never return. What good is money if I am like a prisoner in this great nation?" (Wikipedia)

### *Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit)*

"LatCrit is an extension of the efforts of CRT in educational research, used to reveal the ways Latinas/os experience race, class, gender, and sexuality, while also acknowledging experiences related to issues of immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture. LatCrit enables researchers to better articulate the experiences of Latinas/os specifically, by addressing issues often overlooked by CRT such as immigration status, language, ethnicity, culture, identity, and phenotype." (Huber, 2009, p. 643)

### *Latinx*

Latinx is a term used to include all possible gender and sexual identities. Latino/a and Latin@ were once more common but as folks seek to be more inclusive and move away from gender binary commonly found in the Spanish language, Latinx is being adopted by some. (Logue, 2015)

### *Mental Health*

Defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as "a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community." (World Health Organization, 2014).

### *Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Atzlan*

Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Atzlan, or MEChA, is a student organization founded in April 1969 on the campus of UC Santa Barbara. While MEChA initially began as loosely organized student groups, it evolved into a single unified movement that promotes higher education, cultura, and historia. MEChA was founded on the principles of self-determination for the liberation of La Raza and the belief that political involvement and education are the avenues for change in this society. (MEChA, n.d.)

### *Racist Nativism*



The institutionalized ways people perceive, understand and make sense of contemporary U.S. immigration, that justifies *native* (white) dominance, and reinforces hegemonic power. (Pérez-Huber, 2011)

### ***Self-efficacy***

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997). Self-efficacy reflects confidence in the ability to exert control over one's own motivation, behavior, and social environment. These cognitive self-evaluations influence all manner of human experience, including the goals for which people strive, the amount of energy expended toward goal achievement, and likelihood of attaining particular levels of behavioral performance. Unlike traditional psychological constructs, self-efficacy beliefs are hypothesized to vary depending on the domain of functioning and circumstances surrounding the occurrence of behavior.

### ***Testimonios***

Testimonios are, according to Lindsey Pérez Huber's definition, "a verbal journey of a witness who speaks to reveal the racial, classed, gendered, and nativist injustices they suffered as a means of healing, empowerment, and advocacy for a more humane present and future." (Pérez-Huber, 2009, p. 644)

### ***Undocumented***

Undocumented, a term used to refer to a person who is a foreign national who: (1) entered the US without inspection or with fraudulent documents; or (2) entered legally as a nonimmigrant but then violated the terms of his or her status and remained in the US without authorization. (Fisseha, 2013)

### ***Wellness***

"Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." (World Health Organization, 2016).

### ***Xenophobia***

"Xenophobia is a form of attitudinal, affective, and behavioral prejudice toward immigrants and those perceived as foreign...scholarship suggests that ethnocentrism, nationalism, nativism, and belief in a hierarchical world order have been strongly associated with xenophobia." (Yakushko, 2009)

## **Significance of the Study**

There is a direct relationship among undocumented status, mental health, and wellness. As a result of citizenship status, it is not uncommon for many undocumented college students and in particular those who are not “out” about their status to experience feelings of shame, stress and invisibility living in the shadows. Pérez (2012) writes about undocumented Latinx students managing a stigmatized identity essentially through years of practice and learning how to conceal their identity. What is particularly telling of the weight that undocumented status can have on many students is highlighted by Pérez (2012), “Over time, they learned ways to cope with the stigma, frustration, fear, and anxiety that is a part of their daily lives...their early adulthood is spent developing various survival techniques that they employ on a daily basis living undocumented” (p. 27). Similar to other marginalized community members, the encouragement of undocumented students to embrace their identity for what it is not only promotes self-love but is also a way to encourage a positive sense of self.

On our college campuses, professionals have an ethical obligation and perhaps an unspoken professional oath to foster environments in which students have a positive sense of self and more explicitly, can gain tools to promote healthy identity development. Historically, students who are undocumented have not necessarily fallen within this general professional modus operandi as too commonly these students are underserved in higher education. Pérez (2012) notes that, “Previous findings strongly suggest that professional development is

needed for college and university staff who routinely conduct outreach and recruitment and work in critical offices dealing directly with undocumented students” (p. 142). Thus, a deeper understanding of the relationship between undocumented students and the support services with which they engage to enhance their identity and mental well-being, along with a sense of agency, is an important area of study. Nationally, undocumented students face a society in which they may feel the pressure of stereotype threats, experience xenophobia, and become the target of overt and covert racism and associated micro and macro aggressions. These unfair, unwelcoming, and unhealthy sentiments against an entire population of human beings are destructive. In turn, many students are prone to internalizing these bombastic and ignorant falsehoods that are typically presented as facts and the gospel truth. The resulting consequences leave many students in peril – peril of uncertain educational opportunities, peril of uncertain professional opportunities, peril of health risks. It is intended that this study will in some way deepen this resolve for college campuses to take action in support of our DREAMERS. My goals for disseminating what I have learned as a result of engaging in this study as well as my findings are broad and include considerations for my local community as well as the larger national community. Locally for me means self-reflection as a member of the UVM community and examining ways that I can engage with my fellow UVM colleagues in terms of how we continue our efforts on our campus to support the

undocumented community – both students and staff. I would also identify ways in which I could invite K-20 professionals throughout Vermont to participate in statewide conversations about how we can collectively work together to support undocumented students, families, and colleagues who are undocumented in the Vermont educational system. As opportunities arise to present at local, regional, and national conferences I will endeavor to do so. Finally, I will seek to publish articles related to my study in various outlets related to higher education and student affairs.

### **Researcher's Subjective I**

La Marisoul, lead singer of La Santa Cecilia, a Mexican American band based out of Los Angeles, California, sings in their famous song *El Hielo* (a.k.a. Immigration and Customs Enforcement or ICE), “Marta llegó de niña y sueña con estudiar. Pero se le hace difícil sin los papeles. Se quedan con los laureles los que nacieron acá, pero ella nunca deja de luchar.” Translated, these lyrics tell the story of Marta. Marta arrived as a girl and dreams of studying but it is difficult for her without papers. Those who are born here keep all the prizes, but she never stops fighting. This song addressed the all-too-common narrative of people leaving México, among all other countries, for life in the US. It is no coincidence that music across many genres mirrors people's lived realities. There are countless examples of Mexican and Chicax singers and music groups that sing and re-count the often painful, scary, uncertain, and

hope-filled experiences of our community and the difficult journey many of our relatives have taken for a better and more certain life on this side of the border lands.

As a Chicana from Tucson, Arizona and as a higher education and student affairs professional, what this music reveals is how I have been marked not only by the history of my own family but also by my own students whose immigration status and desire for a future for themselves and their families has collided at my doorstep. The “fighting” that Marta was not prepared to stop engaging in as one of the protagonists in *El Hielo*, elucidates how people – youth – who are marginalized and continually oppressed must frequently resist the dominant narrative many people in positions of power would have us believe about those who exist in the margins of our society. In *When We Fight We Win!* (Jobin-Leeds, 2016), the authors suggest that art is a way to call into existence a reality that does not yet exist. I believe this to be true and I appreciated the authors statement, “Art helps us render things visible that we might not have been able to express. It gives us audacity. Art can develop a culture of solidarity, celebration, and liberation” (Jobin-Leeds, 2016, p.xx).

While I am the researcher within this study and though I was born in the US, there is an intimate familiarity with this subject matter because this has been the experience of some of my family and many of my former students. The personal relationships and family *cuentas* that were passed on through

generations in my family as well the intimate relationships I have had over the past 10+ years in my professional roles with students has allowed me the opportunity to immerse myself in a body of knowledge and awareness which has been unique and eye-opening. My experiences converged naturally at a place where I worked at a large public university in Texas called Texas A&M for just over three years as a program advisor in multicultural affairs. I was fortunate to serve as the first advisor to a student organization known as the Council for Minority Student Affairs (CMSA), which existed to create awareness, provide resources, and empower immigrant communities. I was able to learn from and grow with the founding leaders and many of the general body members of this student organization. Not only did I witness firsthand students coming out of the shadows, but I also played an active role as the organization's advisor. As the researcher who is designing this study, I am fully aware of the ethical considerations regarding the participation from people who have such a vulnerable status and who could potentially reveal sensitive information, putting them in a vulnerable position. For full disclosure, I must also admit to holding some very particular views regarding my own personal philosophies around what it means to be a socially just-minded person and professional. I adamantly believe that as a student affairs professional, I must always act in morally and ethically just ways. It is my responsibility as a student affairs professional to provide support and advocacy for all students considering various identities

they hold, irrespective of what those identities may be, and also regardless of how challenging or inconvenient some situations might be for me as a professional to address effectively. Because I feel so deeply and personally connected to the subject of this study, I recognize that I have bias and that I do not maintain a neutral position in this contentious matter.

When I was working at Texas A&M, I can say that I felt the void in support from my professional community across campus. In general, support for undocumented students was piecemealed together even though there was certainly an existing community of students that were known. The only standing services in place were through the international office but that was because students had to go through that office as standard protocol to be recognized students at the university and services were minimal. Services basically included directing students through the intake process, informing them of what forms needed to be completed in order to remain in good standing, and making sure that the students had health insurance and had paid their international student fees. At the time, no student affairs offices or services were establishing trainings for their staff to be able to serve undocumented students in an educated and informed way nor developing policies or protocols to align with needs and realities of this community of students. The university was admitting these students and taking their tuition dollars but not providing the support and services necessary to assist students in navigating the institution and obstacles

that arose for many. I can certainly say that there were a handful of colleagues who I could consistently turn to with questions or concerns that arose, even if they may not have been informed on how to serve undocumented students or connected in any way with a student who identified as such. This was helpful to me because I at least recognized the type of questions that needed to be asked but for students who did not know who to direct questions to or who would be safe professionals to reach out to, this was problematic. As a staff member with so many university employees all around me, it was sometimes an isolating experience seeking guidance and support from colleagues. Various offices that worked directly with students and academic units with faculty and deans who could use positional authority as a platform to advocate for students could have definitely been more engaged and vocal on campus. As a campus community that was well resourced, steeped in traditions that were student centered, and rich in alumna giving and participation, we could have done significantly more to provide a validating campus environment and one in which students could more easily find a professional staff community prepared to support the unique needs of these students. From my perspective these often seemed to be the exact opposite experiences that students had and would recount to me and/or their peers. As a professional on campus who worked directly and frequently with a variety of student communities, this was not only disappointing, but it also crystalized for me the role that I desired to take and needed to take as a member



of this campus community. I was not willing to take an apolitical stance or sit quietly as I was witnessing and experiencing for myself how the institution, campus climate, and individual and student group behaviors were harming these students or excluding at the very least.

People in our community were intentionally hunting down students who identified as undocumented. Students used tactics like bullying, programming, using social media, calling Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) on specific students, and using positions in the student government to create an environment of fear, exclusion and hate for these students who were their own peers. My intention is in no way to harp on one particular school as all colleges and universities have things they can do to change the system and climate to better meet the needs of undocumented students – even schools that have advanced services, an undocumented student center, and a more critical mass. The purpose of me sharing reflections of my personal experiences is to engage colleagues in critical thought and provide an opportunity for learning based on my own experiences.

The experiences I had at Texas A&M served as a vivid reminder of what is at stake for undocumented students on any given college campus where even a single student could exist. It was early evening one weeknight of a spring semester, and I was in the conference room in my department. I was there because a student organization I advised as part of my professional role was

having their usual weekly meeting. The conference room door was open and where I was seated I had a clear view of the glass doors that served as the main entrance of the department. As the one student group was going about their business, a short time later I saw a group of about four students dressed in business attire running to the department's main entrance. The students I saw were my students from a student group I advised separately in my professional role.

This group had started the year before and was formerly known as the DREAM Act group of the university. The founding members started the group to support and advocate for undocumented students at the university. Up to this point in my experience with the students in the organization, I had learned a tremendous amount regarding experiences of many students at the school who identified as undocumented, all of whom were Latinx that I knew. I learned of the relationships between their undocumented identity and their experiences in spaces across campus as well as challenges in accessing information and services on campus as a result – whether they outed themselves or not. What I did not anticipate, until this point, was the extent to which students would go to be cruel and hateful towards their peers and my students. What I learned in an instant was that the students who were desperately trying to get into the department after hours were there to make copies. It turned out that there were several student senators in the student government who were actively calling ICE to

report students who they knew were and suspected of being undocumented during the student government meeting. My students organized their community to run for student senate positions representing colleges, on-campus, and off-campus student communities. These students got themselves elected into these various positions so that they could be part of the decision-making process for all things that could possibly impact students and the development of initiatives and policies on campus.

Though these students were doing what was within their control to take necessary precautions, I remember the look of fear and urgency on all of their faces as they quickly tried to get into the department. One of the students did not even identify as undocumented but the other three were. The student who was not undocumented helped to found the student organization and also had a personal connection to the undocumented student community because these students were her friends and family. Her parents emigrated from México and she was very much connected to her roots and the history of her community. I think it is safe to say that her fellow peers viewed her as a comrade for the cause and was a trusted source. This same student happened to also be involved in an affiliated student organization within my department and with that relationship came swipe card access into my office after hours and use of the copy machine. She acted quickly to use the resources available to her to benefit her friends and fellow student senators in a serious time of need. She had taken these students

to the department to make copies of forms they needed to complete to ensure that attorney representation could be obtained if detained by ICE that evening at the student government meeting. As luck has it, this student was able to find powder blue paper in the office supply cabinet that the forms needed to be printed on. From this moment on, we both knew to make sure that students who were undocumented and involved in the student organization knew to always carry copies of the form in their backpacks just in case. These were the sort of situations that, while scary and intense, taught me just how nuanced the experiences of undocumented students are, the daily stressors that could be faced, and the specialized critical awareness and competency that student affairs professionals must possess to assist students in navigating their higher education experiences successfully given the particular needs of this student population. Also, I later learned that the name of the specific form that the students had to carry at all times was called a G-28. The G-28, or Notice of Entry of Appearance as Attorney or Accredited Representative, is made available through USCIS via the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) (USCIS, 2018).

I remember how challenging it felt recognizing people's lack of awareness of the experiences of undocumented students on our campus and in our community. Due to my own personal and professional experiences working with college and pre-college students who identified as undocumented, I witnessed first-hand the ways in which student activism and student-led

endeavors to support this community of students emerged. I see opportunities to more deeply understand how mental wellness among students who identify as Latinx undocumented students has been promoted organically and unfettered through their involvement in a student organization focused on supporting and advocating for undocumented students. As a student affairs professional, I witnessed the daily stressors and toll that the undocumented status had on my students and because of this I often found myself wondering how their involvement in various organizations helped to foster a community of validation but also a positive self-image despite their status. As an outsider, or at least someone who was born in the US, I saw how students came to terms with their status and, though difficult, found their own way to accept it and assert their agency as they needed to persist and continue moving forward with their educational pursuits and lives. Because I was able to witness student activism and community building in such a compassionate and loving way through one particular student organization, some of my study seeks to explore "outness" through the lens of student involvement. By this student organization's existence, I saw that they were able to build this radical space on a college campus and in a state where they sometimes seemed to be an anomaly. I viewed the organization and founding members as being everything that I wished the university had been to these students. These audacious undergraduate students built spaces of mattering while also fiercely resisting the dominant discourse and

usual way of doing things that served no purpose other than to marginalize, exploit, and exclude an entire community of students.

### **Summary**

To launch into this introductory chapter, I first explained some history related to the DREAM Act and the student community I refer to as DREAMers so that I could set the groundwork regarding the community I built my study around. I detailed estimates as to the size of the population I am referring to as well as well as policies and executive orders introduced during past and current presidential administrations that brings us to the present situation and significant efforts to pass the current version of the DREAM Act. I then shared my context and personal and professional background as the researcher, followed by a synthesis of the problem I am studying, and the major research questions. Finally, I led into the significance of the study, common terms used throughout the dissertation, and a reflection on my subjectivity as the researcher.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

“Ya no llores llorona. Ya no llores llorona. Mi gente lucha contra ley de racistas. Contra ley de racistas en Arizona. Ay arriba y arriba. Ay arriba y arriba ire. Yo no soy de la migra. Yo no soy de la migra. Ni lo sere. Ni lo sere.”

--*La Bamba Rebelde* by Las Cafeteras

#### Introduction

The primary purpose of this study was to seek to understand the experiences of Latinx undocumented college students in the current political climate and under the current administration in terms of how their student experiences and overall wellness as Latinx undocumented students are being impacted. The study was guided by several questions: a) How do Latinx undocumented students talk about their experiences on the college campus? b) What student organizations do undocumented students select to participate in

and why? c) How do Latinx undocumented students perceive how the institution responds to issues they face due to their undocumented status? d) What type of incidents related to their identity as Latinx undocumented students have most impacted them and in what ways? And, e) How do students describe their own sense of efficacy and self-care as they navigate college within this current political climate and administration? I conducted a case study with three participants who are all from California but are residing in communities away from home, in and out of California, for the purposes of pursuing higher education. All three participants are pursuing a baccalaureate, master's, or doctoral degree respectively.

I explored literature on Latinx undocumented students as addressed in works by several different scholars such as : Daniel Solórzano (2001, 2002), Lindsey Pérez Huber (2009), William Pérez (2012), Susana Muñoz (2013), Tara Yosso (2001, 2002), and Suárez-Orozco (2013), and others. Additionally, there is much that has been written on the educational barriers for high school and college level undocumented students, campus climates students experience once in college, financial aid regarding in and out of state tuition, federal, state, and local policies and legislation, and stress as a result of immigration status among other topical areas (Martinez & Ownes, 2006; Mena, Padilla, & Maldonado, 1987; Thangasamy & Horan, 2016;). Gonzales et al. (2013) cite depression, thoughts of suicide, feelings of exclusion, migration trauma, acculturative stress, job



insecurity, and experiences with discrimination among some known causes of stress.

A fear that is evident in much of the literature is that of separation from family and possible deportation of a student's family members or the student (Abrego, 2006; Chavez, 1997). There are rich accounts of student experiences as undocumented individuals in their educational journey and testimonios<sup>7</sup> directly from these same students. Although there is some literature that does detail experiences of students "coming out of the shadows" or "outing" themselves (Huber & Malago, 2007), in my review of much of the literature on the subject and my own understanding of these students, there are additional questions that beg to be explored.

Existing literature clearly cites the stress students feel and the mental strain manifested from their undocumented status (Arbona et al., 2010; Ellis & Chen, 2009; Huber & Malago, 2007; Yakushka, 2009). Consequently, through the process of exploring existing literature, I sought to understand and draw connections between my major questions and what the literature presents.

My search for literature focused generally on a handful of particular fields of study - education, law, psychology, counseling, ethnic studies and sociology.

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<sup>7</sup> Testimonios are, according to Lindsey Pérez Huber's definition, a verbal journey of a witness who speaks to reveal the racial, classed, gendered, and nativist injustices they suffered as a means of healing, empowerment, and advocacy for a more humane present and future (Pérez Huber, 2009, p. 644).

Within my review of articles and books I used the following search terms:

Latina/o/x, Chicano/a, Mexican American, undocumented students, out of status, illegal, without papers, social capital, Critical Race & Ethnic Studies, Latin American Studies, advocacy, activism, mental health, Latino/a Critical Race Theory, student identity development, testimonios, DREAM centers/offices, student organizations. I consulted a number of journals that are prominent in presenting research on undocumented students such as *Journal of Student Affairs Research, and Practice*, *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, *Journal of Latinos and Education*, and *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*.

There were several particular areas of literature that I explored to understand how existing and emergent research shapes knowledge of the educational experiences of Latinx undocumented college students. Because of my own experiences working with undocumented students, particularly Latinx students, I saw a need to understand the state of mental health with considerations of the intersections with race and immigration status in a “#45 era” presidential administration. Although a study of immigration law in the US is beyond the purpose of this study, I do begin this review with a brief overview of U.S. Immigration Law to set a historical political context leading to the current debates about both the DREAM Act and DACA as related to this study.

I then focus on three primary areas: a) experiences of undocumented students; b) family influence on undocumented students; and, c) mental health and self-efficacy of undocumented students.

### **U.S. Immigration History**

Although U.S. immigration laws can be traced back to 1790, there are numbers of more recent major laws and/or executive orders that have importance to this dissertation study. Several reports and documents provided a chronological overview of laws related to immigration. Several sources were considered for this part of the review and include the Pew Research Center on Hispanic Trends (2015) and the Migration Policy Institutes' fact sheet referred to as *Major U.S. Immigration Laws, 1790-Present*. According to the *Pew Research Center on Hispanic Trends* (2015):

Fifty years ago (1965), the U.S. enacted a sweeping immigration law, *the Immigration and Nationality Act*, which replaced longstanding national origin quotas that favored Northern Europe with a new system allocating more visas to people from other countries around the world and giving increased priority to close relatives of U.S. residents.

Just prior to passage of the 1965 law, residents of only three countries – Ireland, Germany and the United Kingdom – were entitled to nearly 70% of the quota visas available to enter the US (U.S. Department of Justice, 1965). Today, immigration to the US is dominated by people born in Asia and Latin America,

with immigrants from all of Europe accounting for only 10% of recent arrivals (p. 1) and unspecified as to authorized or undocumented migration.

What the Pew Report points out is that since 1965, the nation's immigration population went from 85% non-Hispanic whites, with 4% Hispanic, to 18% by 2015 (p. 3). However, this trend is the result of over three centuries of political and legal actions since the U.S. Constitution gave Congress the right to establish laws related to naturalization in 1787. What follows is a brief overview of major actions since the 1920s.

1921, Emergency Quota Act – Congress' first attempt to regulate immigration by setting "quotas" based on nationality. The law limits the number of immigrants of each nationality allowed to immigrate to the United States each year to 3 percent of the number of foreign-born persons of that nationality present in the United States as of the 1910 census.

1942, Bracero Agreement – Prompted by labor shortages in the United States as a result of World War II, the United States and Mexico enter into the 1942 Bracero Agreement, allowing Mexican nationals to enter the United States to serve as temporary agricultural workers.

1952, Immigration and Nationality Act – This consolidates several immigration laws into one statute, and preserves the national origins quota system. For the first time, Asian nations are assigned quotas that allow their nationals to immigrate to the United States.

1962, Migration and Refugee Assistance Act – JFK signed into law and this authorizes funds to assist foreign nationals from the Western Hemisphere who have fled their countries of origin because of persecution or a fear of persecution on account of race, religion, or political opinion. The law was intended to assist Cuban nationals fleeing communism.

1975, Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act – Expanded the definition of the term “refugee” as defined in the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1962 to include individuals fleeing persecution or fear of persecution from Cambodia and Vietnam.

1986, Immigration Reform and Control Act – Provided for a 50 percent increase in border patrol staffing, and imposed sanctions on employers who knowingly hire or recruit unauthorized immigrants. The law also created two legalization programs.

1996, Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IRRIRA) – Added new grounds of inadmissibility and deportability, expanded the list of crimes constituting an aggravated felony, created expedited removal procedures, and reduced the scope of judicial review of immigration decisions. The law expanded the mandatory detention of immigrants in standard removal proceedings if they have previously been convicted of certain criminal offenses. It also increased the number of Border Patrol agents, introduced new border control measures, and

reduces government benefits available to immigrants among other measures.

2002, Homeland Security Act – Created the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). In 2003, nearly all of the functions of the U.S.

Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) – the Department of Justice agency responsible for provision of immigration services, border enforcement, and border inspection – are transferred to DHS and restructured to become three new agencies: US Customs and Border Protection (CBP), US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). (Migration Policy Institute, 2013)

Most recent was DACA in 2012.

While I do not even pretend to believe that I have some amazing solution to the mess that is defined by immigration policies, what is evident is that policies currently in existence and suggested policies tend to focus on the criminalization of individuals rather than a humanistic stance. Oftentimes, cases regarding undocumented individuals are filtered through criminal law even when there is no violence present in a case when in actuality most matters should be handled as civil offenses. Media we hear and read about in mainstream news outlets vilifies parents and families for their presence in the

US, particularly when people are out of status or have lost status, and for bringing family members along with them.

### **Experiences of Undocumented Students**

In Walter Nicholls' seminal publication on DREAMers, aptly titled, *The DREAMers: How the Undocumented Youth Movement Transformed the Immigrant Rights Debate*, he echoed what Gonzalez and Chavez (2013) expressed earlier as the biopolitics and governmentality of citizenship. In this instance, biopolitics and governmentality of citizenship essentially equate to the formal and institutionalized means by which individuals get their citizenship established in a location; at the very least, these are the ways in which all individuals are expected to prove their mere physical existence. The methods by which people commonly do this are by opening banking accounts, getting a driver's license or permit, or obtaining a social security card, all documents that many undocumented people generally have incredible difficulty obtaining without a recognized status in the US; thus, further perpetuating the notion of abjectivity. In the words of Gonzalez et al. (2011):

Does the undocumented status of 1.5 -generation Latinos (those who migrated at a young age) in the United States affect their political, civic, and public selves? Our approach to this question begins with a theoretical framework base on the concept of abjectivity, which draws together abject status and subjectivity. We argue that the practices of the biopolitics of

citizenship and governmentality – surveillance, immigration documents, employment forms, birth certificates, tax forms, drivers licenses, credit card applications, bank accounts, medical insurance, car insurance, random detentions, and deportations – enclose, penetrate, define, limit, and frustrate the lives of undocumented 1.5-generation Latino immigrants...The analysis shows how abjectivity and illegality constrain daily life, create internalized fears, in some ways immobilize their victims, and in other ways motivate them to engage politically to resist the dire conditions of their lives. (p.1)

In terms of undocumented college students, such laws and acts have dire consequences for undocumented Latinx students. In the words of Pérez (2014):

Caught in unfair circumstances, undocumented students – most of them coming of age in the United States – face uncertain futures, their dreams and potential thwarted by roadblocks to higher education. Undocumented students have to navigate a complex web of federal, state, and postsecondary institution policies in order to achieve a postsecondary education. The fact that they are too often locked out of colleges, universities, and other institutions of higher education is a loss not only for them but for the country as well. This lack of access to higher education means that potential entrepreneurs, highly skilled workers, and middle-class consumers and taxpayers will not be there to grow our



economy. It is up to policymakers to unblock the path to a brighter future for thousands of young, eager students and for the country as a whole. (p. xx)

Some research suggests that by students “outing” or making public their undocumented status they are engaging in a political act or resisting hurtful and limiting single-story type rhetoric by sharing a counter-narrative. Galindo (2012) referred to the 2010 national coalescence of student activism and how “this political strategy contributed to a new political subjectivity for undocumented immigrant students called “Undocumented & Unafraid” that publicly rejected the societal invisibility, silencing, and criminalization of undocumented immigrants” (p. 590). The counter-storytelling could then serve as a vehicle for emancipation from oppressive and dominant discourse (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). While the utilization of counter-storytelling is not new to the existing scholarship on undocumented students or the work of youth in the undocumented student movement, I did wonder how critical this was to pushing for changes now and in the near future considering the political climate we are in and the current presidential administration. In any case, undocumented students have been fiercely active with regards to mobilizing local and national communities and sharing their status as an act of resistance (Russakoff, 2017; Amador, 2011).

Stebbleton and Aleixo (2015) focused on the experiences of Latino/a undocumented college students and their relationships with university personnel in their article, *“Examining Undocumented Latino/a Student Interactions with Faculty and Institutional Agents.”* Through student interviews, the researchers identified three particular findings shared by all participants – student’s outing themselves, students facing some type of barrier to their participation on their campus, and a particularly significant interaction with college personnel. Similarly in Contreras’ (2009) case study, *Sin Papeles y Rompiendo Barreras: Latino Students and the Challenges of Persisting in College*, some related sentiments were mutually felt as with Stebbleton and Aleixo’s 2015 findings. In the case of students at schools in Washington State, Contreras (2009) noted, “feelings of vulnerability and unease about their legal status led students to be less open to new friendships, mentorships, and opportunities on their college campuses” (p. 11). Additionally, negative experiences with staff can cause students to second guess themselves, question benefits of pursuing higher education and sometimes be discriminatory and even threatening according to Contreras (2009).

### **Family and Community Impact on Undocumented Students**

The role that families, writ large, play in the lives of Latinx undocumented students is important. Enriquez (2011) stated, “Immigrant parents and communities have been found to transmit stronger educational values through

familialism and the collective social capital of the ethnic community” (p. 4). Latinx cultures can be collectivist and Enriquez (2011) makes this point by sharing how students have framed competing messages about individualistic and collectivist ways of being by framing social networks as families. In considering the role of family, authors Mahatmya and Gring-Pemle (2014) analyze the language used in the bill for the DREAM Act.

From mere observation, arguments for and against immigration reform have typically centered around national security and economic interests and with little or nothing to do with the subject. If you read the older or currently proposed DREAM Act bills, Mahatmya and Gring-Pemle (2014) essentially state that language used around the DREAM Act depicts students as being “American” and deserving of benefits from DREAM Act yet paints parents as being criminal or national resources rather than a family resource. Furthermore, language in favor of undocumented students tends to neglect the student’s responsibility to their family unit and this definitely works against family unity or even re-unification, which undocumented students have voiced that they have wanted all along.

Menjívar and Cervantes (2016) captured many of the difficult realities of today’s immigrant communities and following are a couple of examples. In 2013 alone, “Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) deported approximately 73,000 parents” (p. 1) and it is estimated that “25 percent of all children in the

U.S. live with at least one immigrant parent (Zong & Batalova, 2015). Here are some more sobering facts.

According to Derby (2012), “having citizen children or even being the primary provider for U.S. citizen children is little help in removal proceedings. A recent report by the NYU School of Law’s Immigrant Rights Clinic found that between 2005 and 2010, 87 percent of processed cases in New York City of individuals with citizen children resulted in deportation.” In *The Atlantic*, Richards (2017) writes, “the initial shock over [#45’s] executive orders that expand the criteria under which immigrants who entered the country illegally can be deported has given way to chronic unease.” Richards (2017) went on to tell the stories of people in different communities and how family members and kids are experiencing this current culture in the country regarding how immigrants are treated. Counselor Ginette Arguello, with Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New Orleans, was featured in Richard’s 2017 article and it was noted that she “ticks off examples of the psychological toll: increased tardiness or absences from school. Difficulty concentrating. Getting in fights at school.” The previous example is from work with youth and here is an example from the same article of Graciela, a 51-year old mother of four. “Since Trump became president, I’m so depressed. I’m eating out of control, and I wake up in the middle of the night and can’t go back to sleep. I have bags under my eyes. It’s really starting to wear on me” (Richards, 2017).

## **Mental Health and Self-Efficacy of Undocumented Students**

In Oksana Yakushko's article, *Understanding the Roots and Consequences of Negative Attitudes Toward Immigrants*, there is not a specific focus on undocumented youth or undocumented Latinx college students. Instead she provides helpful considerations regarding causes of xenophobia from the "in-group" or majority group to the "out-group" or targeted group, the impact of xenophobia and the influence of prejudice and racism among those who are xenophobic, as well as the role of mental health counselors in relation to serving various immigrant communities. According to Yakushko (2009), "an atmosphere of hostility can shape the cultural discourse on immigration and can have detrimental affects on those who are the targets of prejudice toward immigrants. Images of immigrants in the popular culture are often negative and inconsistent" (p. 50). Yakushko (2009) continues on with the statement,

The negative influence of perceived discrimination and prejudice may extend to the second generation of immigrants. For example, Hernandez (2006) found that psychological and social functioning of immigrant children and adolescents declined from first to second generation across all studied immigrant groups. It is possible that one of the explanations for this finding is related to both the racist and xenophobic environments to which immigrants are exposed in their host country. (p. 50)

Regarding the actual practice of counseling and mental health services, Yakushko (2009) encourages field colleagues to pay attention to “intersecting oppressions on immigrants of color, lesbian and gay immigrants, immigrant women, and immigrants with disabilities” (p. 51). The author further states that “immigrants are a vastly heterogeneous group, and many of their mental health needs may be best served with attention to multiple spheres of their experience, both pre-migration and post-migration” (p. 52). Yakushko (2009) posits three general areas for counselors to focus on developing: awareness, knowledge, and skills.

In, “*Awakening to a Nightmare*,” Gonzalez and Chavez (2012) focus on 1.5 generation Latino/a youth and how their status affects their civic, political, and public selves. The study focuses on surveys collected from a random sampling of 805 1.5 generation Latinos and 396 white people in the Orange County region of California. The intention of the researchers in this study was to distinguish the “contours” of the lives of undocumented immigrants. The theoretical framework these authors use is through the lens of a concept known as abjectivity. The ways in which Gonzalez and Chavez (2012) are framing their definition of abjectivity – “to cast away or to throw away” (p. 256) could be akin to contemporary understanding of *dalit* communities of South Asian countries. According to The National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, *dalits* are considered the “untouchables” of several South Asian countries like India,

Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. "One out of every six Indians is Dalit, yet due to their caste identity Dalits, regularly face discrimination and violence which prevent them from enjoying the basic human rights and dignity promised to all citizens of India." Both communities of people, undocumented people and dalits, are typically referred to as burdens on societies. Gonzalez and Chavez (2012) specifically state that, "various intersections of race, gender, sexuality, nationality, migrancy, and any number of other categories can demarcate the abject in society" (p. 256) and this too correlates to Latino/a Critical Race Theory. The authors are not only recognizing the intersections of identities within the Latino/a study participants but also how this particular community experiences these various identities along with their status as undocumented people. Furthermore, Gonzalez and Chavez (2012) address the corporeal connection of abjectivity and how said abjectivity against undocumented people creates docile bodies, though mentally and emotionally people often resist limitations placed on them by the government or the state. In the article, "*Images and Words that Wound*," Solorzano (1997) posits that CRT theorists assert that racism takes on four forms: "1. Micro and macro; 2. Institutional and individual forms; 3. Conscious and unconscious elements; 4. Cumulative impact on both individual and the group" (p. 6). I also suggest that these four forms of racism are also the multiple ways in which violence is perpetrated against undocumented people of color. I appreciate Gonzalez and Chavez (2012) naming the corporeal connection

of immigration status in connection to the overall state of being which connects the somatic and the psychological.

In "*Stress and Health: Major Findings and Policy Implications*," Peggy A. Thoits (2010) writes about research on stress that spans a 40-year period. Within her article she details the following five major findings:

First, when stressors (negative events, chronic strains, and traumas) are measured comprehensively, their damaging impacts on physical and mental health are substantial. Second, differential exposure to stressful experiences is a primary way that gender, racial-ethnic, marital status, and social class inequalities in physical and mental health are produced.

Third, minority group members are additionally harmed by discrimination stress. Fourth, stressors proliferate over the life course and across generations, widening health gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged group members. Fifth, the impacts of stressors on health and well-being are reduced when persons have high levels of mastery, self-esteem, and/or social support. (p. S41)

While in this study I am not focusing on the identity development of undocumented students or Latinx undocumented students, this is important to the ways in which students assert their agency and self-efficaciousness through a positive sense of self.



In fall of 2010, the Jossey-Bass Publishing Company released *New Directions for Student Services*, no. 131, *Understanding and Supporting Undocumented Students*. I remember being at either a NASPA annual conference or regional conference when I learned that this publication had recently become available for purchase. I was in a session that focused on undocumented students and there was a colleague who announced the availability of the book to the attendees. My excitement at learning of the volume and something internal prompted me to email the colleague I learned was involved in putting the publication together. I emailed Dr. Jerry Price, then Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and Dean of Students at Chapman University in Orange, CA. After I sent my email to Dr. Price—a colleague I have never actually met—I quickly received an email response from him thanking me for my message. In the final line of his message I read, “I am happy to send you a copy if you give me your address.” Within a week I received my copy. At the time, I was a newer student affairs professional in 2010, I distinctly remember this book being among the first I read in my field and professional community that directly and explicitly addressed service to undocumented students. For the first time in my professional life I was reading about student experiences that mirrored some of those of my own students. I was reading stories and experiences from colleagues that paralleled my own. In this regard, I did not feel lonely. I remember feeling validated—I

was not imagining things and I indeed should expect more from our field and my campus colleagues and administration.

My awareness of what was going on for my students felt like Pandora's Box had been opened. Now, over seven years later, I am going back to this and other existing literature to get a picture of what literature has said and how it has evolved over time the past several years. What questions are being asked? What is the angle that the authors or researchers are taking? How does my study address a need and an area where there is less understanding or simply a gap?

Though literature suggests and actually points to a myriad of experiences students have had, a constant fact seems to be that many students who are undocumented frequently engage in cycles of new normals all the time with regards to changes in leadership (institutional and local, state, national leaders). This way of operating does not seem so much like a choice as it does a way of life to be able to get basic needs met as well as persist in order to succeed – and maybe even survive for some. If there are newly elected local and state officials – there are always the possibilities of changes. If there is a new president – it is certain that there will be policy changes that come along with the politics of whomever is in office as well as the individuals they appoint to various key positions in their administration. Once all the participants in this study realized their status and the gravity of what that meant, all had to

continually be vigilant in some respects about how they made decisions in their daily lives.

To support this study, I found research related to Latinx<sup>1</sup> undocumented students, their activism as individual and collective entities, and the impact of their status on their mental well-being. While there exists a substantial body of literature written specifically on the experiences of Latinx undocumented students, there is not as much pointed research that explores the relationship between a college student organization which plays an advocacy role for undocumented students and how involvement of Latinx undocumented students in such an organization can promote mental health as a result of being “out”.

In particular, I view a gap in research around the experiences of students who are undocumented and possibly “out” during political climates and presidential administrations that are particularly divisive and the long and short-term impact on mental health and overall wellness. What is the psychological impact of a student’s status during presidential administrations that are particularly racist and xenophobic? What are the consequences for going back into the “closet?” How does an individual negotiate spaces given general and particular risks in various contexts? What does self-efficacy look like in a 45<sup>th</sup> era presidency?

## **Summary**

As I engaged in the process of understanding and analyzing relevant literature, four main sections emerged. The first section focused on a brief history of U.S. immigration laws to understand how as a country we have arrived at the present situation with so much attention being paid to migrants who are out of status and Latinx. Having some basic understanding of immigration history and current bills, laws, and executive orders allows us to understand the urgency and need to pass a law in favor of undocumented youth and students. Because I am interested in the wellness of Latinx undocumented college students, understanding the breadth of general experiences of students was necessary to unravel the quality of student experiences as well as the types and impact they were having on students. Next, I explored the family and community impact on undocumented students followed last by a focus on the mental health of undocumented students.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

*Tengo mi esposa y mis hijos, que me les traje muy chicos, y se han olvidado ya,  
de mi México querido, del que yo nunca me olvido, y no puedo regresar,  
De que me sirve el dinero, si estoy como prisionero, dentro de esta gran nación,  
cuando me acuerdo hasta lloro, aunque la jaula sea de oro, no deja de ser prisionero..."*  
--La Jaula de Oro<sup>8</sup> by Los Tigres del Norte

#### My Story

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<sup>8</sup> La Jaula de Oro is a well-known corrido made famous by the Norteño music group, Los Tigres del Norte. As the corrido genre typically goes, the song is a narrative of an oppressed group and on a topic that has remained socially and politically relevant more than 20 years after it was first released. The actual lyrics translate to, "I have my wife and children whom I brought at a very young age. They no longer remember my beloved México, which I never forget and to which I can never return. What good is money if I am like a prisoner in this great nation?" (Wikipedia, n.d.)

In August of 2017, I was able to visit my family in Calvillo, Aguascalientes, México after nearly 10 years away. This trip was definitely a homecoming and we – me, my mom, brother, madrina, and cousin – were treated as royalty. While I went specifically for the Silva Family Reunion, what I got in return was much more than the usual type of conversations that might be expected in catching up with familiar relatives and meeting previously unknown relatives; I learned more about family history and stories specifically about my grandma and grandpa.

As a multiracial person from a multiracial family on my mom's side, I learned of anti-miscegenation laws in the US. I am familiar with trailblazers like the Loving family who took their case as a mixed race family to the U.S. Supreme Court. What I did not know, but always wondered about, was that México had similar laws for Mexican citizens. My cousin, who I had never met or knew of before the reunion, shared a story with me of how Mexicans in México were not allowed to marry Chinese or Japanese. So, essentially what this meant for my grandparents was that their marriage would not be recognized in México since my grandma is Mexican and my grandpa is Chinese-American. The only reason why my grandparents were able to get married in México before my grandpa took my grandma to the US is because our family had a friend who was a priest and married them through the church.

My sharing of the story of how my grandparents came to be might not seem relevant to my dissertation but they very much are. You see, my grandparents' marriage was not a typical union. Both were the only children in their respective families to marry outside of their race and ethnicity and my grandma packed up her life in the only place she had ever known to marry a man from another country and completely different culture. My great-grandfather, Papá Andrés, was the only one of his eight plus siblings to not leave his hometown and México for opportunities on the other side of the border. All of his siblings either moved to northern México before moving to southern California or moved directly to southern California. Those who moved all settled around the well-known agricultural area of Imperial Valley in southern California. Knowing this part of my family's history, I have to ask why all but my great-grandfather felt the need to move across the border? Why did my grandmother feel the need to get married to a man from another culture who lived on the other side of the border? Part of what I believe was true for my grandma was that the other side of the border – or the United States – presented opportunities in her mind that she did not have before marriage, she would not have had had she not married my grandfather, and had she stayed in México.

Leaving México was hard because she was close to her family and she was the eldest. Life in the US presented challenges as well because she did not know any English when she met my grandfather, she had to put some level of trust in

this stranger she married, she had to learn about Chinese culture and dominant U.S. culture all at the same time, she moved around the US and even to the Philippines, and she raised six children. In later years she had the foresight to sponsor some of her siblings and parents through the immigration process to get tourist visas and green cards as she was able to – all to provide opportunities to her family. I keep using the term *opportunities* but really I believe it was more like that *American Dream* or *Sueno Americano* we hear of; a dream not unlike what we know many other individuals and families to be chasing who have moved from other countries to the US.

While my family's story might not sound unique, the impact that it has had on me has been profound. Knowledge of the contours and texture of their story has helped to mold my overall understanding of the complexities of migration, citizenship, and racism. The precious knowledge that I gained from my grandma's story and the close relationship I had with both of my maternal grandparents has molded my own identities. They are the reason why I spent the better part of two summers studying abroad in Guadalajara, Jalisco, México and Beijing, China. I understood the importance of taking responsibility for learning about my own cultures, especially when I strongly desired to have as strong of a connection to my roots as possible. In the process, I gained deeper understand of myself, my connection to my family, and even more insight into my family's story.



## **My Study**

For this dissertation study I conducted a qualitative case study with three student participants who attend three different universities – a mid-sized New England public liberal arts university, a large Hispanic-serving public university in central California, and a mid-sized Hispanic-serving public university in the Inland Empire of California. All student participants either previously were or currently are undocumented at the time of their interview with me.

I engaged in qualitative research utilizing a Latinx Critical Race Theory (emancipatory) framework to further explore student experiences and understand how the multidimensional context in which they exist impacted their experiences. Solórzano and Yosso's (2002) work spoke to my intentions of utilizing an emancipatory framework when they explained, "critical race researchers acknowledge that educational institutions operate in contradictory ways, with their potential to oppress and marginalize coexisting with their potential to emancipate and empower" (p. 26). My study's participants are all Latinx and undocumented. Their existence in their respective communities as well as their status as matriculated degree-seeking college students is an act of resistance; resistance in the face of systematic and institutionalized racism that Latinx Critical Race Theory seeks to reveal. Additionally, while discourse analysis is not employed in this study, the way that Lindsey Pérez Huber (2011) puts it, "...the term to describe the institutionalized ways we perceive,

understand, and make sense of the world around us. Racist nativist discourses are then, the institutionalized ways we perceive, understand, and make sense of the world around us" (p. 382). Through a series of campus visits to each of the three university campuses where each participant is currently enrolled, I conducted open-ended interviews, guided by questions, with three students who self-identify as undocumented and Latinx. I invited students to share their stories, experiences, and feelings as undocumented students within the current political and polarized climate. I gathered data through the following means: 1) in-person and phone interviews, 2) observations and memoing, and 3) document and media review.

Using case study and a narrative inquiry approach for this study allowed me to deeply understand the context in which the lives of these participants unfold and the influence on and the influence of a specific student organization at a particular university in northern New England and Southern California. As Creswell (2013) describes, "case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information..." (p. 97).

Given that the primary purpose of this dissertation was to seek to understand the experiences of Latinx undocumented college students in the current political climate and under the current administration, the focus was on

how these students' overall wellness as Latinx undocumented students is being impacted. The study was guided by several questions: a) How do Latinx undocumented students talk about their experiences on the college campus? b) What student organizations do undocumented students select to participate in and why? c) How do Latinx undocumented students perceive how the institution responds to issues they face due to their undocumented status? d) What type of incidents related to their identity as Latinx undocumented students have most impacted them and in what ways?, e) How do students describe their own sense of efficacy and self-care as they navigate college within this current political climate and administration?

A major rationale for conducting this study was to effect social change. An example of how I envision my dissertation serving as a vehicle for change in my local community is through awareness. I do not expect to change social and political leanings of people through writing this dissertation but I do believe that I have the opportunity to engage a large cross-section of my university and state community in conversations about this student community in such a way that people will at least be more informed about who this community is and dispel myths that tend to exist in the minds of many people. As a student affairs professional, I am of the belief that youth have played a significant role throughout generations of our country in leading efforts for progress and inclusion. Beyond what I think, there are abundant examples in broadcast and

print media that demonstrate the extent to which DREAMers have relentlessly protested, marched, rallied, sat-in, testified, and called in and called out leadership at a variety of levels in communities. Latinx undocumented students are no different in this regard to past generations. They are undeniably a powerful presence and source of hope in this country and in their own respective communities.

### **Methodology**

This study engaged a qualitative methodology. The factors contributing to the problem being studied, as well as the inherent complexities, necessitate both detailed accounting of the phenomenon and elucidation of those complexities inherent in the study for public consumption and greater understanding. As stated by Schwandt (2007), “To call a research activity qualitative inquiry may broadly mean that it aims at understanding the meaning of human action” (p. 248). To understand the nuances of qualitative inquiry, there should also be an examination of the major defining characteristics. Not only did the major problems identified in this study require an availing of the consequences of inaction but also on the contrary – because it provides a public platform for those Latinx undocumented students who are often relegated to second class citizens and undesirables in communities across the country. Creswell (2013) notes aptly in their definition of qualitative research that it,

...begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report of presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change. (p. 44)

In addition to Creswell's (2013) definition of qualitative research, it was important to be mindful in this type of inquiry that the process plays a significant role as well as the procedural considerations of using a particular framework from which to view the data collected. Thus, establishing trust is critical as well as establishing strong and transparent lines of communication and a tenant underlying my student.

According to Creswell (2013) there are eight overarching and significant features: "natural setting, researcher is a key instrument, multiple methods, complex reasoning through inductive and deductive logic, participants' meanings, emergent design, reflexivity, and holistic account" (pp. 45-47). These

key features help to not only position the researcher within the context of the study, but also to clarify the scope and depth of data collected, the extent to which data can be analyzed, the variety of data points that can be collected, and connect the research tradition to the framework with which the data will be connected. These features defined my research methodology as described below.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The ways that I am conceptualizing the theoretical framing of this study lie in the understanding of studies and concepts from a milieu of fields. To begin to understand the experiences of undocumented people overall, it is important to understand historical contexts and geopolitical underpinnings that created this notion of legality or illegality. We can then begin to understand how particular communities have evolved. Border politics in the context of the US and México play an integral role in how we as a country draw literal physical boundaries but also how those physical boundaries with something like a wall also lead to psychological borders. If we then consider the cultural and physical occupation of communities and individuals who populate them, we can begin to understand how physical boundaries impact one's sense of identity and place – as citizens or immigrants. The practice and protocol outlined in a study's methodological design and overall conceptual framework could be considered the backbone of research that is conducted and the map that outlines how it will be done given certain guiding principles and foundations. By incorporating Latino critical race

theory (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Huber, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1998) as a framework for this study coupled with the methods of qualitative inquiry and narrative storytelling, I was able to examine the construct of student experiences as undocumented college students within a polarizing political climate.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Wellness is a term that is included in my title for this dissertation because it was important to me to have some focus on mental health and overall well-being. Considering the real impact that undocumented status has on my study's participants, this was a necessary factor to take into consideration along with the intersection of race and ethnicity. Thoits' (2010) article provided an important backdrop of knowledge to this study along the lines of mental health from the field of sociology. My understanding of the consequences of experiences that Latinx undocumented students, as a minoritized community on the basis of race, ethnicity, and immigration status, have had and will likely continue to have has deepened. Thoits (2010) notes from various authors that, "pile-ups of stressors also produced elevated levels of psychological distress, and they also predicted onsets or recurrences of psychiatric disorders, such as generalized anxiety disorder, major depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and alcohol and substance use disorders" (Brown & Harris, 1978; Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 1974; Mirowsky & Ross, 2003b; Thoits 1983, 1995)" (p. S42). While none of my participants spoke of alcohol or substance use at all, they did communicate

varying degrees of anxiety, depression or behaviors that are common symptoms of depression, as well as factors that may align with warning signs of post-traumatic stress disorder.

### **Latino/a Critical Race Theory (LatCrit)**

The US has a long-standing history of oppressive behaviors and attitudes towards all communities of color that has thrived as racism. While racism continues today in all forms as a result of its pervasiveness in our society, studies of CRT originally emerged from legal studies in the 1980s (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Essentially, CRT claims that racism is structural, pervasive in all aspects of our society, and mostly benefits white people. While this body of research is certainly important and applicable to any studies related to the experiences of Latinx undocumented students, particularly because of the inherent racism that exists in all communities and is perpetuated by all people and those in positions of authority, it does not speak enough to the added layers of intersectionality which tend to exist in all communities when people are involved. With specific regards to Latinx undocumented students, Latino/a Critical Race Theory, or LatCrit, best captures a fuller scope of “issues often ignored by critical race theorists such as language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality” (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). Since this study touches on undocumented status as experienced by Latinx college students and outside forces that play a role in impacting mental wellness of these students, LatCrit is



an appropriate lens from which to analyze the problems that inform the study as well as all the data collected. Over a period of time in the US, history has revealed the harsh and ugly realities of how Latinx communities have been and continue to be treated. Dominant narratives have painted, with broad strokes, an image that often depicts Latinx people, including the scapegoat Mexican, not only as security threats but also as rapists, drug dealers, and cultural threats to the nation.

If by conducting this study there is to be anything learned or changed as a result, there needs to be efforts that delve deeply into the factors and root systems at play in the contexts surrounding these particular Latinx undocumented students. Not only does LatCrit serve as a tool to analyze data and comprehend student experiences throughout my inquiry, it is also a means to interrogate and unfold people's experiences with immigration, nationality, language, and racism as experienced by student participants in this study.

### **Case Study and Narrative Inquiry Methods**

This study was designed according to the tradition of case study methodology using narrative inquiry methods. To begin, it is important to first identify what a case is understood to be and why this design among many was a relevant fit for this study. Among many other considerations, there is a need to produce more literature with a focus on the mental wellness of Latinx identifying undocumented students; therefore, the cases that were identified in this study

were the student narratives. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) define a case as "...a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context. The case is, in effect, your unit of analysis. Studies may be of just one case or of several" (p. 28). Another different, yet slightly overlapping, definition is from Yin (2012) in which he describes a case as "an empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon (e.g., a "case"), set within its real-world context – especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2009, p. 18)" (p. 4). Approximately three to six students were sought to examine cases that are simultaneously connected within a similar context at the same university that they attend. This study ended up with three participants. Creswell (2013) writes about multiple cases, saying that they "offer the researcher an even deeper understanding of the processes and outcomes of cases, the chance to test (not just develop) hypotheses, and a good picture of locally ground causation" (p. 30). As Creswell (2013) further suggests, "Sampling involves decisions not only about which people to observe and/or interview but also about settings, events, and social processes. Multiple-case studies also demand clear choices about which types of cases to include" (p. 30). Having three cases in this study adds complexity in the design and implementation of the research and those considerations will be further addressed below.

Additionally, Creswell (2013) wrote about narrative research methods: "narrative inquiry research is best for capturing the detailed stories or life

experiences of a single individual or the lives of a small number of individuals” (p. 74). Considering the complicated nature of the status and experiences for each participant, I believed it was helpful that the participants coincidentally identify as undergraduate, master level, and doctorate level students. So, not only did recruiting a minimum of three participants and using narrative inquiry help to capture a variety of rich and deep data, but it also presented opportunities to collect stories that were more likely to contain a variety of factors and contexts across the lives of three participants. By listening to their voices, words, and language, I was able to capture the essence of their experiences and how their undocumented status impacts their identity and sense of efficacy in their roles on college campuses.

Now that the definition of a *case* has been established, it is important to understand why case study methods were chosen as an appropriate approach for this research project. Though some varying perspectives may exist about the validity of case study as a method and design for research, Hamel, Dufour, and Fortin (1993) rationalize utilization of case study research to “explain the social by the social” (p. 41). By this explanation from Hamel et al. (1993), the context presented in this study with students in England and California grants ripe settings with the perfect cadre of participants who have immeasurable experiences that could potentially come to light. Additionally, as the intention behind this study was not to paint broad strokes regarding universal truths or

major overarching generalizations regarding a large population of people, replication is instead a more important logic in the study. Because generalizability can be exceptionally difficult in a case study, replication, as Yin (1993) states, is what will be the aim to draw upon "...more confidence in the overall results. The development of consistent findings, over multiple cases and even multiple studies, can then be considered a very robust finding" (p. 34). On the subject of replication within the study, obtaining a participant pool of three students who were identified for minimum requirements allows for greater shared case properties and increased likelihood of study replication. Also, the case size range encouraged more opportunities for richly detailed data collection.

While the shaping of my study heavily utilized case study methodology and methods, I also incorporated narrative inquiry methods for what Creswell (2013) identified as *Defining Features of Narrative Studies*. Seven features that Creswell (2013) details are:

1. Narrative researchers collect *stories* from individual (and documents and group conversations) about individuals' lived and told experiences.
2. Narrative stories tell of individual experiences, and they may shed light on the identities of individuals and how they see themselves.
3. Narrative stories are gathered through many different forms of data, such as through interviews that may be the primary form of data

collection, but also through observations, documents, pictures, and other sources of qualitative data.

4. Narrative stories often are heard and shaped by the researchers into a chronology although they may not be told that way by the participant(s).

5. Narrative stories are analyzed in varied ways.

6. Narrative stories often contain turning points (Denzin, 1989a) or specific tensions or interruptions that are highlighted by the researchers in the telling of the stories.

7. Narrative stories occur within specific places or situations. (pp. 71-72)

Thus, through my campus visits and multiple opportunities to observe and interview my participants, a more nuanced and rich story emerged.

### **Site Selection**

As a researcher residing in and holding a professional student affairs role at a public university in Vermont, I had not necessarily viewed certain areas of New England as the most ideal region from which to attempt to recruit study participants but knowing that there are undocumented people – students – everywhere in this country, I endeavored to recruit participants. Regardless of how few students I might locate or what school they attended, all have an important story. According to United We DREAM, my state of Vermont is one of about 20 states in the country that has yet to take a declarative stance in any direction on the subject of tuition for undocumented students (United We

DREAM, 2016). Similarly, other New England states have taken a variety of positions ranging from favorable actions in support to no stance. Thus, the reason why building the study around two cases in California and one in a state in New England as there are multiple factors at play in the context of each individual case. The settings and accompanying subsettings for the study are contextually laden with factors that impacted or have the potential to impact the everyday lived experiences of undocumented Latinx students.

The selected research sites varied to include the current university campuses of each participant. There were three institutions selected for this study and a brief overview follows.

- New England University (NEU), a public liberal arts school, is on the smaller end of being mid-sized with an overall student population (undergraduate and graduate) of approximately 12,000. NEU is considered to be among the most expensive public universities for out-of-state students and is also among the nation's universities with the highest annual tuition rate. The overall domestic student of color population hovers around 11% while the Latinx population is about 4.5%, the largest community of color at NEU. NEU is considered a predominately white school and is centered in a state that is among the top whitest states in the country. NEU and the state in which it is located have no particular policies in favor or against undocumented students. NEU's president has issued statements to the campus community in support of students

with DACA, post-#45 and rescission of DACA, but the actual university has not changed any policies in support of undocumented students in general even though undocumented students can be admitted into the university.

Additionally, NEU does not have any particular aid available to undocumented students. The state, similar to NEU, has not made policy changes or adopted any laws in favor of undocumented students or youth. Undocumented students in this state pay the in-state tuition rates and receive no state aid.

- Inland Empire University (IEU), located in the Inland Empire of southern California, is a large mid-sized university with just over 23,000 undergraduate and graduate students. According to the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) 2017 Fact Sheet, as a member institution IEU is designated as one of the 288 Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI) in the continental US and Puerto Rico with a “Hispanic or Latino” population of 40%. Nationally, there are actually 472 schools that have met the designation for enrollment as federally recognized HSIs. One of the qualifications to receive the designation of HSI is to have at least 25% full-time enrollment of “Hispanic” identifying undergraduate students (Hispanic Association of Colleges & Universities, 2017). Behind the Latinx student population at IEU, Asians are at 34.2%, whites at 12%, Black or African American at 3.6% and Two or More Races at 5.7%. As part of a larger system organization in the state of California, IEU has policies and practices in place to support undocumented students since

students can be admitted, and receive institutional and state aid among other considerations. IEU also has an undocumented student center with a fulltime staff member in place. Undocumented students who have established residency in California may qualify for AB 540 and the California DREAM Act.

- Central University (CU) is located in a coastal area of California and is a larger mid-sized university with about 23,000 students, including graduate students. This university is considered among the top public universities in the country and has the federal designation of HSI, with about 27% identifying along the Latinx spectrum. CU is part of a system of other universities and all campuses have undocumented services. CU has a staffed undocumented student center.

Each location had multiple variables at play such as: geographic location in New England and California, student composition of the university, type of university and more. The school in New England, which shall be referred to as NEU, is considered a predominately white institution (PWI), while both schools in California, which shall be known as CU and IEU, are classified as Hispanic-serving institutions. Though all three participants are/were students at an HSI, I selected participants who contacted me directly stating their interest in participating in my study and their meeting of my established criteria.

### **Population and Sampling**



This research endeavored to examine collective cases as a phenomenon experienced by undergraduate and graduate level students who are “out” in some form on their campuses in a student organization loosely defined. Thus, the units of analysis in this study include, but are not limited to, the “out” undocumented Latinx students who were vetted as participants. Participants for on-campus interviews were identified based on self-selection and direct contact with me via email, phone, or text to my personal phone number. I reached out to colleagues or students I know at multiple schools and asked if they would mind sending my recruitment flyer over their listserv or organization’s email list. The plan for recruitment of participants for on-campus interviews began November 2016 and continued into January 2017. The recruitment flyer included a brief researcher bio, information regarding the study, minimum requirements for participation and general questions that would be asked in the initial screening. For the students who agreed to be interviewed, I immediately sent them an email with the questions so that they were aware of some of the questions I planned to ask beforehand. The email included the Research Information Sheet that I went over with them when the interview took place and they were able to read ahead of time. I went through the information sheet before the interview began and before I asked for their verbal consent. I also asked the student to participate in the interview from a private location so that I could protect their anonymity and confidentiality.

All correspondence sent to recruit possible study participants included in the communication was a brief researcher bio. Each study participant was given an informational sheet that detailed who was conducting the study, researcher bio, the purpose of the study, and some general questions or prompts to expect to be asked. There was research protocol detailing the general format of the interviews and how information would be stored securely to ensure confidentiality, participant rights, a confidentiality statement, and possible associated risks as a result of participating in the study. Once all the specifics of the study and interview were shared, the participant was asked to verbally consent to the participation agreement; leaving as little evidence of their participation in my study given the sensitive nature of the subject matter and their vulnerable status. Within the transcription and body of the dissertation, a pseudonym was assigned to protect anonymity of each participant as well as that of the student organization or groups they may have been associated with as well as that of their university.

I fully recognized that the group of students for whose participation I sought for this study are categorized as a vulnerable population, because of immigration status, so I was fully aware of the need to protect confidentiality of participants as well as their anonymity within all written text.

I began by soliciting student participants by sending a recruitment flyer over a listerv at NEU. The Research Protections Office at The University of

Vermont (UVM) approved my protocol, which included this school. By sending the recruitment flyer at NEU, certain community members were inspired to share it in other communities and a handful of recipients asked me if students on their campuses qualified. If I received any communication from potential participants, I responded immediately and went through the screening process. The three participants in this study went through the same process regardless of where they live and attend school.

I was contacted by each of the three participants via text message to my personal phone and/or email to my UVM address. In my initial response to all participants via phone call, text, or email, I had each individual read through each question via email or went through each question verbally over the phone to obtain a direct and clear response to each question. All three selected participants responded affirmatively to each criterion questions. All individuals who contacted me expressing interest in participating in my study were asked the same standard screening questions. Two students contacted me from NEU about their interest in the study but I had to deny participation based on the fact that both were either born in the US or became a naturalized citizen. The three remaining participants met the screening requirements based on responses to the following four questions:

1. How old are you today?
2. Are you enrolled as a fulltime student at (name of school)? (yes or no)

3. How do you identify yourself? Latina/o/x, Hispanic, Chicana/o/x, mixed race with any of the aforementioned identities, or with a Latinx ethnicity like Mexican, Honduran, Brazilian, Dominican, etc. (student can identify themselves)
4. How do you identify your immigration status? undocumented, without papers, out of status, having DACA, etc.

All study participants were enrolled full-time at their respective university. Students who self-identify both as Latina/o/x, Hispanic, Chicana/o, mixed race with any of the aforementioned identities or with their ethnicity and also as being undocumented, without papers, out of status, or having DACA were selected. I identified three student participants. I refer to these participants using the pseudonyms Luna, Gaviota, and Miguel.

### **Data Collection**

In case study data collection, Yin (2012) refers to the importance of gathering six sources of information. These sources are: “direct observations, interviews, archival records, documents, participant observation, and physical artifacts” (Yin, 2012, p. 10). In order to collect a rich variety of data that can begin to address the major questions being explored in this study, the means of data collection were individual, one to two-hour interviews on-campus where each student participant who had met the requirements and agreed to participate in the study met me at a private office, meeting room, or personal apartment. After

the first interview, I transcribed the data and then later conducted a second interview with Luna and Miguel. I was unable to get a second interview with Gaviota despite attempts to do so.

**Interviews.** All interviews included several semi-structured, open-ended questions that were meant to elicit insight into the lives of these individual students. I met with each student on their campus. Both of Luna's interviews took place in her apartment, Gaviota's took place in a meeting room inside a residential building on campus, and Miguel's was in an office inside a residential hall. In total, interviews lasted nearly 6.5 hours. Luna's were the longest at 2.09 and 1.37 hours respectively. Miguel's lasted 1.12 and 32 minutes and Gaviota's was 50 minutes. I recorded the interviews and paid for transcribing services from two local individuals who signed the confidentiality agreement beforehand. The transcriptions were shared with the participants for checking accuracy as recorded. As the research process with these students occurred, all students were given an assigned pseudonym as a safe guard to protect their identity. Additionally, their school name and any other identifying information was not shared with others nor included in the final research report. All data collected was kept on my personal computer, which requires a passcode. My computer remained in my home or in my physical possession at all times. There was no threat of others accessing my computer in my home.

**Observations.** Yin (2012) writes about the importance of observation and

the connection to the sensory experiences as a “distinctive feature” of case studies. This way of engaging in the research invited a deep and critical portrait of the story being captured as well as an understanding of the context and how present factors played into the lives of the cases. For these reasons, writing memos was important in the process as a way of documenting the personal experiences of being an observer but also of catching the details and essence of what can only be explained, if not experienced firsthand. I maintained these memoirs of my observations and crafted a mini portrait of each participant within the institution in which they are students. These images added to the “text”, thus allowing me a deeper understanding and perspective of who they are, their experiences, and how they situate themselves as undocumented students.

Due to the nature of the major questions being asked in this study and how they were asked, the variety of data collected was congruent with the overarching study questions. Ultimately this scholarship should enhance support systems in higher education that can lead to the success of students. Qualitative accounts of student experiences in combination with supporting literature and the overall types of data collected will hopefully not only appeal to people’s hearts and minds but also a greater sense of urgency in the call to rectify this situation that has been negatively impacting the wellness and success of our nation’s undocumented college students for so long. Table 1 presents the

interview data collection processes.

Table 1

*Interview Data Collection*

Questions	Type of Data	Method
Q1. How do Latinx undocumented students talk about their experiences on the college campus?	Qualitative	Interview, Open-ended
Q2. What student organizations do undocumented students select to participate in and why?	Qualitative	Interview, Open-ended
Q3. How do Latinx undocumented students perceive how the institution responds to issues they face due to their undocumented status?	Qualitative	Interview, Open-ended, Observation, Memoing, Document/Media
Q4. What type of incidents related to their identity as Latinx undocumented students have most impacted them and in what ways?	Qualitative	Interview, Open-ended, Document/Media Analysis
Q5. How do students describe their own sense of efficacy and self-care as they navigate college within this current political climate and administration?	Qualitative	Interview, Open-ended

## **Analysis of Data**

Through holistic analysis of the data collected, the entirety of each distinct case was examined individually as well as the multi-bounded cases collectively for deeper meaning. Both Yin (2012) and Miles et al. (2014) assert the value in having at least three independent measures of data; this allowing for means to assess how data may match or be contradictory in the data pool. Also, through the collection of multiple data points, this helped to garner information that drew deeper understanding of student experiences, built confidence in findings, and allowed for opportunities to employ analysis through the lens of LatCrit and discourse analysis. This was imperative to determining possible findings from the data and also for comparisons with what literature suggested or claimed. In the case study tradition of research, triangulation plays a significant role in the manner in which the data collected is analyzed and thus the significance of having multiple forms of data. This is an accepted practice in case study research due to the need to ensure validity as well as have a system established that allows determination of converging lines of evidence when it comes time to declaring findings. Thus my interviews, observations, and document/media review met that criteria.

As far as actual analysis of data is concerned, once all data was transcribed, each individual interview transcriptions were sent to each respective



participant to confirm accuracy. The content from all interviews was read both individually and also compiled by question to compare responses under each question. These were multiple opportunities to read data for themes, contrasting and comparing responses, and completely new connections to the topic that may not have been previously understood or extracted from review of the literature. Since I combed through data utilizing discourse analysis and a lens of LatCrit, this also lent itself to particular findings and connections to the data.

Aside from consideration of the major study questions, I engaged in analytic memoing as a practice to engage as a researcher with the data myself. As Corinne Glesne (2011) posits, “it is particularly important to capture these analytic thoughts when they occur...If you wait until the end to write, your work will not be as rich, thorough, and complex as it would have been otherwise” (p. 189). Miles et al. include in their publication a useful list of topical areas to consider in memoing as a way of “sense-making.” Some examples of the suggested topics to contemplate are: code choices, emergent patterns, categories, themes, concepts, theory, problems in the study, and future directions for the study. I anticipated defining coding by thought unit rather than single words. Once I read through the data I determined what codes, a-priori or in vivo, would be assigned to thoughts. The multiple coding cycles allowed for varying types of codes to emerge as well as organizational methods to gain a big picture and

narrower close-up view of data that was collected and associated definitions that were both a priori and in vivo.

### **Delimitations**

Earlier in this dissertation I stated what research I would be doing and why. What that did not include was rationale as to why this study does not focus on other aspects of Latinx undocumented college students. The focus is on mental health because in much literature on undocumented students it does not appear there is as much a focus on the psychological well-being or overall wellness of “out” undocumented students as it relates to their involvement in a student organization or environments, and benefits or challenges of certain climates, cultures, and values within an institution of higher education,

Research already establishes the fact that stress is felt by many of these students every day (Arbona et al, 2010; Derby, 2012; Gonzales et al, 2012). What research does not say is how lack of mental health or poor quality mental health serves as a detriment or barrier for these students. By examining the multiple cases shared above and the context in which they all exist there is data to explore what mental health looks like in and out of the organization.

A case can easily be made to focus on some aspect of the students lived experiences in college – funding for higher education, graduation rates, experiences in classroom settings with peers and faculty, career development and career advising opportunities, and local, state, and national politics and

policies. While any number of these factors might be sources of stress for many undocumented students, they do not actually capture how the stress manifests itself in the students. Does the student feel paranoid about others knowing about their status? Has the student had suicidal thoughts as a result of their undocumented status? How does stress as a result of immigration status impact self-worth and self-esteem? How does self-efficacy factor into the lives of these students? These questions are not directly addressed by much of the available literature yet they are critical questions that should be understood if we – in higher education and as a society – wish for the success of our pupils in K-20. Thus, deep engagement in qualitative semi-structured interviews provided the most helpful data needed to address my research questions.

Case study methodology and some narrative inquiry methods were selected, as opposed to other qualitative or quantitative methodology and methods, because I do not think that other methods quite allow me, the researcher, to get into the student's narratives. As a research method, Marshall and Rossman (2011) essentially state that case study methods aim to explore the environmental factors in the context of the setting and require "immersion in the setting and rests on both the researcher's and the participants' worldviews" (p. 93).

### **Trustworthiness and Dependability**

Arguably, two of the more critical aspects of any study are the dependability and trustworthiness of both the researcher and research. Both attributes invite comportment from the conception of the study to publication that is not only ethical but also considerate of the integrity of participants and process that must exist and remain present throughout the study. As research typically involves some level of interaction with human subjects, the relationships are also an integral part of the success of a study.

Even though there is much more to a study than data collected and coding of said data, Miles et al. suggest several factors that should be considered when evaluating the dependability of researchers and methods. Some notable points are: “the researcher’s role and status have been clearly described, findings show meaningful parallelism across data sources, there are quality checks, data is collected across full range of settings, and external review from a peer or colleague are in place” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 312). Yin (2012) might also suggest that an additional aspect of dependability would be in the replication of the study. To build onto what has been written of dependability, Saldaña (2016) lists seven personal attributes that researchers should possess and goes on to mention how helpful these can be to the coding process. Saldaña (2016) claims that the researcher should: “be organized, exercise perseverance, deal with ambiguity, exercise flexibility, be creative, be rigorously ethical, and have an extensive vocabulary” (pp. 38-39). Thus, in this study, this is what I endeavored to do.

## **Summary**

This chapter presented the methodology for this qualitative study about the mental health and well-being of undocumented students at three universities. The research questions and research design were presented. The population, site selection, data collection, and data analysis were discussed in this chapter. A discussion of trustworthiness and attention to human subjects/IRB compliance issues were also provided.

## CHAPTER 4

### REFLECTIONS, PROFILES, AND FINDINGS

El mojado tiene ganas de secarse. El mojado está mojado por las lagrimas que bota la nostalgia. El mojado, el indocumentado. Carga el bulto que legal no cargaría, ni obligado. El suplicio de un papel lo ha convertido en fugitivo. Y no es de aquí por que su nombre no aparece en los archivos y es de allá.

--*El Mojado* by Ricardo Arjona

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter you will gain further insight into my perspectives and experiences as the researcher in this study. I have included reflections from my travel to southern California as well as the intimate time I spent in interviews with participants in New England and California. To better understand each participant and the contexts within which each are situated, I developed a participant profile for each student to help bring light to their story as they narrated it in their own words. Though I was ultimately unable to get a second interview with Gaviota scheduled, she did share helpful information from our first meeting that I felt was enough to include in a profile and be included among the data that was utilized for this study. From these profiles I then detailed how the data was coded and what themes emerged from the multiple rounds of analysis. I included a table to reference both the codes and associated themes. Under each separate theme, I highlighted direct quotes from participants to verify how the participants' experiences related and how I understood the relationship to be between participant experiences and theme as well as existing

literature. Finally, as a summative process, I determined my findings, which are detailed at the end of the chapter.

### **Researcher's Reflections**

By the tone and stances of #45, one would never know that he grew up in the densely populated, multicultural, multiracial New York City. It is like #45 has had his head buried in the sand since coming out of the womb. My feelings about #45 caused me to reflect deeply on the relevance and sensitive nature of my study. Because of how my participants identify themselves and the sensitive nature of the topic, I could not help but feel compelled to visit the Los Angeles area and spend time in person with two of my participants. While none of the participants are actually in the LA area, my brother is based there so I used his home as my landing pad. I wanted to meet participants and familiarize myself with their contexts, or at least what was possible in a day-long campus visit to two universities. The subject matter for which I was seeking to engage with my study participants was far too personal and likely carried substantial emotional baggage and difficulties – how could I not honor these individuals by spending some time in-person with them in their own communities.

My brother fortunately and conveniently lives in a neighborhood in LA called Mar Vista. It is a lovely little multicultural barrio that neighbors Santa Monica and Culver City. I would venture to say that his general area is mixed as far as racial and ethnic composition and income. While I would not go so far as

to say that it is an area that is home to folks that are on the more working class spectrum of income, I would say that visually it is pretty symbolic of the diversity and rich communities of color that the greater LA and state of California are known for. I cannot walk out of my brother's house or cruise around his neighborhood without seeing all kinds of people of color who assume a range of roles in the community – soccer coaches, business owners, my brother and his office mates at a marketing agency, friendly Target cashiers, professors, elected officials, people's nannies, and so much more. As I visited my brother's most recent place of employment in a swanky area of West Hollywood, I drove through Beverly Hills and passed the construction site for the newest Waldorf Astoria in that area. As I neared my brother's office, I stopped at traffic lights in front of other high-end brand name businesses and boutiques along the way. While I loved my time with Aaron, I could not help but feel internal tension from what I was observing. People who I presumed to be Latinxs were hustling everywhere.

The *paletero* was selling the delicious frozen treats on the corner to customers working in the area and pushing his small but heavy freezer on wheels from corner to corner and sidewalk to sidewalk as the bell announced that he was nearby. The man standing all day at the fruit cart, ready to cut up any variety of fresh chilled tropical fruits that customers want, was awaiting business and perhaps an opportunity to please people's palates in hopes of



building customer loyalty and thus a successful business. The presence of these familiar sights is not new to me or many people in that community but they were so limited in proximity to the glitz of Beverly Hills and Hollywood while being so far away.

As I neared my brother's office passing down Santa Monica Boulevard, in a span of less than three miles one could notice the drastic differences in spaces and those inhabited by people of color and the working class. The Latinos working at the construction site for the now completed Waldorf Astoria seemed uninvited in ways outside of their work on the construction area. To my bigger point, how is it that a place like LA, where such vast arrays of cultural diversity and myriads of lived realities exist, can be true for so many but totally voided, invisible, unfamiliar, and unappreciated by our current administration? #45 was in his ivory, or probably gold encrusted, tower above the New York City skyline and maybe even the heavens. It is almost inconceivable that we have a president who is so out of touch with the realities of most folks from his own country and city. To think that anyone would feel anything but appreciation for the hard work of a particular community like Latinx people in a locale such as Los Angeles or New York City is embarrassing. The expectation of having a president and presidential administration that is so disconnected from certain communities like Latinxs and undocumented students is not okay. Perhaps we should not be surprised since this is the same president who showed his bias

towards Mexican immigrants, like my family, my friends, and my students from the earliest moments of his campaign.

In a January 29, 2017 New York Times article Dale Russakoff wrote, “Trump had mobilized anti-immigrant anger in large swaths of the country, having kicked off his campaign criticizing Mexican immigrants – They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists.” – and vowing to build a wall on the border to keep them out. In stump speeches, he promised to deport all 11 million undocumented immigrants and, in his first 100 days in office, to terminate DACA, labeling it “illegal amnesty” (Russakoff, 2017).

He does not have the capacity to care about others nor the desire to complicate his thinking about who these communities are – who the people are.

Furthermore, the language he uses, aside from being inflammatory, is also generally lazy, reckless, and erroneous. #45’s use of language in reference to DACA, calling it “illegal amnesty,” is incorrect. DACA has never been an amnesty measure. No one with DACA is pardoned or forgiven for their lack of status in the US. Since DACA is temporary reprieve from deportation, it is still understood that a person who has been granted deferred action is still in line for deportation, only maybe not as immediately as others without DACA. Also, DACA is not an executive order that has anything to do with obtaining citizenship in this country.

As I prepared myself mentally for my three interviews and considered how I wanted to create a comfortable and safe experience for each participant in my study, I was also considering the state of politics in this country and what was going on from the time I began communication with each participant in late fall 2016/early spring 2017. This helped me to thoughtfully consider what the context might be like for each participant as well as develop general questions and specific questions that might have been relevant to all participants or individual participants.

### **Participant's Spaces**

**Luna's Space.** As Luna's interview approached, she decided that she was comfortable having the interview in her apartment and wanted me to go there so that she could make breakfast for us. On Saturday, March 25, 2017, I traveled to Luna and when I arrived at her apartment she greeted me at the front door. I walked into her apartment and smelled her version of huevos rancheros. I proceeded to follow her into the kitchen where there was a dining table off to one side of the room. I put my bag down near the table and sat where I could watch her finishing breakfast preparations. She asked, "Do you like coffee or water?" I said that coffee is good so she then proceeded to serve me. Shortly after serving the coffee I was asked if I like huevos estrellados (eggs sunny side up) to which I said yes. Luna cracked two eggs for me and soon breakfast was served hot and

fresh. This was such a warm and hospitable gesture from Luna. We ate and spoke for a good hour and a half before I actually started the interview.

While Luna finished breakfast, I walked around her kitchen and living room space to see the various pictures around, small things to read like affirmations and poems as well as various cultural relics. If we were perfect strangers, I would have gathered that Luna is very connected to her family and finds a connection with La Virgen de Guadalupe. She later confirmed both of my observations to be accurate.

Luna and I have a pre-existing relationship so the visit to her home and our conversation was comfortable and partly familiar. Before I officially began the interview, she stopped me from recording to ask me how honest she should be. I encouraged her to be as honest as she felt comfortable being. I told her that I did not want her to tell me anything that she thought I wanted to hear and that this interview was not about me. Also, I told Luna I was hoping for honesty – even if she thought it might have made me feel uncomfortable.

Once I explained my operating definition of self-efficacy, my first question regarding self-efficacy and engagement in politics received a long thoughtful response. Luna immediately referenced differences in behavior and feelings between the Obama administration and the Trump administration. There were multiple points she mentioned in her response including this feeling of being *cursed* and *blessed*. When Luna eventually got to these feelings of being cursed

and blessed, this is when she first started to get emotional and eventually tears began to fall. She got emotional on multiple occasions in our first interview and while I anticipated this happening, my heart was heavy for her even though I was still listening intently and writing notes. The first interview with Luna lasted for two hours and nine minutes.

After Luna's first interview, I visited two of the participants' campuses in California and I made it a point to wander onto different parts of campus. I wanted to get a feel of each campus and community in which I was situated – who was there, what I could see, who I could see, what I heard, what I smelled. I sought to understand the sensory experience, if you will. I loved the opportunities I had in all locations to wander and just be curious and observant while not knowing anyone and attempting to fit in. I conversed and participated when necessary but mostly kept to myself and did not announce my presence nor the specific purpose of my visit. I made it a point to visit the epicenter of both campuses – the student centers. It was in these student centers that I explored what might have been available for undocumented students. Were there fliers for programs and guest speakers? Were there student services that targeted undocumented students? Were there student organizations that were leading conversations and collective actions in support or opposition to undocumented students? I also visited the spaces that were created specifically for undocumented students.

In the fall of 2017, I met with Luna in-person for a second round interview. We once again met in her apartment but this time I treated her to breakfast. We ate together and she seemed happy for me to see what she had done with her apartment as she had moved since we last met. For this interview, Luna was sitting deeply in her feelings as she had the first time we met. As I learned from Luna at least six months before, her status changed so we had some catching up to do. Shortly after our first interview, Luna made the decision to get married to her long-time partner. She got married civilly and a very short time after that was contacted by USCIS to have her interview to obtain her green card, which states her status as conditional residency. Fortunately for Luna, and despite the stressful anticipation of her interview and fate of her status being in the hands of one stranger, she was approved. I recall the brief message she sent me like it was yesterday – “I was approved” – along with a picture of her smiling face and the document to confirm this.

As I got into the interview questions, Luna’s excitement was evident in her responses and spirit. I believed this to be from the possibilities available to her with a change in immigration status. She can consider a job anywhere now – any state, any school, any country. She traveled to México this past summer with some family after years of having to watch relatives cross over without her. In December 2017, Luna had been planning to visit México City with her immediate family for the first time since she had left over 16 years earlier. Rather

than being concerned about getting detained traveling anywhere, she was able to focus on connecting and re-connecting with family and friends, eating all the food she had missed from her childhood, and dancing to all the music she would hear as she made her way around her birth country.

**Gaviota's Space.** It was a Wednesday when I went to CU. This is where I was scheduled to meet with Gaviota. I remember getting off the highway and driving into an older part of the city. It was nestled against mountains on one side and the other side you could see the Pacific Ocean in the near distance. It was beautiful. Though beautiful, you could see the influence of the Spanish colonizers in the architecture of buildings sprinkled with Mexican restaurants. Once I finished cruising around, I eventually made my way to campus. The parking lot was conveniently located near the student center and the building where I would later in the day hold a participant interview. As soon as I entered the parking lot, I could hear the constant thud of a bass line and once I got out of my car, I heard the sweet familiar sound of a Bachata song being played over a speaker in the center of campus. I made my way towards the music and to my surprise and excitement I saw all these tents lined up down a center walkway/courtyard where student organizations were tabling. I do not quite remember why this was happening but it was convenient for me. I also immediately heard Spanish language being spoken by Latinx students and many brown faces. It was glorious! Next to one of the Latinx student organization

tables was a stand where a gentleman was selling *raspados, esquites, mangoneadas, aguas frescas* and all sorts of other common Mexican snacks. I felt like I was in heaven but really it was just another usual Wednesday on this campus with a very present and active Latinx student body. As I made my way up to the table to order my *mangoneada*, I was happy to hear that the gentleman behind the stand was speaking to me in Spanish. As a Spanish speaker myself, I happily responded to him in Spanish. We ended up getting into a conversation and he shared that this was his business and that the Latinx student organizations helped sponsor him to be a vendor on campus. I left a happy customer and went about my business in the student center, which was nearby. As I entered the building it seemed like a hub for student activity. There was soft seating and comfortable work spaces on all three levels of the building. Mixed throughout the building were identity centers, various student services offices, and the office for the director of the undocumented student center. I happened to run into an acquaintance from when I worked in Texas that I did not even know worked at this school. When I mentioned that I was just there to visit campus and see if I could visit the undocumented student center, she offered to take me upstairs to introduce me to the director, if she was available, as well as walk with me a short way across campus to the undocumented student center. I took her up on her offer and since the director was in a meeting we went to the center instead. Once we arrived at the building I noticed that the door only had card swipe access and



my acquaintance actually knocked on the door to ask if we could enter. There happened to be two students in the center and she explained that we were wondering if we could just tour the space and the students gave their permission.

The center was small but felt warm and was simply decorated. The room you enter into was large and open with walls adorned by student art and posters by known artists and community activists like Favianna Rodriguez and Julio Salgado. There were a couple of areas of soft seating, and when I entered the room there was one student napping on a long sofa. In one far corner of the room there were also some tables for students to work at as well as a flat screen television. The adjoining room was a multipurpose room with a small kitchenette and a long table and chairs surrounding it. I walked through the space briefly and said hello to the two students in the center. I walked around the main space because there was more to see up on the walls like the art but also fliers and printed materials on tables. I picked a few fliers and noticed that this center had some of the same fliers and pamphlets as the other university I visited. It was good to see that they had some of their own unique services and opportunities to offer that were different from the other campus or campuses I have learned about online. To me, this said that they were considering their own population. One of the fliers I took had information about a summer internship program specifically for in-state students who had already filed their application

for the CA DREAM Act. This school was offering four \$1,500 scholarships for undocumented students who demonstrated financial need. The final bit of information I took was created by a South Asian organization and was a guide for sharing reports of raids on social media. The document focused on the types of enforcement activity, what to do if you personally witness an immigration raid, arrest or related incident, what to do if a report is verified, how to support verification efforts, and the dangers of unverified reporting.

After having a brief experience on Gaviota's campus and walking around to visit various spaces and gather information, I was ready to interview Gaviota by mid-afternoon.

Earlier in the week, I remember beginning to feel nervous as my flight's departure neared to leave Vermont for California. I think it was perhaps due to the newness of people whose time I was taking to ask about their own lives. I was wondering how it would feel to have Gaviota arrive for an interview with me—a person she does not know. I saw her walking down the hall towards the room that was reserved for me. Of course she looked like a normal college student. She wore a dark fitted shirt with skinny jeans and maybe Chucks. Her hair was pulled back, and I could see someone who appeared to be confident. As she approached me I said her name and she responded affirmatively. I extended my hand to shake hers and welcomed her into the room. I then asked her to take a seat wherever she felt comfortable. Though the building was unfamiliar to

both of us, I tried to create a space where there was privacy from the outside windows and the window panel within the room's door. I explained my process to protect privacy and confidentiality and she just went with the flow. If Gaviota was nervous she had me fooled. For being perfect strangers she seemed comfortable and confident. Gaviota mentioned to me as I was closing the door that she was called into work and had to leave a little early for her 4pm shift when our interview began at 3pm. I tried to jump into the interview protocol quickly yet thoroughly so that we did not rush during the actual interview. I asked her to begin by sharing some general biographical information of herself – where is home, who comprises her family, major, when she came to US, etc. Gaviota did not ever seem to hesitate to share.

As I know myself, and what I want to convey to anyone who might read this dissertation, Gaviota is as ordinary a college student as any one of her peers. She has this identity because of her immigration status, and if I did not know her status, I would never have suspected that she is marked with the label that some in this country would have us believe equates to criminality, illegality, and inferiority all because she does not have the right papers.

These were some initial thoughts before, during, and after my interview with Gaviota. She was the second interview among all three participants but the first in California. The next day, Thursday, I was anticipating traveling to the Inland Empire to interview the third and final study participant, Miguel.

**Miguel's Space.** Miguel, a first-year doctoral student at a university in IEU of California, was my final participant interview. I was fortunate to find a program on Miguel's campus the same day as the interview. Since his campus has an undocumented student center, I ventured online a few days before we were scheduled to meet to see if there were any scheduled programs that were open to the community. Luck has it that I happened to find a schedule of programs that were taking place during the month of April and one happened to be the day we were planning to meet. I purposely arrived at campus mid-morning so that I could park my rental, figure out where I was on campus in relationship to the building where I was to meet Miguel for the interview, and just sit myself somewhere to do some writing. I was able to walk around to see most areas of campus, meet a friend and colleague at the career center, and attend the panel that day that I later learned Miguel would be on. Having this time on campus allowed me the opportunity to experience a moment of what campus life was like. It was a total sensory experience. I tried to be as quiet and unassuming as possible. I wanted to avoid mention of who I was and why I was on campus. I wanted to fit in. I sat in different areas near the student center where there were these nice tables with umbrellas. The sun of southern California seemed to be enjoyed by many students and staff members as all areas where I sat were bustling with activity. I enjoyed just being able to blend in – I literally blended in because there were so many people of color from all shades

of the melanin rainbow that I saw all day and everywhere on campus. I literally had to work to identify people who appeared to be white. What a different experience for me coming from a state that is typically tied with Maine as being the whitest state in the country. I happen to live in the most racially and ethnically diverse place in the state of Vermont, but it is relative considering how small and white Vermont is. I was not made to feel different or special or obvious on this campus and it was great. I was normal!

As the day carried on, it was eventually time for the student panel I mentioned Miguel would serve on. The program focused on the experiences of Latinx undocumented graduate students and their journeys into graduate programs. The format for the program was a panel of about five then-current graduate students in master's and doctorate level programs at the university. All shared candid experiences of being undocumented graduate students on that particular campus as well as their successes and challenges with regards to their status. One colleague that I knew on this campus was also at the program and introduced me to the director of IEU's undocumented student center. Sonia, as I will refer to the director of the center, invited me for a visit to the center.

When I walked into the center with Sonia I remember thinking of how packed the space was with students even though it was literally a tiny office that felt like a shoebox. The director's office barely fit a desk and chairs but did not stop her from being busy meeting with students. The reception and lounge area

were not much larger – fitting just two small couches, a computer and printer, and a small residence hall-style fridge. The student receptionist shook my hand and asked if I wanted a tour. I accepted their invitation even though I could have spun in a circle and seen the entire space. They helpfully shared the mission of the space, what was available for use, and some of the programs and services they offer as a center. Other students immediately greeted me and introduced themselves. They expressed their curiosity around my visit and asked my name. I engaged in some general conversations. As I wrapped up my visit to the center, I took notice of how the space was organized, what students were in the center, where it was situated on campus, and what media was posted around the center in the way of art and information. Before I left, I picked up some of the printed materials that were on the front desk.

The materials I took were a small folded wallet-sized KNOW YOUR RIGHTS guide created by the larger educational system the school is part of and included practical information regarding constitutional rights if asked about immigration status, if an enforcement officer comes to your home (including apartment or dorm for students), and if you are taken into custody. There was also a script on the back of the guide that stated specific language to use in the event that you are stopped by an immigration enforcement officer or police officer. Additionally, I picked up a quarter sheet flier with May Day 2017 March details for that local community as well as a packet from the Immigrant Legal

Resource Center (ILRC) for a Family Preparedness Plan. The ILRC Plan walked individuals through a comprehensive plan that is focused specifically on immigrant and mixed status families in the event that there is an emergency or some unexpected incident. The plan details steps to gather important information and create a file of information and documents. Prompts ask for such information as school name, address, and teacher's name, allergies, medical conditions, emergency contacts, parent names and contact information, place of employment, what family and emergency contacts should do if you are detained by ICE, make of vehicle, and consulate phone number among other prompts. Finally, there is a caregiver's authorization affidavit form, a list of particular documents to be stored in a file, information regarding immigration options, and knowing your rights in case you are stopped or detained by ICE. This was helpful information to learn of as it connected to some of the data obtained throughout my interviews.

Before the interviews took place, I suspected that certain questions I prepared to ask participants would illicit some range of emotions and quite possibly sadness and tears. An aspect of all three interviews that stands out vividly in my mind suggested the painful reality and nagging burden that all three students experience. The tears, quivering lips, and cracked voices from responses to questions and/or prompts about this current presidential administration and overall experiences did happen and by all three participants.

I do not share this fact to exploit the raw feelings of these human beings and their very real and very challenging realities but rather to make it perfectly clear how hard this truth is for these three students. A measure of success for these students should not be that they put their heads down and stay out of trouble and merely get by. They are all living full lives and as far as I can tell are decent humans with aspirations and a spectrum of interests and involvement. They are all working. They are all doing their best to be studious and achieve new academic heights. All happen to be first generation college students too. A lot of discourse about immigrants in general and specifically undocumented communities is centered in communities being valuable to the US and other countries because this country and those countries receive some capital benefit, but this is not at all where I wish to center the conversation of the lives of these three students.

### **Participant Profiles**

**Participant 1 – Luna.** Luna is currently a second year master’s student at a university in New England. Born in el Distrito Federal, more commonly known as México City or el D. F., Luna migrated to southern California with her mother at the age of nine. She was initially told she was going to visit family and go to Disneyland in California and unbeknownst to her, her family decided to



stay. Her family has settled in Pomona, CA and this is also where she calls home. Her family, which is her mother, father, and two older brothers, is also a mixed status family. While Luna has conditional residency, her mother and father are now permanent residents as of fall of 2016, her middle brother is now a citizen, and her eldest brother was undocumented in the US until he was deported back to México when Luna was just 13 years old. Luna and her family have seen her eldest brother on several occasions over the past 14 years as her brother has a visa through his work as a firefighter in el D.F. but his detention and deportation still seem to have a profound impact on Luna and I imagine the rest of her family.

Luna was an involved student in high school and influenced by her middle brother who was a college student and an activist during his tenure at a California State school. At the time that Luna started college in 2008, the same alma mater as her middle brother and where she eventually graduated from in 2015, California only had AB 540. Because she met the requirements of AB 540 she could pay in-state tuition rates but there was neither the California DREAM Act nor DACA at the time she started college. DACA, which she applied for immediately and was granted, helped her with employment her final two years of school and allowed her to take advantage of an opportunity to work at her alma mater upon graduation until she started graduate school. Luna paid for school herself, as there was no state aid for a student in her position, and this is

primarily why it took her nearly seven years to graduate. She received a dual degree in Ethnic Studies with a concentration in Chicano Studies and Human Services. Luna applied to Boston College, her dream school, and was accepted but once they asked for her social security number to complete financial aid her process with them stopped there and she decided it would be easiest to go to the state school.

**Participant 2 – Gaviota.** Gaviota, born in Guatemala, arrived in California with her family when she was about three years old in 2001. With Gaviota came her mother, father, and elder sister. Her grandparents joined her family a short time later. Gaviota is from a mixed status family – meaning in her case that some relatives are undocumented and some have residency. Both of her grandparents have permanent residency while both of her parents are undocumented. Gaviota’s sister is also undocumented, and unlike Gaviota, her sister missed qualifying for DACA in her transition from high school to college because it did not exist; though she now has DACA. Her older sister has generally had a very different college experience than Gaviota. She is old enough that when she was starting the college application process in high school there was not yet the California Dream Act or DACA and as a result she felt she needed to go through the community college system so that she could have a better chance at affording college. Her sister remains in community college after at least two years of attending. Gaviota did apply for DACA when it became available and her

transition from high school to college did include DACA so she was able to both go to school and obtain a work permit.

Gaviota and her family call the San Fernando Valley home, specifically Fillmore. Where Gaviota calls home and where she goes to school are not that far from each other, less than two hours away but as I learned in our interview, far enough away that she worries about her parents. When I interviewed Gaviota, she was in her second year at CU. Initially she declared biology as a major but plans changed in her first year and she opted for being a double major in Global Studies and STEM.

During my interview with Gaviota, I asked her a question about the political climate and her thoughts post-President Obama. She shared a lot in her response and something that stays in my visual mind is how she was brought to tears considering my questions. She started crying when she mentioned how hard the political climate has been post-inauguration and shared further that she does not typically discuss what I was asking her about. She spoke about how she knew of many stories of parents being taken away from their kids and even in her own home community in southern California and LA. One of her fears, as she told me through tears, was that she would get a call about her mom and dad being detained while she is away at college.

In Gaviota's second year, she decided to join a student organization specifically for women who self-identify as Latina or Chicana. This is one

organization and space in which she has felt support by peers who are both documented and undocumented.

**Participant 3 – Miguel.** When I interviewed Miguel last spring, he was a 26 year-old, first year doctorate student at IEU in California. Born in Morelia, Michoacán, México in 1991, he was three years old when his parents made the decision to migrate to the US in 1994. Miguel, his parents, and his one-year-old sister initially settled in Korea Town in Los Angeles. During his teenage years they decided to move to the San Fernando Valley.

After high school, Miguel attended Cal State University Northridge (CSUN) for undergraduate studies and then a short time after enrolled at Cal State Long Beach in a graduate program in Economics. During his undergraduate tenure there was no DACA, only AB 540. AB 540 allowed Miguel to pay in-state tuition rates. The decision to go to CSUN was made in part due to the fact that he comes from what he called a poor family; he could not afford a UC school, and it was near home. He essentially felt CSUN was his best option, and so he went. He claims that he was a lazy genius – meaning that he did not ever struggle with class work but at the same time he did not give as much effort as he could have. He remembers questioning the purpose of working to his fullest potential because as someone who was not a citizen he saw the glass ceiling regarding jobs he could take after high school – what was the point? He felt obligated to attend college because his parents worked hard and sacrificed so

much and for him to do the same work they do was not acceptable to him because it would be disrespectful to them considering all they have done for him.

In between degrees and after completing his master's studies, Miguel spent time in Washington, DC working at various think tanks. After leaving DC he returned to southern California and worked for the county of LA doing cost benefit analysis for different projects. While the job was steady and predictable with hours being nine to five with good pay, it just did not provide much freedom nor the connection to academic areas of interest that Miguel had. Miguel realized around this same time that for "most of my life I was concerned about money or other physical needs that I never really thought of, you know am I happy?" This is when Miguel started applying for doctoral programs.

### **Findings: Themes and Codes**

To arrive at my codes and themes, I engaged in an iterative process of analyzing each first and second round interview captured from study participants. With the exception of Gaviota, both Luna and Miguel had two interviews with me. All three participants had the first interview with me in person and the second-round interview with Luna was in person since she is in New England and the second interview with Miguel was over the phone since he is in California. As I engaged in holistic analysis of each case, I first wrote a detailed profile of each study participant [case] and then I coded by individual word or phrase. I employed what Creswell (2013) calls "within-case analysis

(p. 101). Since this process is iterative and I endeavored to be as thorough as possible, I went through this cycle two times before I moved on to cross-case analysis of all three cases and then identified themes overall. Following is a table that includes the breakdown of the 16 themes and the attributes or codes for each theme.

Table 2

Themes	Code Attributes
<b>Being Undocumented</b>	acceptance of identity/identity anticipating/planning /uncertainty asking for help barriers to higher education being "out" complacency/lack of initiative to be informed deportation embarrassing/dehumanizing experiences emergency contact/emergency plan exclusion from participation experiences in daily life false security fear of enforcement authorities going back in closet knowledge of status from young age lack of access to higher education lack of government issued identification migration to US motivation for being out weight of status
<b>Educational Considerations</b>	4 year v. community college campus climate campus programming classroom experiences developing programs evaluation of student experiences flexibility funding higher education (undergrad and grad) graduate student support high school experience knowledge of relevant policies and protocols

	lobbying poor college counseling and college preparation resources/services role of Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) role of university safe space/affinity space school intake process student organizations undocumented student center university communication/transparency
<b>Feelings</b>	disconnected fear desiring an END emotional connection—Disneyland/traumatic experience guilt status and being out freedom/movement happiness isolation safety/security self-doubt self-esteem/self-confidence trust/mistrust validation/support
<b>Influence of Entities *positive and negative experiences*</b>	attitudes towards immigrants/Mexicans elected officials ignorance/naiveté mentors network parents, siblings, partner peer presidents—Bush, Obama, Trump school agents student affairs professionals—includes DACAmented staff
<b>Laws/Policies/ Executive Orders</b>	CA DREAM Act considered international student DACA rescission of DACA
<b>Macro &amp; Micro Aggressions</b>	exploitation light skin privilege/passing

<b>*real and/or perceived*</b>	racism and understanding of it threat of aggression xenophobia
<b>Self</b>	activism--politicized self adjustment to newness attitude community engagement cultural brokers/bi-cultural orientation developing youth educating self--Chicano studies and history excelling academically higher education aspirations internalized racism/oppression intersectionality persistence personal growth life goals/audacity to think big opportunities professional/career aspirations responsibility to community self-advocacy and advocacy speaking truth to power
<b>Wellness</b>	coping faith/hope/higher power health mental health/counseling self-care--laughter

### **Being Undocumented**

Of all themes, it is not surprising that this theme had as many associated codes as the theme titled *Educational Considerations*. The way that I am conceptualizing how these codes fit within this theme are that they exist and are real for participants based on the fact that the participants are undocumented people and undocumented students. By and large, most of the attributes in this



theme can be understood as deleterious/adversity in that Gaviota, Luna, and Miguel have experienced or perceived there to be hardships, barriers, a “glass ceiling,” a constant weight of a “backpack” that carries all the burdens of being out of status, some emotionally difficult or painful experiences, and exclusion.

To begin sharing my analysis and understanding of participant remarks and experiences in this themes section, it is important to first share each participant’s relationship to their status and being “out.” Luna knew that she was undocumented from early on in her time in the US. She focused on her time in high school and college. Throughout these years she was active in student organizations and open with her status. It was evident from my time with Luna that her elder brothers, particularly her middle brother, played a significant role in shaping her identity as an undocumented person. From what she has shared, she has always embraced this identity and felt a responsibility to her community to be out and supporting others who share in the identity. While as a master’s level graduate student she has said that she is still “out” and open about her status, she does not have the community of DREAMers that she had in California so the experience is different. According to Luna, it is not as much a conversation in classes, with peers, and among student organizations as there is no one leading the charge to support and advocate for undocumented students at her school. Luna seemed the most “out” in general of all three participants. She is also the oldest participant at 27 years old.

Miguel is currently “out” on his campus as a doctorate student. With the exception of close friends, family, and teachers in grade school, Miguel did not come “out” until he finished his master’s degree and was seeking employment in Washington, DC. While he has never gone around announcing his immigration status, he also does not keep it a secret. His personal policy is that if someone asks he will be honest unless an immigration enforcement officer asks. Miguel’s parents were always open with him about his status so he has been aware of it for some time now. Miguel is the second oldest participant at 26 years old.

Next, Gaviota, who is the youngest at 21. Gaviota was never really “out” until her first year of college and, even then, she only told a select number of people. She revealed that even her closest friends in high school did not know. Gaviota is definitely the participant who is most guarded about sharing their status. In her first year, she started coming out a little when opportunities arose, like on a panel when another panelist revealed their status, in a Chicano studies course when the subject arose, and in her Latina organization after learning that some other members were also undocumented. Once the election happened and this new administration assumed office, Gaviota stopped sharing her status. While Gaviota might not be sharing her undocumented status openly at this time, she is working on accepting her status. When asked about how her family felt about her coming out to others she stated,

I think they don't really mind, I don't think they are as scared as I am; they are mostly like I said they are really in touch with their religion so they are like oh well we pray to God so everything is going to be fine. But um, yeah, I think they just only are proud of who I am, and I mean, it is my identity so just coming to accept it.

There are many factors that influence each participant's state of being undocumented – some that are shared and some that are unique to the participant.

The first example in analysis of a datum related to the theme of Being Undocumented came from Luna. In a question about where she feels most psychologically and physical safety she responded:

I don't know. I think I felt safer as an undergrad [California]. But I think I feel safer as an undergrad sharing my story and coming out...Even though it was a double edge sword. Because you never knew who was in the audience. But I always felt safe sharing my story as an undergraduate because if I was to get deported, and don't come to class for two times in the next week, then my professor would be like, where is Luna. Or if I were to travel to a conference and get detained, then the network would do something. And I think that was my protection. Cause now it would be like, "Oh Luna just dropped out." Or she just stopped coming to this class. But we had a network, people would be checking in. So we had network

we had people checking in and when we were flying I would be like, oh yeah I just passed my check point, I'll let you guys know when I land. Also having that network. But then here, I was actually thinking about it yesterday. I went to the [name of grocery store] and I took the bus. And I thought, if I were to get detained right now, who would I call? My go-to number is my brother because he knows a lot about immigrant rights and he is very fluent in English and he could do something. But he is far away. So then I was like, would I call [director of Residence Life]? Cause you know he is the director. And I was like, I need to call someone that...would I call [professor in graduate program]? And then I thought of [student affairs professional], I think I would call [name of student affairs professional]. I thought I need to ask her. If I were to be detained and I would get one phone call, who would I call?"

This quote captures multiple considerations at play in a seemingly ordinary experience of going to a grocery store. Not only did Luna have to consider what uncertainties existed in a necessary daily experience like grocery shopping but she also had to think about her travel to a grocery store, being at a grocery store, and also what her emergency plan would be in any instance moving around in her community. The act of grocery shopping is usually a mundane experience for many but this example highlights the reason why it is not for many people who share Luna's immigration status. On top of this, Luna was considering a

major ask of an individual in a new community. Can you be my emergency contact in the instance that I am detained? While this question ultimately requires a yes or no response – the responsibility is significant and requires a certain level of trust in one individual. Important to consider in this ask is what the person being asked understands of the process of detention, rights, and priorities in who to communicate with and what type of information needs to be shared. There is trust and confidence placed in a person who could be an emergency contact and it seems like a rather involved request of someone. Luna goes on to give another example of how in another instance she chose to not out herself or provide further information that was asked of her regarding interest in pursuing higher education.

Luna's dream school was Boston College and she shared that she got this idea in her mind because of her brother. She said,

I think in 2001, before the twin towers event, he [eldest brother] was working in Boston. He was working on a construction site with my uncle. My uncle was also from LA, but the construction company used to fly them out with the rest of the construction crew. And he lived in Boston for almost a year. So I had always heard of Boston, and heard of the snow by him and because he was in construction in another state, he was making good money. So I told him that I want to go to Boston and see what he was talking about. So I made that connection of Boston College so I

applied. And I kind of got in but I got this letter that I was accepted but I needed to get my financial aid approved. And the letter said that they couldn't find my social security number.

Once Luna received this letter she did not follow through with the admissions process because she did not have a social security card at the time. This particular situation served as a barrier to Luna accessing higher education at this school. She had to narrow her ambitions to a local school because of her status.

On a similar note, Miguel shared:

I went to my undergraduate studies at the California State University at Northridge which is in the San Fernando Valley. I went there just for the simple fact that I come from a poor family, we couldn't afford any of the UCs, it's a state school, its near home, it was the best option that I had.

After I graduated from my BA, this was before DACA had passed, I hadn't had any formal job experience and it was very difficult for me to find anything. At least at the level that I was expecting that I could find a job as a gardener or something but I guess out of pride I just couldn't do that. I had studied too hard and my parents had put too much sacrifice so that their son could end up doing the same thing they did. And I respect their work, it's just, at the same time I respect their work, I knew that it would be disrespectful for me for not, for not taking advantage of what they had given me. So I ended up going back for my master's degree in

economics and I ended up at the California State University at Long Beach.

Because of Gaviota's age and possibly because of her residency status in California, she was able to go directly from high school to college during the era of AB 540 and the California DREAM Act. She stated that, "I'm not sure how it works because I still pay for out-of-state tuition, but the dream act and the AB 540 and the other grants from the school, they cover everything so I don't have to pay anything else." Since I was not able to have a second interview with Gaviota, I could not clarify with her directly why it is that she is charged out-of-state tuition rates when she grew up in California. I asked her in the interview why this was, but she was uncertain. My guess was that she may be charged the non-resident tuition rate if she is classified as an international student, which many schools do, and then I confirmed this with another student from the same school who is out of status that this is how it happened for them as an undocumented student. The California DREAM Act covered the difference between in-state and out-of-state/international student tuition rates.

### **Educational Considerations**

This theme is one that encapsulates a myriad of school experiences, resources, and opportunities between high school and college--including undergraduate and graduate studies. Luna gives an example of an experience she had in a graduate class on a day that student activism was discussed. She

was trying to make the point that the risks people take as activists present possible consequences that are not equal to one another – especially if someone is undocumented. In this case, she was feeling frustrated that classmates did not seem to understand the difference between someone sitting behind their computer in the privacy of their home or somewhere on campus versus an undocumented student protesting and getting arrested. Luna said,

The other day in [professor's name] class we were talking about activism. And she wanted to do it like in a line, like a person who gets arrested and a person does a Facebook post. And my whole cohort felt that a Facebook post and getting arrested is the same thing. And I was like, NO! And we couldn't have the conversation because the class ended. But I don't feel the same thing.

Then, when I asked her to expand on her thoughts she went on to say,

Because you're putting yourself at risk. You are putting yourself at risk when you're getting arrested. Or doing social demonstration or doing protest and you are being a vocal person in the streets. And for me that has such a bigger power than putting up a post on Facebook and being in the comfort of your own house or your apartment and just typing: Fuck Trump! I support women's rights, or I support this. But then what are you doing? You are still going out to dinner and to the movies. The person who is being arrested isn't having that experience.



Regarding Luna's general experiences as a graduate student on her campus, she seems to have struggled keeping the conversation alive in classroom spaces as it is not as predominant or pervasive a conversation in her community as other issues. Gaviota also shared an example of a space on campus but one that was facilitated by her campus' women's center. She stated,

So there are spaces where they will put on programs where you can go draw and make stress balls or little things like that or they'll have talks about how to meditate or turn your feelings into something positive.

They open it up to everyone who is oppressed like minorities or women or people that don't identify with certain genders.

She shared that she does go to these gatherings sponsored by the women's center and despite having an undocumented student center on her campus she does not go to that space because of discomfort. She candidly shared that,

They, I know they had a like an organization, but I tried to go once and the people were not really inclusive so I didn't go again, I guess that was my fault. I think it was mostly because they were so close as a family so they were trying to, like scared to let more people in, knowing the political climate and stuff. I have a friend that is part of it and she goes and she said its better, but I, it's just weird to go.

## **Feelings**

As a theme, Feelings captures the spirit of emotions that participants have communicated at some point or another throughout the interview process. Some named specific feelings and other times the participants may have described a situation or something they were holding and what it was like for them. To begin, some of the questions I asked resulted in responses around the theme of Feelings and provoked crying from all three participants.

In an experience Luna had with a peer, she reflected back stating, I feel like I do a lot of stress outs. Like meeting with the professors like, you got here because of Dr. [professor's name]. Like I heard that and I was like, am I worth it or am I here just because of a special treatment. Like I do have that self-doubt all the time. In everything I do, I ask are people doing it for me because they feel sorry for me because I'm undocumented or is it because I'm really worth it? [participant crying]

Or there is Gaviota's revelation of fear. She said,

Mm-hmm. Deportations mostly in like southern California, I haven't really heard about in North California but I'm not from there so I don't know, but there has been a lot in LA, and a lot of stories saying that parents were taken away when dropping their kids off at school. It's just really hard, reading that and seeing that and knowing that maybe one day I'll get a call saying, Oh they took your mom, they took your dad and I'm here and not over there. [participant crying]

Finally, there is an example from Miguel and his thoughts starting with election night.

Anxious is probably the best word. I still remember election night I was crying. Just because it really was a moment where I was like I really don't know what is going on. I have always had that feeling but at that moment I was like I really, really don't know what is going on. After a few days of crying, I figured there is no point to crying anymore.

What Miguel began to realize is that some of these things are not in his control, but he will continue to work as hard as he can. He went on to say more but also spoke about his concern for his parents and the deep level of anxiety he feels:

If I get deported, at least I've gone through a doctorate program, hopefully I can convince my professors to help me get into a different program in Mexico or somewhere else. But I'll personally be ok. Most of my concern has been about my parents. At this point I'm not too worried about myself. I know that if the worst is to come, if I'm in Mexico, I'm educated, I've got a Master's degree, I've got job experience, I've got job contacts. I've got a future. But my parents, they gave up everything to come to this country, they don't got an education, they don't have contacts in Mexico, they don't have family there, they are all here. We have no home, we have no ranch, we are from the city, they have nothing.

Anxiousness is really the best word I can come up with.

## **Influence of Entities**

Influence of Entities is a theme that incorporates codes that are all based on relationships. These relationships are both direct and indirect and with familiar and outside influences like a family member or peer, organized bodies such as the media, or elected officials like the president of the country. The experiences that participants have with these entities range from positive (affirming and inclusive) to negative (threatening and xenophobic). What is clear from participant narratives are the very real influences that these entities have had on their experiences of being undocumented.

A common thread I heard from all participants was the presence of fear as a result of the current presidential administration – #45. There may have existed fear during the tenure of previous presidential administrations but Luna, Miguel, and Gaviota all mentioned the current administration, and as a result of actions and language, all seem to have become quieter and guarded with their status than they alluded to how they were pre-#45. This is what each participant had to say about the current presidential administration. Luna reflected,

I feel like that this question has a two parts because it was between the Obama Administration and the Trump Administration. Umm, I feel like I always been active about my undocumented status. Like sharing with people that I'm undocumented and giving the human perspective of the issue. So I feel like, I have always been an open book in terms of that. I feel

like my advocacy has played a big role in those, umm, in that area.

Because I felt like, the work needed to be done, and if nobody was doing the work; then I needed to be doing the work. You know, if not me, then who? In a sense. So I feel during the Obama administration, I was trying to be as most political and active as much as I can. Now with the Trump administration I feel like now and because of the graduate program, I haven't been active. And I have this sense of guilt of it.

Gaviota in ways echoed Luna but also had some unique reactions to offer.

Yeah, well since Trump got inaugurated and even last year there was chalking around school saying go back to where you came from and build a wall and make America great again, seeing that on campus, a place that you are supposed to feel safe and be ok with was just kind of really hard and, sorry. I like never talked about this. [participant starts crying] Then um, after the election and after he got inaugurated, I know that back home there has been a lot of like raids and deportations.

I ask, "In your community?" To which she replied,

Mm-hmm. Deportations mostly in like South California, I haven't really heard about in North California but I'm not from there so I don't know, but there has been a lot in LA, and a lot of stories saying that parents were taken away when dropping their kids off at school. It's just really hard, reading that and seeing that and knowing that maybe one day I'll get a

call saying, Oh they took your mom, they took your dad and I'm here and not over there. [crying]

Finally, Miguel shared some thoughts around multiple administrations.

I didn't know what was going to happen after Obama, like many people, I thought Hillary was going to win, but even with Hillary, it was kind of I don't know what any of that means, because Bill Clinton was not pro migrant when he was in office, times have changed but for all we know she might cancel it. I certainly didn't expect Trump to win, but the moment he won, I was like shit, I really don't know what's going on now. Even now, I don't know what's going on. If anyone knows, I'd like to know.

While all participants spoke of the impact of multiple influences, family was definitely the common influence and it was also family that seemed to provide the most motivation for each participant. When each participant spoke about their experiences as it related to their connection to their family, I heard and felt a fierce selflessness and protective attitude towards their respective family. I believe that from their examples we can understand the breadth and weight these negative experiences have on an entire community, even if the participant was not the specific target.

### **Laws, Policies, and Executive Orders**

This theme takes into consideration school policies as well as state and national laws or presidential orders. Following are examples each participant had that help provide some insight into their experiences. Luna was sharing her experience getting into her graduate program and mentioned that the person coordinating graduate assistantships made a statement that caused her to question the staff member internally. For example, when the GTA coordinator questioned her, she became concerned. She stated,

And also getting into this program the assistantship kind of pays for the program and when I got the phone call they asked me [staff person coordinating graduate assistantships], you do have a work permit right? And I was like yeah. And they were like because if you don't have work permit you can't come to the program.

Luna went on to say the person's name and then shared some ideas about what her program needed to be doing based on her own experiences. "[Staff member]. And I think that's their requirement. But that is a good conversation for the future. Are undocumented students going to be accepted in [name of university] and into the [name of graduate program]. And if they are, how are they going to fund themselves."

While I believe the spirit of Luna's statement has more to do with policies and laws, Luna and I certainly questioned the accuracy of the graduate assistantship coordinator's comment about needing a work permit. The

statement about the work permit suggests to me that a student would have need for the graduate assistantship even though not all undocumented students have financial need. Second, there have been full- and part-time students admitted to the program in previous years that have not had graduate funding. This example is one which demonstrates some of the encounters students have with school agents, their assumptions, and the level of power some have over students and their ability to access higher education opportunities.

The next examples with Gaviota and Miguel focus a bit more on DACA specifically. I asked participants what it was about DACA that helped them in their situation. Gaviota responded,

Yeah, that helps. DACA helps with getting a job. Before DACA I wasn't of age to have a job, so I didn't really see how it affected me or like I never had to get a job before that. When the election happened and it actually crossed my mind like if DACA goes away then I won't have a job and then if I graduate and I'm still undocumented, how am I going to get a job. It really put things into perspective.

Miguel shared that impact of DACA in his own situation.

Yeah, so before DACA my policy was keep your head low, be honest if someone really asked because most of the time when someone asked it had been a teacher who was just concerned so I knew, yeah they are concerned it's probably ok to let them know. If it was ICE or INS coming



up and asking me, I'm going to shut up, I'm not doing to tell them. After DACA, after it became clear that DACA was here to stay, at least up to the end of the Obama administration I felt more comfortable coming out more directly to people.

He went on to comment about his time in DC and how he actually got his first job. He was rather straightforward stating that, "I guess that impressed them to an extent they said ok, this guy has to have a level of confidence in his work if he's going around telling people this."

We see that DACA not only provided actual opportunities for students to work, but school admission was not necessarily a factor given that Gaviota and Miguel are both students at California schools. A moment of temporary relief was provided because they had something to look forward to with the help of DACA.

Finally, an example of an experience with a student having to go through an international student office can be noted from an example Luna gave. To note, prior to this interview in the fall, Luna's school president had sent university-wide communication regarding students with DACA. Knowing how Luna felt about the content and quality of the communication, I asked Luna what she thought the university was doing well and what could be better. Here is what she shared:

Because before it was like to go to international office and I was like, who do I talk to? Who do I reach out to? And even the international office didn't know what to do. Like their process was so frustrating and annoying and they didn't know how to handle the people who work and going to HR, the payroll, like the language that was used was so dehumanizing, like oh you need to pay, like how come I got like a bigger tax deduction, how come I have to pay more taxes than my other classmates and she was like, oh because you're an illegal alien and blah blah blah, and I was just like, oh my God. So now I feel like the language is changing so I don't know. It's hard to answer that question because I feel [the cultural center and particular staff member] have done so much work in this institution to support undocumented students and it was sad to come in and like not see that, and people not noticing it.

### **Macro and Micro Aggressions**

This theme came to fruition after recognizing that all study participants have experienced fear as a result of their status, whether or not they named it as such. Beyond this, there are direct and/or indirect experiences that have been indignities on the basis of factors like racism and/or xenophobia. Luna shares one such example that has had a lasting impact.

I don't know, I feel like I always had this feeling of my mom being deported or being exploited because she didn't have documents and she

just needed to take it. And her first job when we got here was working at a factory. And she was exploited a lot. She was sexually harassed. Verbally and also because she was put in the busiest machine because she wouldn't give in. So she was exploited in that sense. That I'm aware, she was never touched or anything like that, but just hearing the stories. And not even her telling me, but she would tell my aunt.

Miguel shared his own experience with his younger sister,

So back in, a couple weeks after DACA had passed, my sister and I we never had a direct discussion about being undocumented, we both know, we make a few comments here and there, but we never have a serious talk about it. I don't know why that is. Maybe it's just so obvious. Maybe we just know each other as siblings so much, that we know how the discussion would play out. But a few weeks after DACA passed, she came home and there is, and she tells me a story how she was in the gym and she overheard people speaking poorly of us, the community, not the family directly.

In this moment, I clarified with Miguel who he was referring to as "us." He was referring to undocumented people. He then went on to say, "Yeah, just migrants in general. Like they are taking our jobs, how Obama gave this to the children, yada, yada. And she just stared at me. Give me a moment. [participant is crying] And I felt this anger." As Miguel continued to explain how the

experience made him feel, he then shared how he could try to rationalize racist behavior by writing it off as ignorance or ignoring it if it was against him. Because the example shared included his sister he felt particularly impacted. "But when it's targeted against my sister and even if my sister just happens to hear it and gets affected, that is when I get emotional." In my curiosity about how one addresses such painful moments, I asked Miguel how he responded. He shared, "I just stared back. We aren't twins, but we are so close in age we grew up right next to each other, and we just understand each other so I just stared and she understood." Next, Luna shares a more direct experience with what she has perceived to be racism.

Luna shared a general reflection but also shared a specific example from a trip from California to [New England state].

Yeah. I do feel like within [school name] I do feel safe. And I feel like I need to continue sharing my story. But outside (school name), even with Trump, I feel like people are being more racist. And sin vergüenza...you know without shame. So for example I was traveling home and because I had gotten married and my whole last name changed and when I got to the service counter my ID said [full name] and he was super nice, he was kind of flirting you know. He was super super nice. And then I showed him my passport and his mood completely switched.

This is when Luna felt like the airline employee started treating her differently once they learned that she held a Mexican passport. She went on to have this internal conversation with herself about what she should do and the questions she wanted to ask to stand up for herself. They also would not accept her passport as a form of government issued identification so she had to show them her DACA paperwork and they took a long time to verify that it was her. She ended with this comment, “And even that is something that I constantly think of with this Trump administration especially with the fear that the community is dealing with.”

## **Self**

Self is a theme in which it seemed fitting to condense codes that expressed traits, interests, and intrinsic characteristics or values specific to the individual participant. The attributes that fall within this theme are based on a connection to the self via motivations, understanding of intersecting identities, tenacity, audacity, and inherent attitudes and behaviors that compel the individual to move and continue in spite of outside factors that could be paralyzing. These participants have shared essentially how they have moved forward, moved through, and moved beyond in their own respective manner.

Gaviota gives a prime example of this notion of self and her effort to continue in spite of difficulties in her response to a question about the current presidential administration and what drives her to continue. She talked about

her parents and remembering all they have gone through and how hard it was for them. She acknowledged her opportunity to go to college and how important the degree is, job or no job. She stated, "Half of it is for them, half of it is for me, and I'm hoping by the time I graduate, I have papers."

Miguel also talked about a family reality related to the dynamic between his parents, him, and his sister that exemplifies a common experience for many youth who have parents who are immigrants. The example Miguel shared may appear rather simple and brief but it captures the essence of not only being bi-cultural but also acting as a cultural broker between himself and parents to the outside world and himself as a bridge between his younger sister, who does not have the language skills necessary to effectively communicate in Spanish.

Yeah there is definitely a sense of duty that I have to translate between the two of them if they don't understand each other. I know this is a common occurrence with migrant families. If there was paperwork I had to fill it out. My parents were like fill this out and forge our signature at the bottom.

Also, this quote from Miguel serves as a reminder of the responsibilities that some individuals have to their family and the important roles that they play within their family structure.

In some ways each participant has had to be an advocate for their-selves. We can see in Miguel's response to my question regarding what being "out" has

looked like for him and how he has navigated this territory. “So everyone in the department knows about my undocumented status. Very early on I decided on that, in my master’s program I never really hid it, but I never stated it explicitly and it became an obstacle at times. “ Not only did Miguel, the student, have to out himself to faculty but he also had to educate faculty on what his status and DACA meant in terms of the graduate assistantship and being able to receive funding. Miguel continued to explain why these experiences have caused him to have to be forthcoming from the very beginning of his doctorate programming with faculty members. Miguel maintains communication with leadership in his program and the institution because he feels the need to be proactive in case of any possible changes regarding DACA. He wants to know how to plan and he finished his thought with, “Again, at this point if I am deported, fine, but let me have a dignified exit.”

## **Wellness**

Wellness as a theme emerged from recognizing related codes around the idea of health. All participants shared examples of practices or various things they have done, do, or would like to do that promote wellness in some way. I asked all participants a question about what they do to take care of themselves. Some responded more directly and some responded less directly but all gave multiple examples of things that they do or things that perhaps they believe they should do.

When I asked Luna how she takes care of herself she responded with a lot of detail and candor. She said,

I don't. I am a stress eater. I love chips and I love cooking. Another stress reliever is laughing or making jokes or talking to family members at home. I do miss them. Talking to my grandma and talking silly with her. I speak with my parents like once a day or every other day just to say hey. When I am down, looking at videos of my niece to see how funny she is and how smart she is. I talk to my partner and even though we clash a lot he still keeps me grounded and pushes me a lot. Spending time with friends here.

While Luna went on to share that in general she does not consider her entire cohort to be her friends, she does try leaving personal matters at the door so that she can be present in class. While she enjoys hanging out with a couple of people from her program, she also wants to practice mindfulness as she feels she does not stop often to consider how she is feeling and why she is feeling a certain way. Even though she feels she is inattentive when it comes to self-care as a result of her busy schedule, she would cry and journal more if she had time as well as go to the campus' counseling services. Regarding her health she said, "I think of the metaphor of a flag and I flap this way and flap that way. I feel like I am kicked on the ground and then I get up and dust myself off and just keep moving forward and I don't stop to talk to people about my issues and it gets to the point



where I need to talk to someone.” While she did go to counseling in her first semester of graduate school, she did not go during the spring after #45 was elected. She started crying at this point in the interview as she said, “It was a very dark time for me, very emotional, very time consuming, very life changing... I sometimes sleep when I am depressed but I try not to sleep too much. Dr. [student affairs professional] and my grandma say to get out no matter how you feel. These four walls can consume you.” Luna revealed much that also resonates in other participant’s responses. Peers, family members, and other individuals have all played some sort of role in each participant’s state of wellness.

Gaviota echoed Luna’s influential connection with family and specifically mentioned conversations with her mom before she went on about faith.

I talk to my mom about it [political climate] a lot, and she’ll be like *se salio Dios*, if it’s meant to happen it’ll happen, you’re with God, just know that. I turn a lot to my religion, so I tend to go to mass every Sunday. I’m Catholic, so I go to mass every Sunday, and yeah, [student organization] has helped me out a lot and they, we have had open spaces like after it [2016 presidential election] happened, so it was good to talk about it and like I said there are other girls in there [student organization] too, so it’s good to have their support and knowing I have someone to lean towards too. I am doing a volunteer thing with the Women’s Center on campus and they

also do a lot about self-care and safe spaces so it's good having other people's support who aren't really in that position.

Miguel also shares knowledge of spaces on campus in which to find support, like the campus counseling center, even though he does not seek this specific service for himself.

So one of the benefits of being a graduate student at the University is you get, I think we are entitled to 10 or 12 session per quarter and I've encouraged several members of my cohort to go because graduate school is very stressful. I'm sure you know. I've never gone myself, I know the resources are there. I just don't find that they would be helpful in my specific case because it is such a unique experience. Like I've mentioned there are 8 of us here, there are a few more dozen across the country depending on how you want to count. I don't know anyone who is trained to discuss our issues, the closest I can think of is someone who has handled refugees.

Also, Gaviota had not sought support at her campus' counseling services. Her sentiment was, "I don't really like talking about my feelings, I usually like to go running and being involved in other things and staying busy, it helps."

When I inquired with Miguel about how he viewed the stress manifesting itself, he shared, "Umm panic attacks I think. I haven't had one recently but I did have one about a year ago and it's very strange feeling when you have a panic

attack because you're panicking and you don't know what's going on." When I prompted further to understand if there was an event or something in particular that set Miguel into a panic he shared,

Uhh yeah. So prior to the panic attack I had been isolated for a couple of weeks. I typically see people but I...I hadn't spoken to any one because we were right in the middle of the course work, everyone was studying for exams so I didn't have much you know I didn't really have much conversations with anyone or anything like I was just basically living under a rock.

As a point of reference, at the time of my interview and counting back a year prior would have been after the presidential elections took place in early November 2016.

### **Findings and Interpretations**

In considering what my findings and interpretations are, I re-visited my overarching research questions below.

1. How do undocumented Latinx students talk about their experiences and how they feel as students on their college campus?

All three participants have had mixed experiences as students on their respective campuses. Such feelings as disconnected, fear, equal, self-doubt, trust, and validated are examples of participants' own language that has characterized the range of experiences students have had. All participants mentioned a person

or entity that was supportive and receptive in terms of how they responded to the student's status. The entities ranged from two student affairs professionals in an identity center in New England as well as a professor in a master's program, multiple professors in a doctorate program, a Chicano Studies professor in an undergraduate level course, a Latina centered student organization, and peers. Though students have all felt validated in some way, they have all also either experienced slights as a result of their status or some type of undesirable and indirect experience with senior level administration's communication or lack of communication or response to campus bias. Regardless of the quality of experiences that each participant has had on their campus, all are focused on academic goals and completing their degrees.

## 2. What student organizations are participants involved in?

While participants in general did not dwell as much on responses to questions regarding student involvement in organizations, defined broadly, all participants alluded to some sort of kinship in space that is student-centered. They are all connected to these spaces in some way or another as undocumented students and "out" in the context of these spaces. Luna mentioned a graduate student cohort, Miguel mentioned a group of peers who are undocumented graduate students that he sometimes serves with on panels, and Gaviota mentioned a Latina oriented student organization. Each group that all three

participants are connected to are heterogeneous – they all serve vastly different purposes and yet still seem to serve a purpose in the lives of each student.

3. How does the current political climate and current administration impact how they feel, their sense of efficacy, as an undocumented student?

Throughout this process of developing a study, gathering data, listening to student narratives, reading extensive amounts of literature on the subject matter, and so forth, nothing is clearer than the fact that all three students have experienced complete fear, stress, and anxiety at the thought of being deported but much more specifically – their family members being deported. Additionally, all participants seem to have become more quiet and protective of their status in comparison to how they may have operated at their peak of comfort before the election or during the Obama Administration. My questions regarding the current administration and how the participants were experiencing life post-election made all three participants cry. I believe that as a result of how the current administration has made all participants feel about their status as well as the national anti-immigrant rhetoric that was present even during the presidential campaigns in 2016, the resolve to persist has been strengthened. Beyond the network of support that each student has, they have had to rely on their own agency, self-determination, and self-efficaciousness to continue despite the burdens, as stated in their own language, of barriers to higher education, threat of deportation, dehumanizing experiences, exclusion from participation,

false security, fear of enforcement authorities, and the overall weight of the status feeling like a permanent “backpack.” Despite these outside negative forces it is the activism, attitude, community engagement, personal development, aspirations, responsibility to community, and agency that propels these participants beyond and through limitations intentionally and unintentionally placed on them.

4. What types of incidents related to their identity as undocumented Latinx students have most impacted the students and in what ways?

The types of incidents that Luna, Miguel, and Gaviota have experienced as students range from: the classroom, public spaces on campus, student affairs administrators, human resources staff, university-wide communication from administration, and peers. These various incidences have impacted all participants because they are the experiences that stood out for some reason to each individual; however, it is those situations that impact family members or threaten to impact family members that are most telling of how all participants are feeling their immigration realities.

Throughout this process of developing a study, gathering data, listening to student narratives, reading extensive amounts of literature on the subject matter, nothing is clearer than the fact that all three students have experienced complete fear, stress, and anxiety at the thought of their family members being deported. The language used by elected officials has exacerbated all these

feelings – in this case the 45<sup>th</sup> elected U.S. president. Each participant spoke of the reasons why their family made the decision to migrate to the United States and the difficult journeys in this country. None want their parents' hard work and sacrifices to be in vain and all want to help their families. Stress, fear, anxiety, pre-mature graying, panic attacks, and depression are some of the ways that students have been impacted emotionally and physically.

5. How do students describe what self-care looks like for themselves?

All students have varying degrees of activities or practices they engage in for self-care and all seem to have a belief in the importance of taking care of themselves in some regard. Some examples of self-care are: humor and finding ways to laugh, cooking, staying connected to family and friends, attending stress relieving and affinity space programs on campus through identity centers, and physical activity like walking around outside or going for a run.

For all three participants, self-care varied depending on the participant and while all understood that the campus counseling center could be helpful only one participant went on occasion.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

“Y si a los siglos nos vamos. Somos más Americanos. Somos más Americanos.  
Que el hijo de anglosajón.”

--*Somos más Americanos* by Los Tigres del Norte

While not all Latinx folks are undocumented, I decided to focus on this community because my study needed a focus and also it was a way for me to give back to a community I have worked with extensively. Also, something that can be said for the collective is that we have all been harmed by imperialism and colonization whether we know it or not. Some among our community continue to be marred by it more disproportionately than others. The ugly face of white supremacy, cultural appropriation, and nationalism continues to have a physical and emotional grip on individuals and entire communities of people. The burden of racism and white supremacy on communities of color and undocumented people in particular can be devastating and puts those most at risk in incredibly vulnerable positions. Just like the Muslim Ban does not equate to national security of the US, the exclusion of undocumented youth, Latinx or



not, from full inclusion and participation in life in this country and in higher education does nothing to “Make America Great Again.”

We cannot get suckered into believing that treating people who look differently than ourselves or who have different lived experiences or identities than our own means that we should adopt an “us” versus “them” mentality. We also should not get comfortable treating people as “foreign.” We have seen and continue to see how this divisiveness hurts communities. In the spring of 2015, three college students in North Carolina were murdered execution style in what is considered by many to have been a hate crime. Deah Barakat, Yusor Abu-Salha, and Razan Abu-Salha were murdered because they were Muslim and their white neighbor had a problem with this truth. I am not sharing this incident to force a connection to #45 but I am certain that the same malevolence that he encourages his supporters to engage in and falsehoods and half-truths that he sells those who will believe him are part of the same vein of hate that Deah, Yusor, and Razan’s murderer was incubated in. Xenophobia, islamophobia, racism, sexism, and homophobia are where hate and oppression lie.

Once this current president was inaugurated, the consistent actions against immigrant communities – undocumented or not – began immediately thereafter. Following are the first of three examples that capture some of the ways in which this president and his administration have gone about policing various immigrant communities. One of the very first actions taken by this

administration was to enact a Muslim ban on seven countries. How the president came to a decision about which countries were included on the initial list of banned countries is questionable considering that most if not all of the men responsible for the September 11 attacks were from Saudi Arabia – also not among the list of the seven banned countries. Calamur (2017) wrote, “For 120 days, the order bars the entry of any refugee who is awaiting resettlement in the U.S. It also prohibits all Syrian refugees from entering the U.S. until further notice. Additionally, it bans the citizens of seven majority-Muslim countries – Iraq, Iran, Syria, Somalia, Sudan, Libya, and Yemen – from entering the U.S. on any visa category.” Additionally, this executive order sought to ban “individuals who are permanent residents of the U.S. (green-card holders) who were traveling overseas to visit family or for work – though a senior administration official said their applications would be considered on a case-by-case basis. The official also said green-card holders from those countries who are in the U.S. will have to meet with a consular officer before leaving the US” (Calamur, 2017). The impact of this ban was broadly felt across the United States, including smaller and rural areas of Vermont.

In January 2017, a Middlebury College professor, Dr. Ata Anzali, spoke to the associated press about his experience as a green card holder. In this situation the professor was doing research as a college faculty member in his native Iran while on a year-long educational leave with his family when the ban was

ordered. To be clear, Dr. Anzali, his wife, and his eldest of two daughters are all permanent residents while his youngest child was born in the United States. Dr. Anzali went through the process that the United States has in place so that individuals can obtain recognized citizenship and immigration status in this country. Despite this fact, Dr. Anzali is quoted as saying, "I canceled two flights because I wasn't sure if I go, I don't want my kids to go through this traumatic experience of being detained or deported." (Ring, 2017)

A second example of how this current presidential administration has gone about targeting immigrants is with people who have been granted temporary protected status or TPS. An example of this was detailed in an article published online by Vox in November 2017, authors Lind and Lochhart cite specific instances with survivors of disaster in Central America. Entitled *Trump's next immigration target: people living legally in US after disaster struck their countries*, the authors wrote, "For nearly 20 years, since a 1998 hurricane, the US government has allowed tens of thousands of Honduran immigrants to stay and work in the US rather than forcing them to return to Honduras." (Lind & Lockhart, 2017)). According to the authors, Hondureños and Salvadoreños are the majority of TPS beneficiaries. If this presidential administration ends the temporary status of those who are currently present in the US, at least some 300,000 individuals from Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Haiti alone will be in a position to leave, find other immigration programs they may qualify for

(if they are even accepted), or stay in the US out of status once their status under TPS expires (Lind et al, 2017). The TPS program has seemingly been a governmental sanctioned program that at least four presidential administrations have left unfettered and in place since Reagan's time in office. What this has meant in the context of this article is that "63 percent of Hondurans have been in the US 20 years or more" and it is speculated that "...the real likely outcome is that these TPS holders will stay in the US without legal authorization." (Lind et al, 2017). Among the many problems and consequences of potential changes for the current beneficiaries is language used by the administration to suggest that a merit-based system be adopted. Not to suggest that immigrants in general lack high levels of formal education but the reality is that many people who leave their native countries are probably leaving because they have not had educational opportunities and thusly desire work opportunities to satisfy needs that have gone unmet in their native lands as a result of low educational attainment. So, the expectation by the current administration is not only shortsighted but also exclusionary.

The third and final example of the 45<sup>th</sup>'s vitriolic disposition towards immigrants, particularly Mexicans, are inflammatory at the very least if not simply overtly racist, xenophobic, and outright hateful. In an October 2016 article from The Washington Post, titled *From Mexican rapists to bad hombres, the Trump campaign in two moments*, writer Janell Ross highlights the exact language

that the then presidential candidate used in remarks about Mexicans. She wrote, “When México sends its people, they’re not sending their best. They’re not sending you. They’re not sending you. They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with us. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.” (Ross, 2016) In a subsequent and final speech, the presidential candidate stated [about Mexicans], “One of my first acts will be to get out all of the drug lords, all of the bad ones – we have some bad, bad people in this country that have to get out. We’re going to get them out. We’re going to secure the border. And once the border is secured, at a later date, we’ll make a determination as to the rest. But we have some bad hombres here, and we’re going to get them out.” (Ross, 2016). These are just a few examples of the aggressive and racist nativist behaviors and attitudes that many immigrants or migrants encounter in this country.

Once I did have participants for my study, I tried to not make assumptions about them but there was one that was inevitable in my opinion – I did go into all interviews under the assumption that there would be some type of hardship, fight, or struggle that each person would have experienced because of their status as a Latinx undocumented college student. I believe this was actually a necessary assumption to make for a few reasons. The first, they all identify as Latinx somewhere along the spectrum. Second, they have all been

undocumented at different periods of time in the past eight to nine years with varying degrees of opportunities at different points in their tenure as college students. The variations have meant the difference between paying in-state tuition, qualifying for state aid or not, being legally allowed to enroll in institutions of higher education nationally or not, obtaining a social security number or not, the ability to obtain a driver's license or not, and being allowed to gain work authorization for any type of employment or not. Finally, it is a fair and justified assumption to make because in doing so, I as the researcher, can shed light on all the ways that people, policies, and protocol exclude undocumented people and specifically undocumented students in education.

By acknowledging the presence of undocumented students on all college campuses across the country, the systematic exclusion of these students from full participation in higher education and the institutionalized ways in which racism, xenophobia, and other forms of oppression are perpetuated against this community can be addressed. Regardless of what schools opt to do or not in support of undocumented students, and even their families as an extension of the students, it is clear that there is much work all communities and all schools have ahead of them if they seek to be inclusive and validating spaces of learning for all students. With regards to student's experiences, understanding how students make sense of their realities was crucial.

I asked each participant a question about self-efficacy. The question was generally framed as, *How has your sense of self-efficacy caused you to engage in the political climate?* While I feel I asked the question in a manner that was a little sloppy, what participants revealed was telling of how they each make sense of both the challenges and complexities of their status but also the conscious and perhaps unconscious ways they have learned over time to persist despite multiple forces working against their existence. I was struck by a comment both Luna and Miguel made in their second round interviews. While the comments were different, they felt like they belonged in the same vein of sentiment. Luna made a comment about how people do not have to care about her status or undocumented people while Miguel said that he did not believe it was the responsibility of the university to lobby or do advocacy work. To me, both Luna and Miguel seemed to be suggesting that it is not the role of schools or school personnel to show care for their students. In this case I was specifically addressing undocumented students. This surprised me because both students understand on a very personal level the day-to-day trials and tribulations undocumented students go through just to be college students. These comments made me question what their understanding of the role of student affairs professionals is and their expectations as students of their administrators and campus community. Without wanting to pathologize my study's participants, based on multiple factors that have arisen through the process of analysis of data

as well as experiences with each participant, I have started to wonder how students view their relationship with their respective schools and general communities.

I have come to a new conclusion about the naming of the relationship that exists between a Latinx college student's undocumented status and the outside (society, US, etc.). I am naming the relationship abusive. In all the information I have obtained for this study, I have yet to hear the words abusive or abuse uttered by anyone; however, when I hear people name fear, stress, anxiety, sadness, pain, embarrassment, etc. in regards to how outside influences make a person feel I cannot help but speculate that I am hearing about an abusive relationship. According to Smith and Seagal (2017), some signs of an abusive relationship are: humiliation, poor treatment, threats of violence and actual violence, blame, control, and isolation from friends or family, among many others. The way that I am understanding some of the experiences each participant has shared with me individually and also shared experiences that I have identified among all three participants have caused me to see their relationship with their status and various entities from the outside in a way I previously did not – as an abusive relationship. As a result of how students have been treated as a result of their status, it is understandable that some students might feel the need to revert back to the life in the shadows as a protective recourse to perceptions of the national and local climates as well as



actual experiences. This, however, causes me great concern. There is no doubt that the current political climate in some ways poses threats that exist differently from the Obama administration as a result of the current administration's discourse and actions. Beyond the toxicity I am noticing has been present or continues to be present in some regards for my participants, what I have been captivated by is the absolute will to persist that each participant has demonstrated.

From the five total interviews conducted, aside from codes and themes for all content, there were some choice words or phrases used by participants that in ways crystalized for me how each participant is viewing their place in this matter and have exemplified self-efficaciousness. A couple of examples of participant quotes are, "And when Trump got elected and I had to make a decision of my status. I said, fuck you! Deport me. You know? Go for it. The US has invested so much in my education I would be going back to Mexico all educated" and "I feel like I am swimming upstream and I am living a dream that is not mine pero a huevo. Jaja. I want to be here." As I heard students share their experiences and feelings about their status, I found myself wondering about trauma they have experienced.

As I combed through literature, I did not quite come across in-depth analysis or exploration of trauma, naming of experiences as traumatic or even post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) – which for me has been surprising.

Language around the use of the word trauma seems to be more frequently used around describing experiences in the birth country and the migration journey from birth country to the host country but not specifically in regards to experiences in the host country. So, while I am not a mental health professional who can diagnose someone as having PTSD, all participants shared feelings and behaviors that led me to speculate if I was seeing signs of possible PTSD.

Regarding my role as the researcher, I always have the question about someone's "skin in the game" – what makes people study what they study? Here is a personal account of life near the border that partly influenced this study.

I grew up in Tucson, AZ and if you are a person who grew up within 100 miles of the U.S./México border you know what border life means in some regards. You are familiar with immigration check points, the "wall" that news outlets and politicians keep talking about and spending millions of dollars to construct when a wall already exists, the Minute Men, and the news that often made headlines in the newspapers or on broadcasted evening news regarding the border and migration in both directions from the border. I grew up experiencing all that for myself. I have had to stop at border check points many times, mainly when driving away from areas close to the border with México or after entering back into the US from México. These were normal experiences and it never mattered who was in the car with me – the stops crossing the border

were always nerve-wracking to go through even when there was a time in my life in which I only needed a U.S. birth certificate as proof of my citizenship. People in dark military green or dark blue uniforms armed with big semi-automatic weapons and dogs and lots of power – no thank you. I have also gone through these stops with my grandma, who was a citizen, and relatives, who did have visas or green cards, and these stops could make the strongest of women who had all the right papers so anxious. The fact that one person looking inside your car had the power to make a judgment about you and anyone inside your car's right to be in the country does not feel good. So now imagine how a person feels going from this experience in CA, NM, TX, and AZ to Vermont's border with Canada. The difference in experiences can be quite stark. Other than questionable experiences with U.S. immigration authorities going back into the US, the simple fact that there is no wall or fence at the northern border with Quebec, Canada and the US is something that makes me scratch my head. My guess would be that there are migrants who feel hyper visible and threatened by the physical presence of ICE and local police authorities who purposely patrol in various communities around Vermont but my greater point is that the border between Vermont and Quebec is not militarized. I know of people who have crossed the border at various locations along the U.S./Quebec border in the evening only to find minimal security to the extent that they could cross without being stopped. How is it that depending on the area of the country you live in

and what country you border, you experience a highly militarized border and one that is fervently monitored and another in which you may not even realize that ICE operates within a 100 mile radius and that ICE checkpoints are a real thing? It should not be a surprise to anyone that race is likely a factor and racist and xenophobic beliefs determine militarization or not.

Though our current and future realities around policies might be uncertain, to some degree we have to find some standard way to operate such that regardless of who is in office and what laws are in place, institutions of higher education are thoughtfully and intentionally meeting the needs of undocumented students. We do not need to wait for politicians or administrators in order to create spaces, develop policies, practices and protocols, and advocate for our students. If we know there is need, we cannot wait until someone invites us to join a movement or solve a problem.

Vermont is a policy ambivalent state, meaning that as a state we have not taken a particular stance in terms of higher education policies as they relate to admitting students at public institutions or providing state aid. We have just managed to say nothing. This means that any student, in- or out-of-state, can be admitted to a college or university in Vermont. There is also no legislation in Vermont that allows in-state students to receive state aid for higher education. Aside from my personal views on this topic, my professional experiences tell me

that the times beg for policy changes and colleges and universities in the state of Vermont to take a collective stance and engage in collective actions.

In the five plus years I have been a staff member at The University of Vermont, I have had on-going encounters with and outreach from students who have identified themselves to me as being undocumented. These students have ranged from prospective undergraduate students, master's and doctoral level, and even a first year medical student. While the admissions process at all levels of education at UVM might be a so-called "blind" process, the considerations of educational opportunities from students who are undocumented should compel us as a university and as a state to address the current state of affairs for students so that they and their families do not get snagged in the current processes or lack of processes that exist. For the prospective undergraduate student I worked with, I believe he came out to me after an Admitted Student Visit because I named supporting students who are undocumented in the litany of services in support I offered publicly to the students and family members present. The student, who was born in Brazil, approached me after the event concluded along with his father to identify himself to me as an undocumented student. He was clear in his interest to attend UVM because of the experience he had visiting with his father and also because he was sold on the academic program he was interested in UVM. Fortunately this student felt comfortable enough to share his status with me because I was able to respond to some of his and his father's

questions and also connect him with a colleague in admissions; but, the level of our support for this student only went so far. Neither my colleague nor myself could make any guarantees to him regarding his biggest concern – financial aid. We could not offer information regarding certain institutional aid because the truth was that there was nothing specifically for a student with his status, especially because he would have been considered out-of-state. The fact that he had been granted DACA did not even help him in this situation and to complicate matters he was also a resident of Massachusetts. The price tag for tuition alone at UVM made attendance an impossible feat without the guarantee of substantial amounts of institutional financial aid and financial contributions from his family for one semester alone. This was a tough position to be in professionally but how must this student have felt having to cross UVM off of his potential college list? Another example of an experience with a student came at the master's level. It is common for many master's and doctoral graduate programs to offer admitted students graduate assistantships in the form of teaching or research positions. The case at UVM is no different and for students who have been granted DACA there are certainly many of the same opportunities. UVM, like any other school, needs to be able to offer accurate, precise, timely, and relevant information to students who are undocumented whether they have been granted DACA or not. There needs to be concrete answers, not responses, to frequently asked questions students would

necessarily have regarding graduate studies at UVM. All academic programs, faculty within programs, and student services in each college need to have clearly established processes and communication. Students should also expect to have a clear understanding of where the institution and administration stands on the subject and a clear sense of how the university would support students with and without DACA. In my own personal experiences and assessment of UVM's established processes and protocols – this is not the reality that students would encounter broadly and consistently across their academic unit or student services office they might need to work closely with.

While the general purpose of this study is ultimately meant to be used in a way that undocumented students are helped in their pursuit of higher education, the role of higher education and student affairs professionals who are more informed and engaged in efforts to support undocumented students is critical. We in higher education must also realize that students do become our colleagues in education and all other professional fields. DACA has been a significant factor in making it possible for our undocumented students to become our colleagues in the field. So, while the conversation is focused on undocumented students, some of our own colleagues who are undocumented have become our office mates and professional peers as a result of having been granted DACA. Their opportunities to have legitimate work and gainful professional positions with 401ks, paid vacation days, sick leave, and all the other perks of salaried and

exempt or non-exempt positions is because some have been granted DACA. Though we have a responsibility to students, students are only part of the conversation and part of the community that needs to be considered.

Originally this study was supposed to take place before the election happened in November of 2016. For a variety of reasons it did not happen as initially planned and fortunately or unfortunately there was a tremendous opportunity to use this moment in the history of our country to recognize and highlight how the newest president and his administration have further impacted the lives of the undocumented students in the US. Since the inauguration of the 45<sup>th</sup> president, we witnessed how the immigration executive order (EO) regarding green card holders and refugees has played out for entire communities across the nation and the world. We have seen in Vermont how the executive order impacted the planned and anticipated arrival of Syrian families in Rutland, VT as well as one of our own family members who is from Iran. As a staff member at UVM, I have seen the fear and stress the EO has caused my own students to feel, particularly those from some of the original seven banned countries of Libya, Yemen, Iran, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, and Syria. My students who are permanent residents and citizens should have had nothing to fear but – psychologically – it is undeniable that their fears and stress are partially rooted in the fact that this administration has the entire Muslim community in its crosshairs. This is but one community that has been targeted and we have yet to



see what further EOs may emerge and what the intended and unintended consequences of those will be. With the rescission of DACA in fall 2017, we see heated debate among members of Congress to come to an agreement regarding the DREAM Act or anything that looks remotely like immigration reform.

### **Considerations**

In the fall of 2017, the organization United We DREAM started a photo campaign in which current DACA recipients stood individually holding a white piece of paper in front of their chest with a large clearly written number noting the days they had remaining under their deferred action. The number in each image varied between numbers like 0, 4, 120, 589 and so on. While the visual imagery is powerful, how must it feel for these human beings whose days of some freedom and relief are literally numbered? To the 4<sup>th</sup> grade elementary school teacher who is able to get their teacher's license or the student who was able to overcome constant obstacles along their educational journey as they make their way to their dream master's program because of the provisions under DACA – what do we say to these folks who will no longer have deferred action? How can we be okay granting admission to the graduate student only for their deferred status to end in March of their final semester of a two-year graduate program? What does this say about our commitment as an institution of education to our students that we, who are aware of this looming reality, just turn away knowing full well the consequences for our student?

As a student affairs professional, I oftentimes feel like we get in our own way. We work on campuses where there is a lot of learning taking place as well as opportunities to learn about everything under the sun – if we want – but this is not the choice that a lot of us make. This is what prevents so many of us who work with students to connect more deeply and serve more effectively AND compassionately. We get stuck in what I consider to be akin to “What is halal?” type questions I hear Muslim friends get all the time. These are questions whose answers are important for people who might not have awareness about basics regarding various subjects but they are also superficial and have answers found easily online in a Google search or in a YouTube video; yet, they make their way into conversations and prevent deeper and more complicated conversations from occurring. These questions are burdensome, at the very least, for those who commonly get asked. It is these very conversations that we need to be frequently engaging in so that we may understand the complicated nature of undocumented status. We need to be able to identify paths to rectify situations that our students may find themselves in as well as address and resolve barriers that our students are likely to encounter on our campuses in their pursuit of formal education.

In *Decolonizing Educational Research: From Ownership to Answerability* (2016), author Leigh Patel wrote, “From a view of education as a system, the practices of researchers, teachers, and policymakers have fluid interaction with

the centuries-long processes that foment the privileged and the oppressed, the colonizers and the colonized, the vaulted and the marginalized” (p. 15). In executing this study, I always wrestled with my own fears and trepidations about whether or not my actions and views as a researcher in my study were propagating the mentality of colonizers. Was I participating in behaviors that further oppressed an already marginalized and oppressed community? Was asking for the time of my participants and inquiring into their story actually going to help them somehow? I was not asking the participants to bleed for me, but I was asking for information that was personal and private for many. While I believe that my intent in conducting this study was good, I do wonder what my impact was and will continue to be.

As an educator, I frequently consider the role Plyler v. Doe has had since the Supreme Court ruling in 1982 allowing free K-12 education for students regardless of immigration status in the US. A shortcoming of this famous landmark case is that there is no clause or provision for post-secondary education. Because we know that undocumented students are among the most at-risk of not moving on from high school to matriculation in college – the need to pay attention to this community of students should be compelling and cause us to change antiquated policies and laws. That being said, I leave you with the following final thoughts and ideas for future research.

On January 19, 2018, I had the pleasure of attending a performance at a local performing arts center in Burlington, VT and the headliner was Marc

Bamuthi Joseph and Daniel Bernard Roumain (DBR) with their show called *Blackbird, Fly!*. While I loved both of these talented men performing together, there were two particular moments that resonated with me in terms of what I wanted to say in my final reflection that I borrow from one of Marc's pieces. Marc was doing an improvised spoken word piece as the encore with DBR and in part of it he was talking about being sons of Haitian immigrants and immigrants in general. He used the word *pathologize* in the context of how the US treats immigrants. This stood out to me because as a country, dominant discourse feeds into the notions that immigrant communities, especially immigrant communities of color, are always problematic for some ignorant reason or another.

During another part of Marc's piece he ended with the words *Clap.The.Fuck.Back!* I agree. This is what we as student affairs professionals need to be doing individually and collectively. When we see injustices and when we know our departments, schools, and institutions can be doing better and should be doing better to serve undocumented students and other minoritized and underserved communities – we need to be courageous and speak up.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

- Persistence of graduate students and students in professional schools (master's, doctoral, medical, etc.)
- Career development and career choices

- Experiences of students who access services and support at undocumented student centers
- PTSD among undocumented students and impact of continual traumatic experiences
- Impact of institutional agents on persistence and wellness of undocumented students
- Professional experiences of student affairs professionals who are undocumented
- How student use of campus counseling services impacts mental health and overall wellness

As I close this study, my dreams for this student community are quite simple. I want all the undocumented students out there to be able to live this life as their best selves. I wish for students to know they are loved. I wish for students to find the courage to take up space and assume their rightful place in our communities and in our schools.

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## APPENDIX A

### SAMPLE FLYER

# Seeking **LATINX** Students



- *Do you identify as undocumented?*
- *Do you identify as Latina/o/x, Hispanic, or Chicana/o/x?*

If you responded yes to these questions, please consider participating in this study!

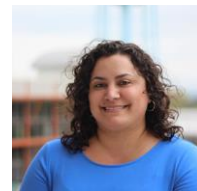
60-minute interview on-campus at university  
\*confidential\*

### **Participant criteria:**

1. At least 18 years old or older
2. Be currently enrolled as a student at the University of X
3. You must self-identify as one of the following: Latina/o, Latinx, Hispanic, Chicana/o/x, or mixed race, or with a Latino ethnicity like Mexican, Guatemalan, Brazilian, Dominican, Colombian, etc.
4. You must self-identify as being undocumented, without papers, out of status, or having DACA

### **Contact:**

*Sarah Maria Childs*  
Doctoral Candidate, The University of Vermont  
(xxx) xxx-xxxx  
[Sarah.Childs@uvm.edu](mailto:Sarah.Childs@uvm.edu)



## APPENDIX B

### RECRUITMENT MESSAGE FOR STUDENT ORGANIZATION LISTSERV

Dear students,

I hope this message finds you well and enjoying your summer wherever you are. I am a former employee of (school name) and a former advisor of (name of student organization), actually the first ever advisor. I had the great pleasure of getting to know the founding members and general body members of (name of student organization) from 2008-2011 when I was there. Fast forward 5 or so years and I am a student affairs professional and current doctoral candidate at the University of Vermont in Burlington, VT. Once I knew that I wanted to pursue doctoral studies, I was certain what the focus of my research would be – Latino/a/x undocumented college students. My experiences with students, through the amazing work of (name of student organization), was profoundly impactful and my research is one way that I am seeking to give back to this community and my own family.

I am reaching out to the membership of (name of student organization) to invite 4-8 participants for my study. I will conduct a case study at (name of school) to examine the experiences of Latinx undocumented students and how being “out” and being engaged in (name of student organization) can effect the overall mental wellness of Latino/a undocumented students on a college campus.

Should you decide to participate in my study, you must meet the following requirements:

1. At least 18 years old or older
2. Be currently enrolled as a student at (name of school)
3. You must self-identify as one of the following: Latina/o, Latinx, Hispanic, Chicana/o/x, mixed race with any of the aforementioned identities, or with a Latino ethnicity like Mexican, Honduran, Brazilian, Dominican, etc.
4. You must self-identify as being undocumented, without papers, out of status, or having DACA
5. Should be affiliated in some way with (name of student organization) as an executive board member or a general member

**If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact Sarah M. Childs via phone call or text message to (xxx) xxx-xxxx or email at [sarah.maria.childs@gmail.com](mailto:sarah.maria.childs@gmail.com) as soon as possible.\***

Participant screening questions (all will require responses):

1. How old are you today?
2. Are you enrolled as a fulltime student at (name of school)? (yes or no)



3. How do you identify yourself? Latina/o, Latinx, Hispanic, Chicana/o/x, mixed race with any of the aforementioned identities, or with a Latino ethnicity like Mexican, Honduran, Brazilian, Dominican, etc. (student can identify themselves but these are just some examples)
4. How do you identify your immigration status? undocumented, without papers, out of status, or having DACA
5. Do you consent to participating in an in-person interview during the fall semester on campus? (yes or no)

## APPENDIX C

### Interview Protocol

#### Pre-Interview

##### 1<sup>st</sup> conversation once student contacts me:

1. I will personally follow-up with each student who contacts me with interest in participating in the study. Initial outreach will occur via phone to notify each individual student that I received their message indicating their interest in participating.
2. Once I establish communication with the students via phone, I will introduce myself and confirm their interest once again in participating. If they are no longer interested I will be certain to thank them for their time and make them aware that there is no further action or communication needed on their end. If they are interested in participating, I will review the minimum requirements for participation to confirm their eligibility. If they meet all minimum requirements I will then briefly share the interview protocol with purpose of the study, risks/benefits, confidentiality and protection of their identity, my contact information if they have any questions, and withdrawal rights.
3. The students will be informed that the interview will take approximately 45 minutes of their time. There will be an additional 15 minutes to review the protocol briefly, obtain their verbal consent to participate, and time for any questions they may have throughout interview.
5. I will ask each student if I have their permission to audio record the conversation for accuracy and for my own personal notes. If they are not comfortable with having the conversation recorded I will let them know that it is okay and I am still interested in having an interview regardless but that I will be taking written notes.
6. For the student who agrees to be interviewed, I will immediately send them a message, preferably a text message with the questions so that they are aware of what I will ask beforehand. The message will include the Information Sheet that I will go over with them when the interview takes place and they can read ahead of time and I will also make sure to go through the information sheet before the interview begins and before I get their verbal consent.

##### Subsequent conversations:

1. Two weeks out from my visit, I will contact the students again to let them know the dates that I will be on campus. I will ask them for their availability and then based on their schedule I will confirm a one-hour meeting with them. The location for the interviews will be on campus in the multicultural center located on central campus in the student center. A friend and colleague of mine will

reserve the space for me in a room that has a door, can be locked, and in an area where we will not be disturbed. The building and room location will be shared with the student when the meeting time is confirmed.

2. One week before scheduled interviews, I will send a text message to each individual student with a reminder of the interview time and location.
3. Three days before interview, I will send another reminder of the interview time and location. I will also confirm that the time still works with their schedules and reschedule as needed.
4. The day prior to each scheduled interview, I will ask each student to confirm their receipt of my message confirming the time of their interview and the location of the interview on campus. I will let them know that I will greet them once they arrive at the interview room but I will do it discreetly so that I do not draw attention to them or make public their participation in the study. They will be told to walk directly to the room and there is no need to stop at the reception desk. I will not have signage outside of the door in which the interviews will take place.

### **Interview**

1. I will greet the student and welcome them into the room. I will then lock the door behind them so that no one walks in and then introduce myself.

2. I will then read the following blurb:

*I am conducting this interview as part of my dissertation study at the University of Vermont. Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this interview. I am conducting this case study research to examine the experiences of Latinx undocumented students and how being “out” and being engaged in (name of student organization) can affect the overall mental wellness of Latino/a undocumented students on a college campus. I will be asking you several questions and you are welcomed to jump in and ask questions of me and for any clarification. I can stop the interview and the recording at anytime you wish.*

*Please note that all notes I gather from this interview in addition to any audio recordings will be kept separate from one another. I will keep notes and transcripts on my laptop and audio recordings on a separate recording device. All data gathered from the interview will be stored securely in my apartment, where I live alone, and keep locked at all times. Once I have completed the research paper, I will delete and shred all data that is collected so that no identifying information remains from our interview. I will also use a pseudonym for you, the school, and the student organization so that your anonymity and confidentiality are protected.*

4. I will then ask them again if it is okay that I audio record the interview and remind them of the approximate time the interview will take. If the student does not wish to be recorded I will write notes as the interview happens.

5. They will be informed that all information they share will be kept confidential and will only be used for the purposes of this study. I will also let them know that a pseudonym will be created for them and no identifying information will be shared about them in the final research report. All the data I receive from the interview will be secure on my personal computer that I keep locked in my home or in my personal possession outside of my home. I will inform the student that there is no foreseen risks associated with participation in this project.
6. I will inform the student that the audio recording and/or notes will be saved on an audio recording device while the transcript, coding and actual dissertation will be kept on my personal laptop. Before I begin the interview, I will ask the student for their verbal consent and note this in my notes.
7. I will ask the student to ask any questions or share feedback during and after the interview should anything arise for them.
8. I will be the only person reviewing any notes and/or audio recordings of the interview unless I require advisement from my dissertation adviser. I will also be the only person coding the information.
9. I will let them know that I can provide them with an electronic version of my dissertation when it is completed.

\*Audio recording begins at this point. I will start the recording by identifying myself, the date and time, the interview number (by order 1-8), and the participants pseudonym. After this, I will begin asking the actual interview questions.\*

## APPENDIX D

### Modified Interview Questions – Post-Election

1. Please state your year in school, major, and hometown.
2. What interested you in participating in this study?
3. What spaces in your life are you “out” about your status? (class, org, professor, family only, etc.)
4. What made you want to “out” yourself? Will you remain out with this new presidential administration? If not “out” why not?
5. Has this new presidential administration had an impact on you? If so, please explain how?
6. Think back to a time in which you can recall a specific incident that impacted you as an undocumented person. What was the incident and why did it impact you in the way it did?
7. Are there organizations in the community or at your school that have played a role in your wellness or success as an undocumented student?
8. Give some examples of experiences you have had as a Latinx undocumented student at (name of school)?
9. Is there anything you want to share with me that I did not ask about as it related to being an undocumented student or undocumented Latinx student?
10. How do you feel about being out with this new presidential administration?